

"You Can Understand the Bible"

Seminar Textbook

II Timothy 3:15-17

*AN EXPLANATION AND APPLICATION
OF THE HISTORICAL-GRAMMATICAL
METHOD OF HERMENEUTICS*

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS COMMENTARY

AB	Anchor Bible Commentaries, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vols.), ed. David Noel Freedman
AGLR	Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised, ed. Harold K. Moulton
AGNT	Analytical Greek New Testament, ed. Barbara and Timothy Friberg
AKOT	Analytical Key to the Old Testament by John Joseph Owens
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts, James B. Pritchard
BDB	A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, GBS, 1997
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (4 vols.), ed. George A. Buttrick
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (5 vols.), ed. James Orr
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPSOA	The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation (The Jewish Publication Society of America)
KB	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner
LAM	The Holy Bible From Ancient Eastern Manuscripts (the Peshitta) by George M. Lamsa
LXX	Septuagint (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970; A new English Translation of the Septuagint, 2007, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright
MOF	A New Translation of the Bible by James Moffatt
MT	Masoretic Hebrew Text
NAB	New American Bible Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	NET Bible: New English Translation, Second Beta Edition

NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (4 vols.), ed. C. Brown
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (5 vols.), ed. Willem A. VanGemeren
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTPG	Old Testament Parsing Guide by Todd S. Beall, William A. Banks, and Colin Smith
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SEPT	A New English Translation of the Septuagint by Oxford University, 2007
TCGNT	A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament by Bruce M. Metzger
TEV	Today's English Version from United Bible Societies
UBS ⁴	The Greek New Testament, UBS fourth edition
UBSHTP	Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (5 vols.)
YLT	Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Robert Young
ZPBE	Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia (5 vols), ed. Merrill C. Tenney

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR: A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THIS INTERPRETIVE METHOD

Biblical interpretation is a rational and spiritual process that attempts to understand an ancient inspired writer in such a way that the inspired message from God may be understood and applied in our day and every day!

The spiritual process is crucial but difficult to define. It does involve a yieldedness and openness to God. There must be a hunger (1) for Him, (2) to know Him, and (3) to serve Him. This process involves prayer, confession, and the willingness for lifestyle change. The Spirit is crucial in the interpretive process, but why sincere, godly Christians understand the Bible differently is a mystery (I will deal with this in more detail).

The rational process is easier to describe. We must be consistent and fair to the text and not be influenced by our personal, cultural, or denominational biases. We are all historically conditioned. None of us are objective, neutral interpreters. My hermeneutical approach offers a careful rational process containing four interpretive principles structured to help us attempt to overcome our biases.

First Principle (historical context)

The first principle is to note the historical setting in which a biblical book was written and the particular historical occasion for its authorship (or when it was edited). The original author had a purpose and a message to communicate. The text cannot mean something to us that it never meant to the original, ancient, inspired author, nor the first hearers, readers. His intent—not our historical, emotional, cultural, personal, or denominational need—is the key. Application is an integral partner to interpretation, but proper interpretation must always precede application. It must be reiterated that every biblical text has one and only one meaning. This meaning is what the original biblical author intended through the Spirit's leadership to communicate to his day. This one meaning may have many possible applications to different cultures and situations. However, these applications must be linked to the central truth of the original author.

Second Principle (literary context)

The second principle is to identify the literary units. Every biblical book is a unified document. Interpreters have no right to isolate one aspect of truth and exclude others. Therefore, we must strive to understand the purpose of the whole biblical book before we interpret the individual literary units. The individual parts—chapters, paragraphs, or verses—cannot mean what the whole unit does not mean. Interpretation must move from a deductive approach of the whole to an inductive approach to the parts. Paragraph and chapter divisions are not inspired, but they do aid us in identifying thought units.

Interpreting at a paragraph level—not sentence, clause, phrase, or word level—is the key in following the biblical author's intended meaning. Paragraphs are based on a unified topic, often called the theme or topical sentence. Every word, phrase, clause, and sentence in the paragraph relates somehow to this unified theme. They limit it, expand it, explain it, illustrate it, and/or question it. A real key to proper interpretation is to follow the original author's thought on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis through the individual literary units that make up the biblical book. It must be admitted that there is no textual marker in the Hebrew or Greek text.

Third Principle (lexical options)

The third principle is to read the Bible in different translations in order to grasp the widest possible range of meaning (semantic field) that biblical words or phrases may have. Often a phrase or word can be understood in several ways. These different translations bring out these options and help to identify and explain the manuscript variations. These do not affect doctrine, but they do help us to try to get back to the original text penned by an inspired ancient writer. One of the most helpful resources is *UBS Handbook for Translators*. . .

Fourth Principle (literary genre)

The fourth principle is to note the literary genre. Original inspired authors chose to record their messages in different forms (e.g., historical narrative, historical drama, poetry, prophecy, gospel [parable], letter, apocalyptic). Bruce Corley said the author's choice of genre is a "literary contract" with the reader on how to understand and interpret the writing. These different forms have special keys to interpretation.

1. Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*
2. D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes*
3. Robert Stein, *Playing by the Rules*

This Textbook offers a way for the student to check his interpretations. It is not meant to be definitive, but rather informative and thought-provoking. Often, other possible interpretations help us not be so parochial, dogmatic, and denominational. Interpreters need to have a larger range of interpretive options to recognize how ambiguous the ancient text can be. It is shocking how little agreement there is among Christians who claim the Bible as their source of truth.

These principles have helped me to overcome much of my historical conditioning by forcing me to struggle with the ancient text. My hope is that it will be a blessing to you as well.

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June 27, 1996
(revised March, 2023)

PS A more extensive summary is found in Special Topic: [A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)

INTRODUCTION

I. A Word About the Trend in Biblical Interpretation Toward Specializations in Hermeneutics

I can remember, as a new believer, how excited I was about understanding more about Christ, the Christian life, and the Bible. I was told that it was the joy and job of every believer to study the Bible for themselves. I can remember how frustrating it was when I began reading the Bible. What I thought would be an exciting adventure turned into a confusing nightmare.

“The thought of personal Bible study frightens most Christians. It seems to be so difficult without any formal training. Yet Psalm 119 persistently beckons every Christian to feed on the spiritual nourishment of Scripture” (Mayhue 1986, 45).

But there was hope. I was told that religious training (i.e., Seminary) would provide the tools and techniques necessary to understand the Bible for myself, but this turned out to be a half truth. It was true that religious training opened the Bible to me in many wonderful ways. However, very quickly it was evident to me that more education and specialization were needed to really understand the Bible. Suddenly I realized that years of linguistic, semantic, exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological expertise were needed to fully understand the Bible. By this time, my level of education was such that I recognized that the specialists who were training me did not interpret the Bible with uniformity either (Silva 1987, 2-3). They each claimed that educational acumen in their particular field was crucial to proper biblical interpretation and yet they continued to disagree on how to interpret certain difficult passages.

These comments are not meant to be strongly critical of Christian education, but a recognition that it could not deliver all it promised. Somehow, somewhere, someway there had to be more than education.

“The Bible is so simple that the least educated can understand its basic message and yet so profound that the best scholar can never exhaust its full meaning” (Schultz and Inch 1976, 9).

Somehow we have turned the interpretation of the Bible into the exclusive domain of the academic specialists or professional clergy. We have taken the Bible, which was written for the common person, and given it to the privileged, highly-trained expert.

Wycliffe wrote: “Christ and His apostles taught the people in the language best known to them. It is certain that the truth of the Christian faith becomes more evident the more faith itself is known. Therefore, the doctrine should not only be in Latin, but in the vulgar tongue and, as the faith of the church is contained in the Scripture, the more these are known in a true sense the better. The laity ought to understand the faith, and as doctrines of our faith are in the Scriptures, believers should have the Scriptures in a language which they fully understand” (Mayhue 1986, 106).

What we have done with the principles of interpretation parallels what

1. the Jews did with their legal experts, the scribes
2. the Gnostics did with their intellectual emphasis and secret knowledge, which only they dispensed
3. the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages did with the clergy vs. laity dichotomy.

We have again taken the Bible from the grasp of the common person only to make its truths available to the specialist. We have done to biblical interpretation what medicine has done to physicians: a specialist for every system of the human body, yet these specialists often disagree on diagnosis and treatment. The same tendency has occurred in almost every area of modern life, including the academic disciplines of the Christian college and seminary.

With the glut of information available today, the specialists cannot even keep up in their own fields. So, how can the average Christian be expected to keep up with biblical scholarship when even “the experts” cannot do so? Gordon Fee, in a book entitled *Interpreting the Word of God*, made this statement:

“The suggestions offered in this paper may seem so staggering to the common man, to whom the Bible was originally addressed, that interpretation becomes an affair only of the expert. Fortunately, the Spirit, as the wind, ‘bloweth where it listeth’ (John 3:8), and in this instance, He has a wonderful way of graciously bypassing the expert and addressing us directly” (Schultz and Inch 1976, 126).

I think we would agree that in this area of hermeneutics (the principles of biblical interpretation) and exegesis (the practice of interpretation) we have inadvertently taken the Bible from the very ones to whom it was given. Daniel Webster commented in this area.

“I believe that the Bible is to be understood and received in the plain, obvious meaning of its passages, since I cannot persuade myself that a book intended for the salvation and conversion of the whole world should cover its meaning in any such mystery and doubt that none but critics and philosophers discover it” (Mayhue 1986, 60).

It seems that the insistence on advanced education as a necessity to interpret the Bible must surely be wrong by the very fact that the vast majority of the world never has had, and never can have, the level of theological training enjoyed by Europe and America since the Enlightenment.

“Most people probably think that reference books, like commentaries and Bible dictionaries, are necessary tools for Bible study. No doubt they are helpful, for they give us the insights of Bible scholars. But many Christians, especially those in poorer circumstances, cannot have these helps. Must they wait to study the Bible until they can get them? If so, many would have to wait forever” (Sterrett 1973, 33).

“One can be confident that the vernacular will convey most of the grammatical factors necessary for understanding Biblical writing. If this were not true, the bulk of Christendom would be unqualified for Bible study, and the Bible would be accessible to only a few privileged few” (Traina 1985, 81).

The church must return to a balanced position between (1) education and (2) supernatural giftedness. There are many factors involved in a proper understanding of the Bible's message, not the least of which is the spiritual motivation, commitment, and giftedness of the interpreter. Obviously, a trained person will be more adept at some aspects of the task, but not necessarily the crucial ones.

“The presence of the Holy Spirit and the ability of language to communicate truth combine to give all you need to study and interpret the Bible for yourself” (Henricksen 1973, 37).

Could it be that biblical interpretation is a spiritual gift, as well as a learned discipline? This is not to imply that all Christians do not have the right and responsibility to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, but could it be there is that which is beyond education? A good analogy might be the gift of evangelism. In witnessing situations it is obvious when this gift is present. Its effectiveness and fruitfulness is apparent. However, this surely does not remove or lessen the biblical responsibility for witnessing to a select, gifted few. All believers can learn to do a better, more effective job of sharing our faith through training and personal experience. I believe this is true of Bible interpretation also. We must combine

1. our dependence on the Spirit (Silva 1987, 24-25)
2. with the insight from education
3. and the benefit of practical experience.

“It might seem up to this point that I am advocating a non-intellectual approach to Bible interpretation. This is certainly not the case. Spurgeon warns us of this when he says, ‘It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to them should think so little of what He revealed to others’” (Henricksen 1973, 41).

This brings us to the question of how we balance these two obvious truths: God's ability to communicate through His Word to the uneducated and how education can facilitate the process.

First, I would like to assert that our opportunities for education surely must be taken into consideration. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Many Christians lack the motivation for improvement, not the opportunities. For not only are we stewards of our opportunities, but of our motivation and attitude as well (i.e., Ps. 42:1-2).

“God is His own interpreter, but the student of Scripture must bring to his task a disciplined mind as well as a warm heart. Faith offers no shortcuts to a responsible reading of the Bible. Nor can we leave the task of biblical interpretation to a few experts. None of us can avoid the task of interpretation. Every time we listen to someone speak, or whenever we read what someone has written, we interpret what is being said. It is no different when we open the Bible. The question is not whether we need to interpret, but how well or how badly we do it” (Jansen 1968, 17).

To the need of a warm heart, I would like to add that though our hearts might be warm they are still sinful (Silva 1987, 23,118; see **Special Topic: [The Fall of Mankind](#)**). We need to be careful of

linking our understanding of the Bible with God's understanding. We have all been, and continue to be, affected by sin. In the last analysis neither the best hermeneutical principles or exegetical procedures nor a warm heart can overcome our propensity toward sin. Humility must accompany our interpretations.

“Proper hermeneutics demands a stance of humility. This includes not only the humility of learning from others, but more significantly, the humility of coming under the judgment of the Word one is interpreting. Although the task of the interpreter requires study and judgment, his ultimate task is to let the Word he is studying address him and call him to obedience” (Gordon Fee quoted in Schultz and Inch 1976, 127).

Another possible solution is the concept of varying degrees or levels of interpretation. It seems obvious to me that untrained lay people will not have the depth of insight that a trained interpreter might have. However, this does not imply that incomplete knowledge is faulty knowledge.

“Saying that we understand God's Word does not mean we can understand everything in it, solve all problems of interpretation and get answers to all our questions. The precise meaning of some things seems to be still secret” (Sterrett 1973, 16).

If so, all human knowledge is in the same category. The Spirit's task of leading God's children into truth (John 14:26; 16:13-14; I John 2:20-21) is only expanded by our intellectual skills. The basics of the Christian faith can be known by anyone by means of a simple reading of the Bible in a translation he/she understands. It is in the area of maturity and balance that Christian education becomes an invaluable aid. We can trust the Spirit in the area of interpretation. Surely there will be misinterpretations and theological problems, but are these absent from scholars?

The crucial need for the modern church is that we begin to involve all believers in meaningful, personal, daily Bible study for themselves. This involves the church training them in interpretive techniques which they can comprehend and implement.

“The challenge to the church is to stress individual study of the Bible among those who believe the Bible” (Osborne and Woodward 1979, 13).

This is further stressed:

“In-depth Bible study, as we have seen, is meant for every believer, whether a lay student of the Word or a professional Christian worker. We must remember that God does not require us to be brilliant, but He does require us to be faithful. Spending an extensive amount of time in detailed study of Scripture does not take a genius, but it does take a disciplined believer. Faithfulness and discipline are two sides of the same coin” (Osborne and Woodward 1979, 82).

The hermeneutical techniques must be reduced to common sense concepts, for really they should involve nothing more than the normal application of human reason and language skills (Fee 1982, 16; Sire 1980, 51). God wants to communicate to us as badly as believers want to understand His message. The techniques need to balance the individual's own analytical processes while providing

good, reliable reference material as quickly as possible to the process. This is particularly true of historical and cultural background material. Gordon Fee offers these helpful suggestions.

“Let the nonexpert not despair; but let him also be prepared to study, not simply to devotionalize. To study he should use these basic tools: (a) More than one good contemporary translation. This should point out at times where some of the problems lie. He should be sure to use translations which recognize the differences between prose and poetry and are aware of paragraphs. (b) At least one good commentary, especially one that takes into account the hermeneutical principles offered in this paper (e.g., C. K. Barrett, on I Cor.; F. F. Bruce, on Hebrews; R. D. Brown on John). Again, consulting several will usually apprise one of various options. (c) His own common sense. Scripture is not filled with hidden meanings to be dug out by miners in dark caves. Try to discover what is plainly intended by the biblical author. This intention usually lies close to the surface and needs only a little insight into grammar or history to become visible. Very often it lies right on the surface and the expert misses it because he is too prone to dig first and look later. At this point the nonexpert has much to teach the expert (Gordon Fee in *Interpreting the Word of God*,” quoted in Schultz and Inch 1976, 127).

A Word to the Laity

For many laypersons there is a growing apathy and indifference to personal Bible study. Many are willing for someone else to interpret the Bible for them. This flies in the face of the biblical principle of “the priesthood of the believer,” which was so enthusiastically reinforced by the Reformation. We are all responsible to know God through Christ and to understand for ourselves His will for our lives (i.e., soul competency). We dare not delegate this awesome responsibility to another, no matter how much we respect that person. We will all give an account to God for our understanding of the Bible and how we have lived it (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10).

Why is the prevalence toward pre-digested Bible study (sermons, commentaries) so evident today? First, I think the large number of interpretations so readily available in western culture has caused great confusion. It seems that no one agrees about the Bible. This is certainly not the case. However, one must distinguish between major, historical Christian truths and peripheral issues. The major pillars of the Christian faith are shared by all Christian denominations (**see [Special Topic: The Kerygma of the Early Church](#)**). By this I mean the doctrines related to the person and work of Christ, God’s desire to save, and the central place of the Bible and other similar truths which are common to all Christians. Laypeople must be trained to distinguish between the wheat and the chaff. Just because there are so many interpretations does not relieve us of the responsibility of choosing the ones which are most in line with an inspired biblical author’s intent expressed in a biblical context.

Not only is the variety of interpretations a barrier, but also the interpreter’s denominational traditions. Often, laypeople think they know what the Bible means before they study it or even read it for themselves. Often, we become so comfortable in a theological system that we forget the problems these man-made systems have caused throughout the history of the Church. Also, we forget how many different, often seemingly conflicting, systems there are in the Christian community. We

dare not limit ourselves to that with which we are familiar! We must force ourselves to remove the glasses of denominational and cultural tradition and view the Bible in light of its own day. Denominational and cultural traditions can be helpful, but they must always be subject to the Bible, not vice versa. It is painful to reexamine what we have been told, but it is crucial that we do so, individually, apart from parents, pastor, teacher, spouse, or friends.

We must realize that we have all been affected by our parents, our place of birth, our time of birth, but also by our personal experiences and our personality type. These all greatly influence how we interpret the Bible. We cannot change or eliminate these factors, but we can recognize their presence, which will help us not to be unduly influenced by them. We are all historically conditioned.

There was a time in Western culture when the laity knew the Bible as well as the preachers, but in our day of specialization and the encroachment of mass media on our time, we have opted for the expert. However, in biblical interpretation we must do it for ourselves. This does not mean that we do not consult the gifted, called, and trained Christian leaders, but we must not allow their interpretation to become ours without prayerful, personal, biblical analysis. We are all affected by sin, even after we are saved. This affects every aspect of our understanding about God and His purposes. We must recognize the major truth that our understanding is never God's understanding. We must cling to the major pillars of Christianity, but allow maximum expression of interpretation and practice in peripheral or non-essential areas. We must each decide where the boundaries are located and live appropriately, by faith, by love, in the light we have from Scripture.

In summary, it seems to me that the church must devote more energy to communicating the principles for adequately understanding the Bible's ancient, inspired author's intent. We as Bible readers must also reduce our experiential, parochial, denominational, tradition-bound presuppositions in order to truly seek the message of the inspired biblical writers, even when these might violate our personal biases or denominational traditions. We must leave our popular "proof texting" techniques for a true contextual interpretation of the original biblical authors. The only inspired person in biblical interpretation is the original author(s).

Believers must reexamine their goals and motives in light of Eph. 4:2-3, 11-16. May God help us move into the fullness of His Word in thought and deed.

II. The Author's Experiences in Teaching Hermeneutics in Local Churches, Classrooms, and Seminars

As a pastor for fifteen years, a university professor for sixteen, I have had ample opportunity to observe and discuss hermeneutical issues with Christians from several denominational groups. I have pastored in Southern Baptist churches and taught at three Southern Baptist schools (Wayland Baptist University extension, Lubbock, Texas; The Hispanic School of Theology, Lubbock, Texas; and East Texas Baptist University, Marshall, Texas), and a charismatic junior college level Bible school (Trinity Bible Institute, Lubbock, Texas). Since retirement I have taught courses for several years at:

1. the OMS Emmaus Seminary in Cap Haitian, Haiti
2. the Baptist Armenian Seminary in Yerevan, Armenia

3. the interdenominational seminary in Novi Sod, Serbia
4. the John Wesley Methodist Seminary in Monterrey, Mexico

I did my doctoral work at an interdenominational seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (i.e., Swedish evangelicals) in the Chicago area. This has allowed me to minister across denominational lines for several years. One common theme has developed in these discussions and that is the obvious lack of training in hermeneutical concepts and procedures. Most Christians, in interpreting the Bible, rely on

- proof-texting
- literalizing
- allegory/moralizing
- denominational indoctrination
- personal experience
- cultural conditioning

There is a desperate need for a consistent, verifiable, textually-oriented hermeneutical approach to biblical interpretation. It is crucial that the hermeneutical principles be presented in (1) non- technical language; (2) simply stated principles; and (3) principles that can be demonstrated with several relevant biblical examples.

Laypersons readily respond to a simplified hermeneutical approach which can be demonstrated to provide a more consistent, verifiable procedure for personally interpreting the Scriptures. Most laypersons sense the relativity of much of the Bible study with which they are presented, from local churches, Christian literature and also from broadcast media (radio and television). I have taught hermeneutics in several settings.

- citywide seminars
- local church seminars
- Sunday School classes
- junior college classrooms
- university classrooms
- seminary classrooms

In each of these settings I have found people to be open and eager to respond to a consistent, verifiable approach to Bible study. There is a real hunger to understand the Bible and live in light of its teachings. There is also a real frustration because of

- * the multiplicity of interpretations
- * the relativity of interpretations
- * the denominational arrogance connected with certain interpretations
- * the lack of ability to verify what they have been told in God's name

This Textbook is not designed to be a technical, exhaustive, academic presentation of hermeneutics, but an introduction to the average believer to the Contextual/Textual approach of the textually-oriented school of interpretation (i.e., Antioch of Syria; see **Special Topic: [The Antiochian School of Biblical Interpretation](#)**) and the personal application of these principles into daily study and life.

The Introduction will focus on five specific areas:

1. the need for hermeneutical training
2. the Contextual/Textual principles of biblical hermeneutics
3. some major pitfalls in contemporary hermeneutics
4. some guiding methodological procedures, and
5. the Bible study resources which are available to the modern English speaking layperson.

This Textbook is designed to raise the interest and desire of Christians to interpret the Scriptures for themselves. It is admittedly only a beginning step, but a crucial step nevertheless. The Bibliography provides numerous additional sources for further study in Bible study techniques. The recognition that there is a problem in our current popular methods of biblical interpretation and that there is a more consistent, verifiable approach available to laypersons is the major goal of this Textbook. Because the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, hopefully this Introduction will start laypersons on the right path of the exciting and fulfilling task of lifestyle, daily, personal Bible study.

III. The Issue of Authority

The question of whether or not there is a God has never really been an issue for me personally. I, following the biblical writers, have assumed the existence of God (i.e., Gen. 1:1). I have never felt the need for a philosophical argument to bolster my faith at this point. Thomas Aquinas' five proofs for God are helpful to those who seek evidence from rationalism. However, even the philosophical necessity arguments do not really prove the existence of the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. At best they posit a logical necessity, an unmoved mover, or a prime cause.

Also, the question about whether we can know God (Ecclesiastes and Greek philosophy) has never been a major concern for me. I have assumed that God is trying to communicate to us. This is not only true in natural revelation: (1) God's witness in creation (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20) and (2) mankind's inner moral witness (Rom. 2:14-15), but uniquely in God's written revelation (2 Tim. 3:15-17). God has spoken to us through events, laws, and prophets (cf. Matt. 5:17-19). He has spoken supremely in His Son (John 1:1-14; Heb. 1:1-3; Matt. 5:21-48).

The major question for me has revolved around what God is saying. This concern developed very early in my Christian life. Desiring to know the Bible I was appalled at all the different interpretations of Scripture. It seemed that everyone had his own opinion about the Bible, often based on individual personality type, denominational background, personal experience, or parental training. They were all so convinced and convincing. I began to wonder if one could really know, with any degree of certainty, what God was saying.

There are four Sources of Authority.

1. Revelation (inspiration)
2. Reason (illumination)
3. Experience
4. Tradition/culture
5. Authority is the key question!

- revelation vs. human reason (rationalism)
- revelation vs. human experience (existentialism)
- revelation vs. human traditions (denominations)

God created us in His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27), so our mind and experiences are significant, but not ultimate. This is also true of our traditions/culture (cf. Isa. 29:13).

In seminary I was finally introduced to the concept of “biblical authority.” It became clear to me that the Bible was the only basis for faith and practice. This was not just a cliché to defend one’s traditional methodologies and theologies. It was really a specific answer to the issue of authority.

Even after accepting the authority of the Bible as properly interpreted, there still remains the difficult issue of which hermeneutical system is best. The same bewilderment that I felt in the maze of interpretations, I also found to be present in the area of hermeneutics. As a matter of fact, the divergence of expressed or unexpressed, conscious or unconscious, principles of hermeneutics may really be the cause for the multiplicity of interpretations. Hermeneutical principles were extremely difficult to analyze because they themselves were not inspired, but were developed within differing theological traditions and through historical crises. There are sincere, godly, educated, prayerful interpreters in each of the different systems. How does one decide which system to use? The basic issue for me came down to “verifiability” and “consistency.” I am sure that this is because I live in a day which is dominated by the scientific method. However, there must be some boundaries placed on interpretation. Ambivalence does exist within hermeneutics because it is both a gift (art) and a set of logical guidelines for understanding human languages (science). Whatever one’s principles of interpretation, they must balance these two perspectives.

The Antiochian (Syrian) school of interpretation offered the best available balance. Its contextual/textual focus allows at least some measure of verifiability. There will never be unanimity, but at least it stressed the importance of interpreting the Scriptures in their obvious, normal sense.

It must be admitted that the approach is basically a historical reaction to the allegorical school of Alexandria, Egypt, which developed from the Neo-Platonism of Philo and later Origen. This is an oversimplification (Silva 1987, 52-53), but it is still helpful to use it in analyzing the two basic approaches of the church to biblical interpretation. The Antiochian school, with its Aristotelian methodology, did provide an adequate rationale for Reformation/ Renaissance interpretation, which set the stage for our modern scientific orientation. The Contextual/Textual approach to interpretation allows the Bible to speak first to its day (one meaning) and then to our day (many applications). It bridges the gap of time and culture in a methodology acceptable to the intellectual community of our day. They accept it because it is basically the same method that is used to interpret all ancient literature and it fits the thought forms of our modern academic mindset.

As hermeneutics became a major concern of my ministry, I began to analyze preaching, teaching, and religious writing more carefully. It was appalling to see the abuses that were occurring in God’s name. The church seemed to be praising the Bible and then perverting its message. This was not only true of the layperson, but also the church’s leadership. It was not an issue of piety, but true ignorance of the basic principles of interpretation. The joy I found in knowing the Bible by means of the original author’s purpose (intent) was simply a non-entity to many wonderful, committed, loving

believers. I decided to develop a Textbook in order to introduce laypersons to the basic principles of the Antiochian, contextual/textually-focused method. At that time (1977) there were not very many books available on hermeneutics. This was especially true for the laity. I tried to develop interest by exposing our faulty interpretations as well as our conscious biases. This was combined with a brief explanation of the contextual/textual method and a list of common theological errors encountered in interpretation. Finally, a procedural order was proposed to help someone walk through the different hermeneutical tasks and the appropriate time to consult research tools.

IV. The Need for Non-technical Hermeneutical Procedures

A. Apathy Among Believers

This problem has been on my heart as a pastor and professor for several years. I have been made painfully aware of the decline in general biblical knowledge among believers in our day. This lack of a basic Bible knowledge has been the root cause of many of the problems in the contemporary church. I know that modern believers love God as much as past generations have loved Him and His Word, so what is the cause of the degeneration in our understanding, not only of the content of Scripture, but what it means and how it is applicable today?

In my opinion a sense of frustration has caused the majority of Christians to become indifferent and apathetic about studying and interpreting the Bible. This apathy is discernible in several areas of modern life. One of the major problems is our cultural attitude of consumerism. We as a people are accustomed to instant gratification of our every need. Our culture has turned the “fast food” industry’s mentality into a cultural norm. We are accustomed to a product being readily available and instantaneously consumed. Christian maturity based on Bible knowledge and daily lifestyle cannot accommodate this cultural expectation. Bible knowledge is only available by paying a personal price of prayer, persistence, training, regular study, and personal application. In reality, most modern believers are on the fast track of twenty-first century, materialistic America and are not willing to pay such a personal price.

Also, the non-biblical dichotomy between clergy and laity has accentuated the problem. It almost seems that our “hired gun” mentality has relieved most lay persons of the sense of need to study and understand the Bible personally. “Let the preacher do it” has become our mind set. The problem with this mentality is, “What if the pastor misinterprets?” or “What if you change pastors?” This apathetic attitude circumvents the biblical truth and the Reformation reemphasis (Luther) of the doctrine of “soul competency” (i.e., “a royal priesthood,” 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6). It reinforces our “herd society” tendency. It tends to focus spiritual responsibility away from ourselves and onto others. Church leaders become intermediaries or gurus instead of “player coaches” (i.e., every believer is a called, gifted, full-time minister of Jesus; Eph. 4:11-12). Not only have we as a culture divided life into the secular and the sacred, but we have delegated the sacred to surrogates.

Another major cause for apathy among the majority of modern believers in the area of Bible study is our growing modern trend toward specialization. Bible study has become the

technical domain of trained specialists. The principles, vocabulary, and procedures are so complicated and involved that one feels incompetent unless he has several PhD. degrees: linguistics, Greek, Hebrew, hermeneutics, and theology. This introduces the danger of “modern gnosticism,” which is spiritual truth available only from an intellectual elite. Of course, even the elite do not agree. It seems that even technical skills do not bring consensus.

This brings us to the next reason for apathy, which is the multiplicity of interpretations. Not only is one confronted with denominational differences, but even within denominations there is a divergence of opinion. It is no wonder that the majority of believers are confused in the face of such disagreement, which is usually presented in such a forceful, dogmatic fashion.

B. Dogmatism Among Believers

Is it any wonder that there is confusion and reluctance to become involved in the interpretive process? Besides these previously mentioned external factors, there are several internal ones. If there is an apathy about getting involved in Bible study, it almost seems that once the decision is made to overcome that apathy, immediate polarization and exclusivism results. The level of dogmatism among modern western Bible students is very high.

This seems to involve several factors. The first is often related to the spiritual tradition in which one is raised. Often dogmatism is a learned response from our parents or church teachers. This can be either a complete identification with their views and practices or the complete rejection of their position. This transference, assimilation, or negative reaction is usually unrelated to personal Bible study. Often our biases, presuppositions, and *á priori*s are passed on through families.

If parents do not stamp us with their spiritual views, then most assuredly our denomination will. Much that we believe is not a result of personal Bible study, but of denominational indoctrination. Today very few churches systematically teach what they believe and why. This problem is affected not only by denominationalism, but by the geographical location of the denominational church. As it is obvious that the age (pre-Renaissance, Renaissance, modernity, post-modernity) in which we live affects our belief system, so too, does our geographical location. Parochialism is as significant as parental or denominational tradition. For over thirty years I have been involved in Partnership Evangelism and have taken church members and students on mission trips to work with my denomination’s churches in foreign countries. I have been amazed how differently churches from the same denominational tradition practice their faith! This really opened my eyes to the denominational, parochial indoctrination (not Bible reading) that has affected all of us.

The second major cause of dogmatism among believers is related to personal factors. As we are affected by time, place, and parents, so too, are we equally impacted by our own personhood. This concept will be developed in some detail in a later section of this Textbook, but it needs to be mentioned at the beginning how much our personality type, personal experience, and spiritual gift affect our interpretations. Often our dogmatism could be

expressed by “if it happened to me it ought to happen to you” and “if it has never happened to me, it should never happen to you either.” Both are false!

V. **Basic Presuppositions About the Bible**

At this point I need to be as transparent as possible and try to spell out my own operating assumptions. If we are so affected by non-biblical factors, why is this Textbook not just one more in the series? I am not attempting to get you to agree with me, but to provide a more consistent, verifiable methodology for personal, non-technical Bible study. The methodology is not inspired, but it is a developed ancient Christian model from Antioch of Syria. My basic presuppositions are

- A. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is from the one and only Creator, Redeemer God. He gave it to us through human instrumentality so that we might know and understand Him and His will for our lives (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-17). It is absolutely authoritative.

Special Topic: [Monothelism](#)

Special Topic: [The Bible \(its uniqueness and inspiration\)](#)

Special Topic: [Inspiration](#)

- B. The Bible, like hermeneutics, is not an end in itself, but a means to a personal encounter with God (Grant and Tracy 1984, 177; Carson 1984, 11; Silva 1987, vi). God has clearly spoken to us in the Bible and even more clearly in His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). Christ is the focus of all Scripture (cf. Matt. 5:17-19, 21-48). He is its crowning fulfillment and goal. He is Lord of Scripture. In Him revelation is complete and final (John 1:1-18; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:13-20).

- C. The Bible is written in normal, non-technical human language. Its focus is the obvious, normal meaning of words, clauses, sentences (Silva 1987, 42). The Holy Spirit gave simple statements of truth. This is not to say

1. that the Bible is unambiguous
2. that it does not contain cultural idioms
3. that it does not contain difficult passages
4. at this point in time, scribal errors

However, it does not have hidden or secret meanings. It is not contradictory (analogy of faith) although it does contain paradoxical or dialectical tension between truths.

Special Topic: [Eastern Literature \(biblical paradoxes\)](#)

- D. The message of the Bible is primarily redemptive and is meant for all humans (Ezek. 18:23,32; John 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9). It is for the world, not exclusively for Israel (Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6). It is for the “lost” (fallen) world, not only for the church. It is for the common, average human being, not only for the spiritually or intellectually gifted.

See Special Topic: [YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan](#)

- E. The Holy Spirit is an indispensable guide to proper understanding.

1. There must be a balance between
 - a. a human effort and piety (Phil 1:12-13; 2 Tim. 2:15)
 - b. the leading of the Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 John 2:20-21,27).

2. Biblical interpretation is possibly a spiritual gift (like evangelism, giving, or prayer), yet it is also the task of every believer. Although it is a gift, by analyzing the gifted, all of us can do a better job.
 3. There is a spiritual dimension beyond human intellectual reach. The original authors often recorded more than they understood (future events, aspects of progressive revelation, and multiple fulfillment prophecy). The original hearers often did not comprehend the inspired message and its implications. The Spirit illumines us to comprehend the basic message of the biblical writers. We may not understand every detail, but then, who does? The Spirit is the true author of all Scripture.
- F. The Bible does not speak directly to every modern question (Spire 1980, 82-82). It is ambiguous in many areas. Some of it is locked into the original historical setting (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:29) and other parts are hidden behind the “not yet” of history (e.g., Dan. 12:4). It must be remembered that the Bible is analogous truth, not exhaustive truth. It is adequate for faith and life. We cannot know everything, either about God or a specific doctrine of Scripture, but we can know what is essential (Silva 1987, 80).

VI. General Statements About the Contextual/Textual Method

This Textbook is basically an introduction to the Contextual/Textual method of interpreting the Bible (also known as “the common sense method”). This method developed in the third century A.D. in Antioch, Syria, in reaction to the Allegorical method, which had previously developed in Alexandria, Egypt. The historical development and explanation of this ancient methodology will be developed in a later session. In this introductory session let me make some general statements about the Antiochian method (see **Special Topic: [The Antiochian School of Biblical Interpretation](#)**).

- A. It is the only methodology available which provides controls on interpretation which enables others to verify, from the text, a given interpretation. This provides a measure of consistency and assurance that one has interpreted the passage properly in light of the original inspired author’s intent. As Gordon Fee says, “A Bible that can mean anything, means nothing.”
- B. This is not a method for scholars or church leaders only, but a means of getting back to the original hearers. These original hearers would have understood the message in their own existential context and cultural milieu. Because of time, language, and culture the task of understanding the original setting and message becomes increasingly difficult (Virkler 1981, p. 19-20). That which was readily apparent is often lost in history, culture, or idiom. Therefore, knowledge of history and culture becomes crucial. Knowledge of the original language, its structure, grammar, and its idioms becomes very helpful. Because of the cultural and linguistic gap we become researchers, or at least, readers of competent researchers. Translators are researchers!
- C. Our first and final task in interpretation is to understand as clearly as possible what the biblical authors were saying to their day, what the original hearers would have, could have, should have understood, and how these truths are applicable to our culture and our personal lives. Apart from these two criteria there is no meaningful interpretation!

At this point let me spell out several context and content questions that one should ask every biblical text (i.e., minimum a paragraph but hopefully a literary unit).

1. What did the original author say? (textual criticism)
2. What did the original author mean? (exegesis)
3. What did the original author say elsewhere on the same subject? (parallel passages)
4. What did the other biblical authors say on the same subject? (parallel passages)
5. How did the original hearers understand the message and respond to it? (original application)
6. How does the original message apply to my day? (modern application)
7. How does the original message apply to my life? (personal application)

VII. Some General Comments to the Reader

- A. Sin affects everyone's interpretation (even after salvation, cf. Rom. 7; Eph. 6:10-17), education, prayer, and systematization. I know it affects mine, but I do not always understand where and how. Therefore, each of us must filter our study through the indwelling Holy Spirit (i.e., you, the Bible, and the indwelling Holy Spirit have **priority**)! Look at my examples, ponder my logic, allow me to stretch your current understandings.
- B. Please do not judge or react to this Textbook based solely on what you have always heard or believed. Allow me the opportunity to at least challenge your traditional understandings. I often tell my classes, "Just because I say something you have never heard does not automatically mean I am weird! You may be weird!"
- C. The examples I use are controversial. They are meant to make you think and reexamine your personal theology and Bible study techniques. Please do not become so involved in the illustrations of these hermeneutical principles or exegetical procedures that you miss the methodology I am trying to present. The examples are meant to
 1. show alternate interpretations
 2. show inappropriateness of interpretations
 3. illustrate hermeneutical principles
 4. get and keep your attention
- D. Please remember that I am not trying to impart to you my personal theology, but to introduce an ancient Christian hermeneutical methodology and its application. I am not seeking your agreement, but am attempting to challenge you into implementing interpretive procedures which may not always answer all of our questions, but which will help in recognizing when one is trying to say too much or too little about a passage of Scripture.
- E. This Textbook is not primarily designed for new Christians. It is for believers who are struggling with maturity and are seeking to express their faith in biblical categories. Maturity is a tension-filled process of self examination and lifestyle faith. Maturity will make us less dogmatic and judgmental! It is a pilgrimage that never ceases.

THE BIBLE

I. The Canon

Because this Textbook is basically an introduction to contextual and textual principles for interpreting the Bible, it seems obvious that we need to first look at the Bible itself. For the purpose of this study we are going to assume the Spirit's guidance in canonization (the greatest presupposition), even though it was an ugly historical process.

See **Special Topic: [Canon](#)**

A. The Author's General Presuppositions

1. God exists and He wants us to know Him.
2. He has revealed Himself to us (i.e., the Revelatory Triangle).
 - a. He acted in history (revelation)
 - b. He chose certain people to record and explain His acts (inspiration; see **Special Topic: [Inspiration](#)**)
 - c. His Spirit helps the reader (hearer) of this written revelation understand its main truths (illumination, see **Special Topic: [Illumination](#)**)
3. The Bible is the only trustworthy source of truth about God (I know about Jesus' life and teachings only through the Bible). It is collectively our only source for faith and practice. OT and NT books were written to specific occasions and times but are now inspired guides for all occasions and ages. However, they do contain some cultural truths that do not transcend their own time and culture (i.e., polygamy, holy war, slavery, celibacy, place of women, wearing veils, holy kiss, etc.). The best book I have read on how to differentiate between the culture and the eternal truth for every age, is Gordon Fee's *The Gospel and Spirit*. He says, if the Bible speaks with "one voice" on a subject, it is probably an eternal truth. But, if the Bible seems to speak with "two voices," it is probably a cultural aspect.

B. I realize that the canonization process is a historical process (see **Special Topic: [Canon](#)**) with some unfortunate incidents and events, but it is my faith presupposition that God led its development. The early church accepted the recognized books of the OT that were accepted within Judaism (see **Special Topic: [Hebrew Canon](#)**). From historical research it seems that the early churches, not the early councils alone, decided the New Testament canon. Apparently the following criteria were involved, either consciously or unconsciously.

1. The Protestant Canon contains all the inspired books; the canon is closed! (i.e., "the faith," Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; Gal. 1:23; 6:10; Jude vv. 3,20; see **Special Topic: [The Faith \[NT\]](#)**)
 - a. accepted OT from the synagogue (not the Apocrapha)
 - b. twenty-seven books in NT (a progressive historical process)

2. New Testament authors are connected to Jesus or an Apostle (a progressive historical process)
 - a. James and Jude to Jesus (His half brothers)
 - b. the Gospel of Mark to Peter (who turned his sermons at Rome into the first Gospel)
 - c. the Gospel of Luke to Paul (missionary partner)
 - d. Hebrews traditionally to Paul (but I do not think Paul was the author)
3. Theological unity with Apostolic training (later called “rule of faith”). The Gospels seem to have been written after most of the other NT books
 - a. because of the rise of heresy (e.g., adoptionism, Gnosticism, Marcionism, Montanism)
 - b. because of the delayed Second Coming (**Special Topic: [Delayed Second Coming](#)**); first by Tertullian and later used for the early church creeds from the early church councils (i.e., Apostles’ creed, Nicean creed), followed by Irenaeus
 - c. because of the death of the twelve Apostles
 See **Special Topic: [Adoptionism](#)** and **Special Topic: [Gnosticism](#)**
4. The permanently and morally changed lives of hearers where these books were read and accepted
5. The general consensus of the early churches and later church councils can be seen in the early lists of canonical books
 - a. Origen (A.D. 185-254) asserts that there were four Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles in circulation among the churches.
 - b. the Muratorian Fragment dates between A.D. 180-200 from Rome (the only copy available today is a damaged, late Latin text). It lists the same 27 books as the Protestant NT (but adds Apocalypse of Peter and Shepherd of Hermas).
 - c. Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 265-340) introduced a threefold designation (as did Origen) to describe Christian writings:
 - (1) “received” and thereby accepted
 - (2) “disputed” and thereby meaning some churches, but not all, accepted them
 - (3) “spurious” and thereby unaccepted in the vast majority of churches and not to be read.
 The ones in the disputed category which were finally accepted were: James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John. The majority of what is known as the Pseudepigrapha were rejected.
 - d. the Cheltenham list (in Latin) from North Africa (A.D. 360) has the same 27 books (except for Hebrews, James, and Jude [Hebrews is not specifically mentioned, but may be included in Paul’s letters]), as the Protestant NT, but in an unusual order.
 - e. Athanasius’ Easter Letter of A.D. 367 is the first to list exactly the same 27 books (no more, no less) as the Protestant NT.
 - f. The concept and contents of an authoritative list of unique books was a historical, political, and theological development.

6. Suggested reading
 - a. *The Canon of the New Testament* by Bruce Metzger, published by Oxford Press
 - b. Articles on canon in *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, pp. 709-745
 - c. *Introduction to the Bible* by William E. Nix and Norman Geisler, published by Moody Press, 1968 (esp. the chart on p. 22)
 - d. *Holy Writings – Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* by John Barton, published by Westminster John Knox Press.

7. The Old and New Testaments are the only literary productions of the Ancient Near East that were “canonized” as especially coming from and revealing divine purposes. There are no other religious lists which differentiate between canonical (i.e., authoritative) vs. non-canonical religious writings.

The early church accepted the canonical list of OT books used in the synagogue.

How, why, and when did this historical process happen for the New Testament?

- a. Was it by the churches of the late first through fourth centuries?
- b. Was it by the use of Christian writers of the second century?
- c. Was it by the decisions of the church councils of the third and fourth centuries A.D.?

II. Claims of Inspiration

In our day of conflicting claims and statements about the Bible, biblical authority, and interpretation, it becomes extremely important that we focus on what the Bible claims for itself. Theological and philosophical discussions and their claims are interesting, but not inspired. Human categories and formulations have always been guilty of understatement or overstatement. It is crucial that we allow the Bible to speak for itself.

Since Jesus is the focus of our faith and doctrine, if we could find Him speaking on this subject it would be very informative. He did this in Matt. 5:17-19 in an opening section of the so-called “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7; see **Special Topic: [Sermon on the Mount](#)**). He spells out clearly His view of the body of sacred literature which we call the Old Testament. Notice His emphasis on its eternality and significance for the life and faith of believers. Also notice His central place in its purpose and fulfillment. This passage not only supports a divinely inspired Old Testament, but a supreme focusing of that revelation in Himself (Christocentric typology; see **Special Topic: [Deity of Christ from the OT](#)**). However, it is also readily noticeable in vv. 21-26, 27-31, 33-37, and 38-40 that He completely reorients the traditional interpretation of the Old Testament among rabbinical Judaism of His day (i.e., traditional rabbinical interpretation and even Moses himself). The Scripture itself is inspired, eternal, and Christocentric, but our human interpretations are not. This is an extremely valuable foundational truth. The Bible, not our understanding of it, is what is eternal and inspired. Jesus intensified the traditional, rule-focused application of the Torah (see Alfred Edersheim’s *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*) and raised it to the impossible level of attitude, motivation, and intent (i.e., the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7).

The classical statement of biblical inspiration (See **Special Topic: [Inspiration](#)**) comes from the Apostle to the Gentiles, Saul of Tarsus. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Paul specifically states the “God-

givenness” (literally, God-exhaled) of Scripture. At this point it is textually uncertain if he would have included all the New Testament writings that we know in this statement. However, by implication, they are surely included.

1. 2 Peter 3:15-16 includes Paul’s writings in the category of “Scripture.”
2. Another supporting Scripture passage from Paul concerning inspiration is found in 1 Thess. 2:13. Here, as before, the focus is on God as the real source of the Apostle’s words.
3. This same truth is echoed by the Apostle Peter in 2 Pet. 1:20-21.

Not only are the Scriptures presented as divine in origin, but also in purpose. All Scripture is given to NT believers for their faith and life (Rom. 4:23-24; 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

III. The Bible’s Purpose

A. Not a Rule Book

Much of our misunderstanding concerning Scripture begins in our mistaken notions concerning its purposes. One way to establish what a thing is to state what it is not. The fallen human tendency toward legalism, so evident among the Pharisees, is alive and well and lives in your home church. This tendency turns the Bible into an extensive set of rules. Modern believers have almost turned the Scriptures into a legalistic rule book, a kind of “Christian Talmud.” It must be stated forcibly that the Scriptures’ primary focus is redemptive (see **Special Topic: [YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan](#)**). It is meant to confront, convince, and turn wayward mankind back to God (McQuilkin 183, 49). The primary focus is salvation (2 Tim. 3:15), which issues in Christlikeness (2 Tim. 3:17). This Christlikeness is also a major goal (Romans 8:28-29,30; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 1:4; 2:10; 4:13; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:15), but it is a result of the first goal. At least one possibility for the structure and nature of the Bible is its redemptive purpose and not a systematized rule book or doctrine book (i.e., not a Christian Talmud). The Bible does not address all of our intellectual questions. Many issues are addressed in ambiguous or incomplete ways. The Bible was not designed primarily as a systematic theology book, but as a selective history of God’s dealing with His rebellious creation. Its purpose is not merely rules, but relationship. It leaves areas uncovered so that we are forced to walk in love (1 Corinthians 13), not rules (Col. 2:16-23). We must see the priority of people made in His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27), not rules. It is not a set of rules, but a new character, a new focus, a new life that is presented (i.e., the New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34, described in Ezek. 36:22-36).

This is not to imply that the Bible does not contain rules, because it does, but they do not cover every area. Often rules become barriers instead of bridges in mankind’s search for God. The Bible provides us with enough information to live a God-pleasing life; it also provides us some guidelines and moral boundaries. Its primary gift, however, is the “Guide,” not the guidelines. Knowing and following the Guide until you become like Him is the second goal of Scripture.

B. Not a Science Book

Another example of modern mankind's attempt to ask questions of Scripture which it is not designed to answer is in the area of modern scientific inquiry. Many want to force the Scriptures onto the philosophical grid of natural law, particularly in relation to the "scientific method" of inductive reasoning. The Bible is not a divine textbook on natural law. It is not anti-scientific; it is pre-scientific! Its primary purpose is not in this area. Although the Bible is not speaking directly to these questions it does speak about physical reality, however, it does so in the language of description (i.e., phenomenological language), not science. It describes reality in terms of its own day. It presents a "world view" more than a "world picture." This means that it focuses more on "the who" than on "the how." Things are described as how they appear (i.e., the five senses) to the common person. Some examples are

1. Do the dead really live in the ground? The Hebrew culture, like our own, buries their dead. Therefore, in the language of description, they were in the earth (Sheol or Hades).
2. Does the land really float on water? This is often connected to the three-storied universe model. The ancients knew that water was present underground (i.e., oasis). Their conclusion was expressed in poetic language.
3. Even we, in our day, speak in these categories.
 - a. "the sun rises"
 - b. "dew falls"

Some books which have really helped me in this area are

- 1) *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* by R. Hooykaas
- 2) *The Scientific Enterprise and the Christian Faith* by Malcolm A. Jeeves
- 3) *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* by Bernard Ramm
- 4) *Science and Hermeneutics* by Vern S. Poythress
- 5) *Darwinism on Trial* by Phillip Johnson
- 6) Several good books by Hugh Ross, Pensacola Bible Church, Pensacola, FL
- 7) *Science and Faith: An Evangelical Dialogue* by Henry Poe and Jimmy Davis
- 8) *The Battle of Beginnings* by Del Ratzsch
- 9) *Coming to Peace with Science* by Daniel Falk
- 10) *Mere Christianity: Science and Intelligent Design* by William Demoski
- 11) *Genesis One: An Ancient Cosmology* by John H. Walton

C. Not a Magic Book

Not only is the Bible not a rule book or a science book, but it is not a magic book either. Our love for the Bible has caused us to handle it in some very strange ways. Have you ever sought God's will by praying and then letting your Bible fall open to a page and then put your finger on a verse? This common practice treats the Bible as if it were a crystal ball or divine "Ouija board." The Bible is a message, not a modern Urim and Thummim (Exod. 28:30; see **Special Topic: [Urim and Thummim](#)**). Its value is in its message, not in its physical presence. As Christians, we take our Bible into the hospital with us, not so we can read it, because we

are too sick. We do so because it represents God's presence to us. For many modern Christians the Bible has become a physical idol. Its physical presence is not its power, but its message about God in Christ. Placing your Bible on your surgical incision will not help it heal faster. We do not only need the Bible beside our bed; we need its message in our hearts.

I have even heard people get upset if someone drops a Bible or if someone writes in it. The Bible is nothing more than cow skin (if you have an expensive one), tree pulp, and ink. It is only holy in its connection to God. The Bible is useless unless it is read and followed. Our culture is reverent toward the Bible and rebellious toward God. Earlier in our court system one had to swear to tell the truth while holding his hand on the Bible. If one is a believer he would not lie anyway. If one is swearing on an ancient book in which he did not believe and whose content he did not know, what makes us think that he would not lie?

The Bible is not a magical charm. It is not a detailed, complete, unabridged textbook on natural phenomena and it is not "Hoyle's" rule book on the game of life with detailed instructions in every area. It is a message from the God who acts within human history. It points toward His Son and it points its finger at our rebellion.

IV. Author's Presuppositions About the Bible

Even though the Bible has been abused by mankind's expectations and usages, it is still our only guide for faith and practice. I would like to state my presuppositions about the Bible.

"I believe the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the only clear self-revelation of God. The New Testament is the perfect fulfillment and interpreter of the Old Testament (we must view the OT through the new revelations of Jesus and the NT, which radically universalize the promises to Israel). I believe the one and only Eternal, Creator, Redeemer God initiated the writing of our canonical Scriptures by inspiring certain chosen persons to record and explain His acts in the lives of individuals and nations. The Bible is our only clear source of information about God and His purposes (I know about Jesus only from the pages of the NT). Natural revelation (cf. Job 38-39; Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15) is valid, but not complete. Jesus Christ is the capstone of God's revelation about Himself (cf. John 1:18; Col. 1:14-16; Heb. 1:2-3). The Bible must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:23; 16:20-21; 1 Cor. 2:6-16) in order to be correctly understood (in its spiritual dimension). Its message is authoritative, adequate, eternal, infallible, and trustworthy for all believers. The exact mode of its inspiration has not been revealed to us, but it is obvious to believers that the Bible is a supernatural book, written by natural people under special leadership."

V. Evidence for a Supernaturally Inspired and Authoritative Bible

Although the above statement is presuppositional, as is all human knowledge, it does not mean that there is no credible supportive evidence. At this point let us examine some of this evidence.

- A. The Bible contains very precise predictions (historical, not typological [Hosea 11:1] or apocalyptic [Zechariah 9]) about future events, not in vague formulations, but in specific and often shocking preciseness. Two good examples follow.
1. The area of Jesus' ministry was predicted to be in Galilee, Isa. 9:1. This was very unexpected by Judean Jewry because Galilee was not considered to be quite Kosher because of its physical distance from the Temple. Yet, the majority of Jesus' ministry was spent in this geographical area.
 2. The place of Jesus' birth is specifically recorded in Micah 5:2. Bethlehem was a very small village whose only claim to fame was that the family of Jesse lived there. Yet, 750 years before the birth of Jesus the Bible specifically pinpoints this as the birthplace of the Messiah. Even the rabbinical scholars of Herod's court knew this (Matt. 2:4-6). Some may doubt the 8th century B.C. date for both Isaiah and Micah, however, because of the Septuagint (which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture, which was begun about 250-200 B.C.), even at the very minimum these prophecies were made over 200 years before their fulfillment.
- B. Another evidence relates to the modern scientific discipline of archaeology. The last few decades have seen a tremendous amount of archaeological discovery. To my knowledge there have not been any finds that have repudiated the Bible's historical accuracies (Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, p. 31, "No archaeological discovery has ever been made that contradicts or controverts historical statements of Scripture"), quite the contrary. Archaeology has facilitated confidence in the historicity of the Bible over and over again.
1. One example is the use of Mesopotamian names in the Nuzi and Mari Tablets of the second millennium B.C., which also occur in Genesis. Now these are not the same people, but the same names. Names are characteristic of a particular time and place. The names "Terah" and "Nahor" are common to the biblical record and in these ancient tablets.
 2. The existence of a Hittite civilization in Asia Minor is another example. For many years (19th century) secular history had no references to the stable, highly developed culture known by this name (Archer 1982, 96-98, 210). However, Genesis 10 and the historical books of the Bible mention them many times (2 Kings 7:6,7; 2 Chr. 1:17). Archaeology has since confirmed, not only their existence, but their longevity and power (i.e., 1950 archeologists found royal library of 2,000 cuneiform tablets where the nation was called both Anatolia and Hittite).
 3. The existence of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian king (Daniel 5), has often been denied. There are ten lists of Babylonian kings in secular history taken from Babylonian documents, but none contain Belshazzar's name. With further archaeological finds it became obvious that Belshazzar was co-regent and the official in charge during that period of time. His father, Nabonidus, whose mother was the high priestess of the moon goddess, *Zin*, had become so involved in the worship of *Zin* (Nana) that he had moved to Tema (Arabia), her holy city, while on a ten-year military campaign against Egypt. He left his son, Belshazzar, to reign in the city of Babylon in his absence.

- C. A further evidence for a supernatural Bible is the consistency of its message. This is not to say that the Bible does not contain some paradoxical material, but it also does not contradict itself. This is amazing when one considers that it was written over a 1600/1400 year period (depending on the date of the Exodus, i.e., 1495, 1290 B.C.; See **Special Topic: [Date of the Exodus](#)**) by authors of radically different educational and cultural backgrounds from Mesopotamia to Egypt. It is composed of various literary genres and is written in three separate languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek). Yet, even with all of this variety, a unified message (i.e., plot line) is presented (i.e., metanarrative).
- D. Finally, one of the most marvelous evidences for the Bible's unique inspiration is the permanently morally changed lives of men and women from different cultures, different educational levels, and different socio-economic levels through history. Wherever the Bible has simply been read, radical, permanent lifestyle changes have occurred. The Bible is its own best apologist.
- E. Bishop H. C. G. Moule, "He [Christ] absolutely trusted the Bible, and, though there are in it things inexplicable and intricate that have puzzled men so much, I am going, not in a blind sense, but reverently to trust the Book because of Him." Harford and MacDonald, *The Life of Bishop Moule*, 1922 (p. 138).
- F. A good book which extends these evidences is D. James Kennedy's *Why I Believe*, ISBN 0-8499-2943-1

VI. Problems Related to Our Interpretation of the Bible

The above does not mean to imply that it is easy to understand or that there are not some problems connected with the Bible. Because of the nature of human language, hand copied manuscripts combined with the problem of translation, our modern Bibles must be interpreted in an analytical fashion.

The first problem to confront the modern Bible reader is the manuscript variations which exist. This is not only true of the Hebrew Old Testament, but also the Greek New Testament. This subject will be discussed in a more practical manner in a later chapter, but for now let us look at the problem. The academic area associated with this issue is often called Textual Criticism (See **Special Topic: [Textual Criticism](#)**). It basically tries to decide the original wording of the "autographies" of each book of the Bible. Some good books concerning this problem are:

- A. *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual* by B. K. Walke, D. Guthrie, Gordon Fee, and R. H. Harrison
- B. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* by Bruce M. Metzger
- C. *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism and Scribes, Scrolls, and Scriptures*, by J. H. Greenlee
- D. *The Books and the Parchments* by F. F. Bruce
- E. *The Early Versions of the New Testament* by Bruce Metzger
- F. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* by F. F. Bruce
- G. *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* by D. A. Carson

H. *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* by K. A. Kitchen

I. *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* edited by David Alan Beach

VII. The Major Textual Sources of Our Modern Bible

The modern standard text of the Old Testament in Hebrew is called the Masoretic Text (the consonantal text set by Rabbi Aquiba in A.D. 100). It was meant to standardize the many Hebrew translations available in that period. It was probably the text used by the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who were the only religious group that survived the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70. Its name comes from a group of Jewish scholars who put vowel points, punctuation marks, and some textual comments into the ancient, unpointed, consonantal (no vowels) Hebrew text (finished in the 9th century A.D.). Following is a brief outline of OT and NT sources.

A. Old Testament

1. Masoretic Text (MT) – The Hebrew consonantal textual form was set by Rabbi Aquiba in A.D. 100. The addition of vowel points, accents, marginal notes, punctuation, and apparatus notes was finished in the 9th century A.D. by Masoretic scholars. This textual form is quoted in the Mishnah, Talmud, Targums (Aramaic translation), Peshitta (Syriac translation), and Vulgate (Latin translation).
2. Septuagint (LXX) – Tradition says it was produced by 70 Jewish scholars in 70 days for the library of Alexandria, Egypt. It was supposedly requested by a Jewish leader of King Ptolemy II living in Alexandria (285-246 B.C.). The Ptolemy rulers of Egypt boasted of the largest library in the world. This tradition comes from “Letter of Aristeas.” The LXX provides a differing Hebrew textual tradition from the text of Rabbi Aquiba (MT). Both traditions are represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The problem comes when these two texts do not agree. And, in books like Jeremiah and Hosea, they are radically different. Since the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, it has become obvious that both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint have ancient manuscript attestation. Usually the Masoretic Text is accepted as the basic text for the Old Testament and the Septuagint is allowed to supplement it in difficult passages or corrupted readings.

- a. The LXX has helped in the understanding of the MT (one example):
 - (1) the LXX of Isa. 52:14, “as many shall be amazed at him”
 - (2) the MT of Isa. 52:14, “just as many were astonished over you”
- b. The DSS have helped in the understanding of the MT (one example):
 - (1) the DSS (IQ Isaiah) of Isa. 21:8 – “then the seer cried, upon a watchtower I stand. . .”
 - (2) the MT of Isa. 21:8 – “and I cried a lion! My Lord, I always stand on the watchtower by day. . .”

- c. Both the LXX and DSS have helped our understanding of Isa. 53:11
 - (1) LXX and DSS – “after the travail of his soul he will see light, he will be satisfied”
 - (2) MT – “he shall see of the travail of his soul. He shall be satisfied” (The MT doubled the VERB, but left out the first OBJECT).

We do not have the “autographs” or original manuscripts of any of the original biblical authors, only copies of copies of copies.

- 3. Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) – Written or copied from earlier works in the Roman B.C. period, close to New Testament times by a sect of Jewish separatists (they left temple worship because the current high priest was not of the line of Aaron), called “Essenes.” The Hebrew manuscripts were found in 1947 in several cave sites around the Dead Sea. They contain the Hebrew textual families behind both the MT and the LXX.

Another problem in this area is the discrepancy between the Masoretic Text and the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament.

- a. One good example would be a comparison of Num. 25:9 and I Cor. 10:8. The OT reference states that 24,000 died, while Paul states that 23,000 died. Here we are faced with the problem of an ancient text which was copied by hand. This could be a scribal error in transmission or it could be a quotation from memory by Paul or a rabbinical tradition. I know it is painful to us (because of our presuppositions about inspiration) to find discrepancies such as this, but the truth of the matter is that our modern translations of the Bible have some minor problems of this type.
- b. A similar problem is found in Matt. 27:9, where an OT quote is referred to Jeremiah, when it seems to come from Zechariah. To show you how much disagreement this has caused let me give you some of the supposed reasons for this discrepancy.
 - a. The 5th century Syriac version called the Peshitta simply removes the name “Jeremiah.”
 - b. Augustine, Luther, and Keil assert an error in Matthew’s text.
 - c. Origen and Eusebius assert an error by a copyist.
 - d. Jerome and Ewald assert that it is a quote from an apocryphal work attributed to Jeremiah which was lost and that it was not a quote from Zechariah at all.
 - e. Mede asserts that Jeremiah wrote Zechariah 9-11.
 - f. Lightfoot asserts that Jeremiah was listed as the first of the prophets; in this designation all other prophets were implied.
 - g. Hengstenberg asserts that Zechariah quoted Jeremiah.
 - h. Calvin asserts that an error has crept into the text in an unknown way.

With so many theories from learned, godly men it is obvious that we simply do not know. To deny the problem (#1) is not an answer either. To hide behind cliches or presuppositions also does not solve the problem. Our modern translations of the Bible have some problems which we must try to sort out. For the layperson this can often be done by comparing modern translations. A simple practical suggestion would be, if in the margin of your modern study Bible it says, “not in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts,” just do not build a doctrine on this text. Find the parallel passages where the doctrine is clearly taught.

B. New Testament

Over 5,300 manuscripts (whole or fragmentary) of the Greek New Testament are in existence today. About 85 of these are written on papyri. There are 268 (uncial) manuscripts written in all capital letters. Later, about the 9th-10th century A.D., a running script (minuscule) was developed. The Greek manuscripts written in this form number about 2,700. We also have about 2,100 copies of lists of Scripture texts used in worship that are called lectionaries. The following is a brief outline of NT sources.

1. The Papyri – About 85 Greek manuscripts containing parts of the New Testament are extant, written on papyrus, dating from the second century A.D., but most are from the third and fourth centuries A.D. None of these manuscripts contain the whole New Testament. Some are done by professional scribes, but many of them are hastily copied by less exacting copyists. This rapid copying was meant to keep a copy of an inspired book that was read in the churches of an area and then passed on to another area. Just being old does not, in and of itself, make it more accurate.
2. Codex Sinaiticus – is known by the Hebrew “A” (*aleph*), א, or (01). It was found at St. Catherine’s monastery on Mt. Sinai by Tischendorf. It dates from the fourth century A.D. It contains both the Old and New Testaments. It is of “the Alexandrian Text” type, as is Codex B.
3. Codex Alexandrinus – is known by the Greek capital letter “A” (*alpha*) or (02). It is a fifth century A.D. manuscript which was found at Alexandria, Egypt. Only the Gospels are of “the Alexandrian text” type.
4. Codex Vaticanus – is known by the Greek capital letter “B” or (03), was found in the Vatican’s library in Rome and dates from the middle of the fourth century A.D. It contains both the Old and New Testaments. It is of “The Alexandrian Text” type, as is Codex א. Its roots go back into the second century to P⁷⁵.
5. Codex Ephraemi – is known as “C” or (04), is a fifth century A.D. manuscript which was partially destroyed. Its roots go back to the third century P⁴⁵. Codex W, from the fifth century is also of this textual family.
6. Codex Bezae – is known by the Greek capital letter “D” or (05), is a fifth or sixth century A.D. manuscript. Its roots, according to Eldon Jay Epp, go back into the second century, based on the Old Latin and Old Syriac translations, as well as many papyri fragments. However, Kurt and Barbara Eland do not list any papyri connected to this textual family and they put it to the fourth century and no earlier, but they do list a few precursor papyri (i.e., P³⁸, P⁴⁸, P⁶⁹). It is the chief representative of what is called “The Western Text.” It contains many additions and was the main Greek witness behind the third edition of Erasmus’ Greek New Testament, which was the Koine Greek witness for the King James translation.

The NT manuscripts can be grouped into three, possibly four, families of manuscripts that share certain characteristics (i.e., additions, corrections, and omissions).

1. Alexandrian “local” text (designated by the Greek Capital A), which includes
 - a. P⁷⁵, P⁶⁶ (about A.D. 200) the Gospels
 - b. P⁴⁶ (about A.D. 225) Paul’s letters
 - c. P⁷² (about A.D. 225-250) Peter and Jude
 - d. Codex B, called Vaticanus (about A.D. 325), which includes the entire OT and NT
 - e. quoted by Origen (A.D. 182-251)
 - f. other manuscripts which show this text type are \aleph , L, W, 33
 2. Western text from North Africa which includes
 - a. quotes from North Africa: Tertullian (A.D. 150-230), Cyprian (A.D. 210-258), and the Old Latin
 - b. quotes from Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202)
 - c. quotes from Tatian (A.D. 120-180) and Old Syriac
 - d. Codex D “Bezae”
 3. Byzantine text
 - a. reflected in over 80% of the 5,300 manuscripts (mostly minuscules)
 - b. quoted by leaders from Antioch of Syria: Cappadoceans, Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 350-428)
 - c. Codex A in the Gospels only
 - d. Codex E (eighth century) for the full NT
 4. the fourth possible type is “Caesarean”
 - a. primarily seen in Mark
 - b. some witnesses to it are P⁴⁵, W, H
- C. Brief explanation of the problems and theories of “lower criticism,” also called “textual criticism.”
1. How did the variants occur?
 - a. inadvertent or accidental (vast majority of occurrences)
 - (1) slip of the eye
 - (a) in hand copying, which reads the second instance of two similar words and, thereby, omits all of the words in between (homoioteleuton)
 - (b) in omitting a double letter word or phrase (haplography)
 - (c) in hand copying, a mental error in repeating a phrase or line of a Greek text (dittography)
 - (2) slip of the ear in hand copying by oral dictation, where a misspelling occurs (itacism) in similar sounding words. Often the misspelling implies or spells another Greek word
 - (3) the earliest Greek texts had no chapter or verse divisions, little or no punctuation, and no division between words. It is possible to divide letters into different words

- b. intentional
 - (1) changes were made to improve the grammatical form of the text copied
 - (2) changes were made to bring the text into conformity with other biblical texts (harmonization of parallels)
 - (3) changes were made by combining two or more variant readings into one long combined text (conflation)
 - (4) changes were made to correct a perceived problem in the text
 - (5) changes were made to make the text more doctrinally orthodox (cf. 1 John 5:7-8)
 - (6) some additional information as to the historical setting or proper interpretation of the text was placed in the margin by one scribe, but placed into the text by a second scribe (cf. John 5:4)
- c. A good book on how oral societies of the ANE (i.e., Israel) passed on their traditions is John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*. It clearly shows how OT MSS problems may have been caused.

D. The basic tenets of textual criticism (transcriptional probabilities)

1. the most awkward or grammatically unusual text is probably the original because the scribes tended to make the text smoother
2. the shortest text is probably the original because scribes tended to add additional information or phrases from parallel passages (this has recently been challenged by papyrus comparative studies)
3. the older text is given more weight because of its historical proximity to the original, everything else being equal
4. manuscripts that are geographically diverse usually have the original readings
5. attempts to explain how variants could have occurred. This is considered the most important tenet by most scholars.
6. analysis of a given biblical author's literary style, vocabulary, and theology is used to decide probable original wording.
7. doctrinally weaker texts, especially those relating to major theological discussions during the period of manuscript changes, like the Trinity in I John 5:7-8, are to be preferred. At this point I would like to quote from J. Harold Greenlee's book, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*.

“No Christian doctrine hangs upon a debatable text; and the student of the New Testament must beware of wanting his text to be more orthodox or doctrinally stronger than is the inspired original” (p. 68).
8. W. A. Criswell told Greg Garrison of THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS that he (Criswell) doesn't believe every word in the Bible is inspired, “at least not every word that has been given to the modern public by centuries of translators.” Criswell further said, “I very much am a believer in textual criticism. As such, I think the last half of the 16th chapter of Mark is heresy: it's not inspired, it's just concocted. . .when you compare those

manuscripts way back yonder, there was no such thing as that conclusion of the Book of Mark. Somebody added it. . .”

The patriarch of the SBC inerrantists also claimed that “interpolation” is also evident in John 5:4, the account of Jesus at the pool of Bethesda. And he discusses the two different accounts of the suicide of Judas (cf. Matt. 27 and Acts 1), “It’s just a different view of the suicide,” Criswell said. “If it is in the bible, there is an explanation for it. And the two accounts of the suicide of Judas are in the Bible.” Criswell added, “Textual criticism is a wonderful science in itself. It is not ephemeral, it’s not impertinent. It’s dynamic and central. . .”

An additional problem with our modern English copies of the Bible is that from the time of the original authors until the invention of the printing press, the Bible was copied by hand. Often these copyists added their own thoughts or “corrected” the manuscript they were copying. This has caused several non-original additions to the New Testament.

- E. Some examples of the problem of hand-copied manuscripts in the Greek New Testament.
1. Mark 16:9ff – In the Greek manuscripts/traditions of Mark there are four different endings.
 - a. The longest ending of twelve verses found in King James is missing in manuscripts \aleph and B. The Greek texts used by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome also lack this long ending.
 - b. The long ending is present in manuscripts A, C, D, K, U, and \aleph^c . The earliest witness to this long ending in the Fathers is Irenaeus (ministered from A.D. 177-190) and the Diatessaron (A.D. 180).
 - c. The passage is obviously non-Markan (i.e., uninspired). These verses contain terms and theology not found elsewhere in Mark. They even contain heresy (i.e., drinking of poison and handling snakes).
 - d. Let me add my exegetical notes on Mark 16:9-20 from my commentary:
“**Mark 16:9-20** I am committed to inspired Apostolic writings as the true word of God, the only source for faith and practice. However, these verses are not inspired, possibly even heretical (drinking poison, handling snakes). I refuse to comment on them! For a full discussion of the textual problem see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary On the Greek New Testament*, pp. 122-126.”
 2. John 5:4 – This verse is not in P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵, nor the uncial manuscripts \aleph , B, C, or D. However, it is found in A. It was obviously added by a scribe to explain the historical setting. This is likely Jewish folklore answering the question why there were so many sick people around this pool. God does not heal by angels stirring water with the first to enter being rewarded with physical healing. At this point let me add my exegetical notes from John 5:4.

“John 5:4 This verse (John 5:3b-4) is a later scribal commentary which tries to explain

1. the presence of all the sick people by the pool
2. why this man had been there so long
3. why he wanted someone to put him in the water, John 5:7

It is obviously a Jewish folk tale. It was not part of John's original Gospel. The evidence for this verse not being included is:

1. it is not in manuscripts P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵, \aleph , B, C*, D
2. it is marked by an asterisk in over 20 additional later Greek manuscripts, showing that this text was thought not to be original
3. there are several non-Johannine terms used in this short verse

It is included in several early Greek uncial manuscripts, A, C³, K, and L. It is also included in the Diatessaron (about A.D. 180), and the writings of Tertullian (A.D. 200), Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Cyril. This shows its antiquity but not its inclusion in the original inspired Gospel. It is included in KJV, NASB (1995 Update, with brackets), and NKJV, but omitted in NASB (1970), NRSV, NJB, REB, NET Bible, and NIV.

For a good discussion of the manuscript variants by an evangelical textual critic, see Gordon Fee, *To What End Exegesis?*, pp. 17-28.

3. John 7:53-8:11 – This passage does not appear in any of the ancient Greek manuscripts or early church Fathers until the sixth century A.D. in manuscript “D” called Bezae. No Greek church Father, until the twelfth century A.D., comments on this passage. The account is found in several other places in the Greek manuscripts of John, after 7:36, after 7:44, and after 21:25. At this point let me add my exegetical notes from John 8, Textual Background.

TEXTUAL BACKGROUND TO 7:53-8:11

- A. The account of Jesus with an adulterous woman recorded in John 7:53-8:11 was not part of the original Gospel of John. It surely sounds like Jesus, but it was not from the pen of John the Apostle.
- B. Evidence for this passage (one sentence in Greek) being omitted from the Gospel are
 1. External evidence
 - a. absent from the oldest Greek manuscripts
 - (1) papyrus — P⁶⁵ (early third century), P⁷⁵ (third century)
 - (2) uncials — \aleph (fourth century), B (fourth century), probably absent from A and C. These are damaged at this point in John, but when the surviving leaves of the manuscript are measured there is no room for this passage.

- b. many of the later Greek manuscripts that include it mark it with a special sign or symbol, like an asterisk, to show it was not original
- c. it is found in several different locations in different later manuscripts
 - (1) after John 7:36
 - (2) after John 7:44
 - (3) after John 7:25
 - (4) in Luke after 21:38
 - (5) in Luke after 24:53
- d. absent from the ancient translations
 - (1) the old Latin
 - (2) the old Syriac
 - (3) the early copies of the Peshitta (later Syriac)
- e. there is no comment on this text by any of the Greek fathers (until the twelfth century)
- f. it is present in codex D (Bezae), a western manuscript of the sixth century, the Latin Vulgate, and the later editions of the Peshitta.

2. Internal evidence

- a. the vocabulary and style are more like Luke than John. It was placed in some Greek manuscripts after Luke 21:38 and in others after Luke 24:53
- b. it totally breaks the context of Jesus' discussion with the Jewish leaders after the feast of Tabernacles, 7:1-52; 8:12- 59
- c. there are no parallels in the Synoptic Gospels

3. For a complete technical discussion see Bruce M Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. 219-221.

see **Special Topic:** [Textual Criticism](#)

C. This account may be genuine oral tradition from Jesus' life. However, there are many accounts of Jesus' life that Gospel writers chose to not record (John 20:30-31). It is the Gospel writers themselves who were inspired. Later scribes had no right to include an account of Jesus' life, even if authentic, that was not included by the inspired original author. The original authors alone had the insight under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to select, arrange, and adapt the works and words of Jesus. This passage is not original and, therefore, not inspired and should not be included in our Bibles!

D. I have chosen not to comment on this passage because I do not believe it is from the pen of John and, therefore, not part of an inspired text (even if historical). Inspiration ceases with the death of the Apostles.

see **Special Topic:** [Inspiration](#)

4. Matthew 6:13 – This verse is not found in manuscripts \aleph , B, or D. It is present in manuscripts K, L, and W, but with variations. It is also absent from the early church Father's comments on the Lord's Prayer (i.e., Tertullian [A.D. 150-230], Origen [A.D. 182-251], and Cyprian [A.D. ministered 248-258]). It is found in the King James translation because it was included in Erasmus' third edition Greek text. At this point let me add my exegetical notes from Matt. 6:13

Matt. 6:13b The Doxology of Matt. 6:13b is not found in

1. the parallel of Luke 11:2-4
2. the ancient Greek uncial manuscripts \aleph , B, D
3. the commentaries of Origen, Cyprian, Jerome, or Augustine

There are several forms of this doxology in the different Greek manuscripts of Matthew. It probably was added from 1 Chr. 29:11-13 as the Lord's prayer began to be used in liturgical ways by the early Church. It was not original. Roman Catholic liturgy omits it because it is not in the Vulgate. A. T. Robertson commented on this text in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, "The Doxology is placed in the margin of the Revised Version. It is wanting in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts. The earliest forms vary much, some shorter, some longer than the one in the Authorized Version. The use of a doxology arose when this prayer began to be used as a liturgy to be recited or to be chanted in public worship. It was not an original part of the Model Prayer as given by Jesus," p. 55. The UBS⁴ rates the omission as "A" (certain).

5. Luke 22:43-44 – These verses are found in the ancient Greek uncial manuscripts \aleph^* , \aleph^2 , D, K, L, X, and Delta. They are also found in the quotations of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Eusebius, and Jerome. However, they are omitted in MSS P⁶⁹[probably]⁷⁵, \aleph^c , A, N, T, and W, as well as the manuscripts used by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The UBS⁴ ranks their omission as "certain" (A).

The NASB and NRSV bracket these verses, while NKJV, TEV, and NIV have a footnote which says, "some ancient manuscripts omit verses 43 and 44." This information is unique to Luke's Gospel. At this point let me put add my exegetical notes from Luke 22:43-44

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The UBS⁴, NASB, and NRSV bracket these verses, while NKJV, TEV, and NIV have

a footnote which says, "some ancient manuscripts omit verses 43 and 44." This information is unique to Luke's Gospel.

6. I John 5:7-8 – These verses are not found in manuscripts \aleph , A, or B nor any other Greek manuscript except four dating from the twelfth century A.D. This text is not quoted by any of the Greek Fathers, even in their defense of the concept of the Deity of Christ or the Trinity. They are absent from all ancient translations including Jerome's Vulgate. They were apparently added later by well-meaning copyists in order to bolster the doctrine of the Trinity. They are found in the King James translation because of their inclusion in Erasmus' third edition (and only this edition) of the Greek New Testament.

See **Special Topic: [The Trinity](#)**

At this point let me add my exegetical notes from 1 John 5:7.

1 John 5:7 There is some confusion in the English translations as to where 1 John 5:6,7, and 8 begin and end. The portion of 1 John 5:7 that is found in the KJV which says "in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one," is not found in the three major ancient uncial Greek manuscripts of the NT: Alexandrinus (A), Vaticanus (B), or Sinaiticus (\aleph), nor in the Byzantine family of manuscripts. It appears in only four late minuscule manuscripts.

1. MS 61, dated in the 16th century
2. MS 88 dated in the 12th century, where the passage is inserted in the margin by a later hand
3. MS 629, dated in the 14th or 15th century
4. MS 635, dated in the 11th century, where the passage is inserted in the margin by a later hand

This verse is not quoted by any of the Early Church Fathers, even in their doctrinal debates over the Trinity. It is absent from all ancient versions except one late Latin manuscript family (*Sixto-Clementine*). It is not in the Old Latin or Jerome's Vulgate. It appears first in a treatise by the Spanish heretic Priscillian, who died in A.D. 385. It was quoted by Latin Fathers in North Africa and Italy in the 5th century. This verse is simply not part of the original inspired words of 1 John.

The biblical doctrine of one God but with three personal manifestations (Father, Son, and Spirit) is not affected by the rejection of this verse. Although it is true that the Bible never uses the word "trinity," many biblical passages speak of all three persons of the Godhead acting together:

1. at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:16-17)
2. the great commission (Matt. 28:19)
3. the Spirit sent (John 14:26)
4. Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:33-34)
5. Paul's discussion of flesh and spirit (Rom. 8:7-10)
6. Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-6)
7. Paul's travel plans (2 Cor. 1:21-22)
8. Paul's benediction (2 Cor. 13:14)
9. Paul's discussion of the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4-6)
10. Paul's prayer of praise to the Father (Eph. 1:3-14)

11. Paul's discussion of the Gentiles' former alienation (Eph. 2:18)
12. Paul's discussion of the oneness of God (Eph. 4:4-6)
13. Paul's discussion of the kindness of God (Titus 3:4-6)
14. Peter's introduction (1 Pet. 1:2)

Our modern translations of the Bible do have some textual problems. However, these do not affect a major doctrine. We can trust these modern translations of the Bible for all that is necessary for faith and practice. One of the translators of the RSV, F. C. Grant, said, "No doctrine of the Christian faith has been affected by the revision, for the simple reason that, out of thousands of variant readings in the manuscripts, none has turned up thus far that requires a revision of Christian doctrine."

"It is noteworthy that for most scholars over 90% of all the variants of the NT text are resolved, because in most instances the variant that best explains the origins of the others is also supported by the earliest and best witnesses" (Gordon Fee, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 430).

I have cited these examples to show you that we must analyze our English translations (Fee and Stuart 1982, 30-34). They do have textual problems. I do not feel comfortable with these textual variants, but they are a reality. It is reassuring to realize that they are rare and do not affect any major Christian doctrine. Also, in comparison to other ancient literature, the Bible has remarkably few variations but many copies!

F. The problem of translating from one language to another.

Besides the problem of manuscript variations there is the added problem of translating one language into another. In reality all translations are concise commentaries. Possibly an understanding of translation theory will

1. encourage us to use more than one translation in our study
2. help us know which different translations to compare

There are three basic methods available to translators.

1. A literal approach tries to use a word-for-word correspondence.
2. An idiom-for-idiom approach tries to use clauses or phrases, not words, as the basis to communicate the ancient text.
3. A thought-for-thought approach tries to use concepts instead of actual terms and phrases of the originals.

We can see this more clearly on the following graph.

KJV	NIV	Amplified Bible
ASV	NAB	Phillips Translation
NASB	TEV	LB
RSV	JB	
	NEB	
	Williams Translation	

Literal	Idiom-for-idiom	Idea-for-idea
Word-for-word	Clause-for clause	Free Rendering
Formal Correspondence	Dynamic Equivalent	Paraphrase

A good discussion of translation theory is found in Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, pp. 34-41. Also, tremendous help in this area is found in the United Bible Societies' publications by Eugene A. Nida on translation theory and practice.

G. The problem of human languages in describing God.

Not only do we face an uncertain text at some places, but also, if we are not fluent in ancient Hebrew and Koine Greek, we face a variety of English translations. Complicating the problem even more is our own human finitude and sinfulness. Human language itself limits and determines the categories and scope of divine revelation. God has spoken to us in

1. imagery
2. negation
3. analogy

Human language is adequate to speak about God, but it is not exhaustive or ultimate. We can know God, but with some limits. One good example of this limitation is anthropomorphisms, that is, speaking about God in human, physical, or psychological terms. We have nothing else to use. We assert that God is a person and all we know about personhood is in human categories. Some examples of this difficulty follow.

1. anthropomorphism (God described in human terms)
 - a. God with human body
 - (1) walking – Gen. 3:8; 18:33; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:14
 - (2) eyes – Gen. 6:8; Exod. 33:17
 - (3) man on a throne - Isa. 6:1; Dan.7:9
 - b. God as female
 - (1) Gen. 1:2 (Spirit as female bird)
 - (2) Gen. 17:1 (El Shaddai; see **Special Topic: [Shaddai](#)**)
 - (3) Deut. 32:18 (God as mother)
 - (4) Exod. 19:4 (God as mother eagle)
 - (5) Isa. 49:14-15; 66:9-13 (God as nursing mother and also possibly Hos. 11:4)
 - c. God as advocating lying (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19-23)

- d. NT imagery of “God’s right hand” (cf. Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 13:1; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22)
2. Human titles used to describe God
 - a. Shepherd (cf. Psalm 23)
 - b. Father (cf. Isaiah 63:16; Psalm 103:13)
 - c. Go’el – kinsman redeemer (cf. Exod. 6:6 see **Special Topic: [Kinsman Redeemer](#)**)
 - d. Lover – husband (cf. Hosea 1-3)
 - e. Parent, father, and mother (cf. Hosea 11:3-4)
3. Physical objects used to describe God
 - a. Rock (cf. Psalm 18; see **Special Topic: [Cornerstone](#)**)
 - b. Fortress and stronghold (cf. Psalm 18)
 - c. Shield (cf. Gen. 15:1; Psalm 18)
 - d. Horn of salvation (cf. Psalm 18)
 - e. Tree (cf. Hos. 14:8)
4. Language is part of the image of God in mankind, but sin has affected all aspects of our existence, including language.
5. God is faithful and communicates to us adequately, if not exhaustively, knowledge about Himself. This is usually in the form of negation, analogy, or imagery.

The biggest problem we face in interpreting the Bible, along with the others mentioned, is our sinfulness. We twist everything, including the Bible, to fit and meet our wants. We never have an objective, unaffected view of God, our world, or ourselves. Yet, even with all of these handicaps, God is faithful. We can know God and His Word because He wants us to do so (Silva 1987, 118). He has provided all that we need by the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Calvin). Yes, there are problems, but there are also abounding provisions. The problems should limit our dogmatism and increase our thanksgiving through prayerful, diligent Bible study. The road is not easy, but He walks with us. The goal is Christlikeness, not only a correct interpretation. Interpretation is a means to the goal of knowing, serving, and praising Him who called us out of darkness through His Son (Col. 1:13).

Special Topic: [Anthropomorphic Language to Describe God](#)

Special Topic: [Illumination](#)

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

I. Author's Presuppositional Definition

Many Christians would agree that the Bible is the only source for faith and practice. If this is so, why are there so many different interpretations? So many are speaking seemingly conflicting interpretations in God's name. How do we know who is to be believed? These questions reflect the confusion of the modern Christian community and are a critical issue. How can average believers evaluate what they hear or read—all of which claims to be God's truth?

Here are some ways to evaluate a person who claims to speak for God.

- A. Deut. 13:1-5 (sign or wonder in name of another god)
- B. Deut. 18:20-22 (accurately predicts the future in name of another god)
- C. Matt. 7:15-23 (by their fruits you shall know them)
- D. Matt. 24:24 (miracles are not automatically a sign of God)
- E. 1 John 4:1-3 (Christological, one nature—God and man)
- F. 2 Pet. 3:15-16 (they misinterpret revelation – read all of 2 Peter 3)

For me, the answer has come in my presuppositional definition of what “biblical authority” involves. I realize that I am reacting to my own existential circumstances, yet I have no other option. It may bother you that I speak of “presuppositions.” Yet, most, if not all, of the significant questions of life are dealt with in this manner because of the very nature of our human situation. Total objectivity is impossible. One hopes we have not uncritically assimilated our cultural “givens.” In an attempt to limit, not only my own “givens,” but also those of others, I have tried to put some boundaries on the interpretation of the Bible. I realize that this may mean that I will not be able to receive some truth, but I feel it will protect me from cultural, denominational, and experiential misinterpretations. In truth, the contextual/textual method will force us to say less about the Bible, but should help us become more committed to the major pillars of the Christian faith.

“Biblical authority” is normally defined as the belief in the God-giveness of the Bible, and thereby, its authority (cf. 2 Tim. 3:14-17). For me it is also understanding what the biblical author was saying to his day and then applying that truth to my day. This means that I must try to put myself into his day, his reasoning, and his purpose(s). I must try to hear as the original hearers heard. I must struggle with the “then” of the biblical author, book, event, parable, etc. I must be able to show others, from the text of the Bible itself, the how, why, when, and where of my interpretation. I am not free to let it, or make it, say what I want it to say (Liefeld 1984, 6). It must be free to speak; I must be ready to hear and pass this truth on to the people of my day. Only if I have understood the original author and only if I have transferred the eternal truth to my day and to my life have I participated in true “biblical authority.” There will surely be some disagreements on the “then” and the “now” aspects of interpretation, but we must limit our interpretations to the Bible and verify our understanding from its pages.

II. Need for Verifiable Interpretations

One of the plagues of the Protestant Reformation is the multiplicity of interpretations (resulting in modern denominationalism), which resulted from its “back to the Bible” movement. I have no real hope of unanimity on this side of heaven, but we must return to the Scriptures, consistently and verifiably interpreted. We all must walk in our own light, but hopefully we will be able to defend our doctrine (faith) and practice (life) from the Scriptures. The Scriptures must be allowed to speak; speak in light of their literary, grammatical, and historical context. We must defend our interpretations in the light of

- A. the normal usage of human language
- B. the original author’s intent in the passage
- C. the balance of all Scripture
- D. Christlikeness

The contemporary curse of proof-texting and spiritualizing has devastated the church. The cults have learned our techniques and how to use them with great effectiveness. Here are some good books that discuss this issue:

1. James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting*, IVP, 1980
2. D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, Baker, 1984
3. Moises Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, Zondervan, 1983

The hope of this Textbook is not only to give a methodology for interpretation, but also to give you the ability to evaluate other interpretations. We must defend our own interpretations and be able to analyze other’s interpretations. Here are my assumptions on how to do this.

- A. The writers of Scripture used normal human language and expected to be understood.
- B. Modern interpreters seek the original author’s intent by documenting several types of information.
 1. historical and cultural setting of their day
 2. literary context (whole book, literary unit, paragraph)
 3. genre (historical narrative, prophecy, law, poetry, parable, apocalyptic)
 4. textual design (e.g., John 3 -- Mr. Religious and John 4 -- Ms. Irreligious)
 5. syntax (grammatical relationships and forms)
 6. original word meanings
 - a. Old Testament
 - (1) cognate languages (Semitic languages)
 - (2) Dead Sea Scrolls
 - (3) Samaritan Pentateuch
 - (4) rabbinical writings

- b. New Testament
 - (1) the Septuagint (the NT writers were Hebrew thinkers writing in street Greek)
 - (2) papyri finds from Egypt
 - (3) Greek literature
- C. The balance of all of Scripture (parallel passages) because it has one divine author (the Spirit).
- D. Christlikeness (Jesus is the goal and fulfillment of Scripture. He is both the perfect revelation of Deity and the perfect example of true humanity).
 - 1. ultimate revelation of YHWH (e.g., John 14:8-9)
 - 2. substitutionary sacrifice for sin (e.g., Mark 10:45)
 - 3. Example of what humans should be and one day will be (e.g., 1 John 3:2)

It is a basic presupposition that every text has one and only one proper interpretation and that is the original author's intent. This authorial meaning had an original application. This application (significance) can be multiplied to different situations, but each one must be inseparably linked to the original intent (cf. *The Aims of Interpretation* by E.D. Hirsch).

III. Examples of Interpretive Abuse

To illustrate my point concerning the pervasiveness of improper hermeneutics (even among evangelicals), consider the following selected examples.

- A. Deuteronomy 23:18 is used to prove that believers should not "sell" their dogs (KJV). Dogs in Deuteronomy are male prostitutes of the Canaanite fertility cult.
- B. 2 Samuel 9 is used as imagery for grace covering our sins as Mephibosheth's crippled feet are allegorized as "our sin" and David's table is allegorized as God's grace covering them from sight (ancient people did not sit with their feet under a table).
- C. John 11:44 is used to speak of "things that bind" to refer to inappropriate habits, motives, and actions. Preachers then make a list of the things they think "bind" believers.
- D. 1 Corinthians 13:8 is used to prove that tongues will cease first and of themselves, when in context, everything but love will cease. The literary context of chapters 11-14 speaks often of "tongues" in positive ways.
- E. Colossians 2:21 is used to prove total abstinence, when it is a quote from the false teachers!
- F. Revelation 3:20 is used as an evangelistic passage, when it is addressed to one of the seven churches.

The plague of proof-texting and spiritualizing abounds.

- A. "The practice of isolating sentences, thoughts, and ideas from their immediate context is nearly always fatal when applied to Paul. 'Solitary proof-texts,' says Professor H. A. A. Kennedy, 'have wrought more havoc in theology than all the heresies,'" *A Man in Christ* by James Steward, p. 15.

- B. “The proof-text method of interpreting Paul’s letters, which views them as direct revelations of the supernatural will of God conveying to men eternal, timeless truths that need only to be systematized to produce a complete theology, obviously ignores the means by which God has been pleased to give to men his Word,” G. E. Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, p. 379.

So, what can be done? We must all reexamine our working definition of biblical authority. If our interpretation would have surprised the original author or hearers, it probably surprises God. If we speak in His name, we surely should have paid the price of personal confession, prayer, and diligent study. We do not all need to be scholars, but we do need to be serious, regular, capable students of the Bible (i.e., good Bible readers, See **Special Topic: [A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)**). Humility, teachableness, and a daily walk of faith will protect us from many a pitfall. Remember, every paragraph has one main truth (words have meaning only in sentences; sentences have meaning only in paragraphs; paragraphs must relate to a specific literary unit). Be careful of overconfidence in interpreting the details (the Spirit will help believers find the main truths of paragraphs)! Suggested reading:

1. *Scripture Twisting* by James W. Sire
2. *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* by Moises Silva

THE INTERPRETER

I. Presuppositional Conditioning

We are all historically conditioned. Total objectivity is not possible (D. A. Carson, *Biblical Interpretation and the Church* 1984, 12). However, if we can identify our biases, or at least areas in which they may be found, we are better able to control their influence. There is an excellent discussion of our pre-understanding in Duncan Ferguson's *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 6-22.

“Because we all have our prejudices and misconceptions it is all too easy to see in Scripture only what we want to see, and to miss the new and edifying revelation of fuller truth which is God's purpose for us. . . It is all too easy to read our own ideas into Scripture instead of getting out of the Scripture what it teaches, which might quite possibly overthrow our ideas (Stibbs 1950, 10-11).

There are many areas from which our presuppositions may come.

- A. One major factor is our personality type. This causes much confusion and disagreements among believers. We expect everyone to think and analyze as we do. A very valuable book in this area is *Why Christians Fight Over the Bible* by John Newport and William Cannon. Some believers are very logical and structured in their thought processes, while others are much more emotional and less prone to details and systems. Yet all believers are responsible to interpret the Bible and live in light of its truths.
- B. Another factor is our personal perception of our world and our experience of it. Not only do personality factors affect us, but also our maleness and femaleness. We are learning from the study of brain function how differently men and women perceive their worlds. This will affect how we interpret the Bible.

Also, our personal experiences, or the experiences of those close to us, can affect our interpretations. If a unique spiritual experience has happened to us, we will surely look for it on the pages of the Bible and in the lives of others.

- C. Closely related to personality difference is spiritual giftedness (1 Corinthians 12-14; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7,11-12). Often our giftedness is directly related to our personality type (Ps. 139:13-16). Giftedness comes at salvation (1 Cor. 12:4,7,11), not physical birth. However, they may be related. Spiritual giftedness is meant to be gracious service (1 Cor. 12:7) to our fellow believers, but it often turns into conflict (1 Cor. 12:12-30), especially in the area of biblical interpretation.

Our personality type also affects how we approach the Scriptures. Some approach the Scriptures looking for systematic categories, while others approach it in a more existential, devotional fashion. Our reason for coming to the Bible often affects our understanding. There is a difference between teaching a Sunday School class for five year olds and preparing a lecture series for a university. However, the process of interpretation should be the same.

- D. Another significant factor is our place of birth. There are so many cultural and theological differences even within the United States and this is multiplied by other cultures and

nationalities. Often we learn strong biases from our culture, not the Bible. Two good contemporary examples of this are western individualism and capitalism.

- E. As the place of our birth affects us, so too, the time of our birth. Culture is a fluid factor. Even those from the same culture and geographical area can be affected by “the generation gap.” If one multiplies this generation gap over centuries and cultures back to the Bible days, the potential for error becomes significant. We are affected by the twentieth and twenty-first century’s scientific mindset and our societal form and norms. Every age has “flavor” all its own. However, when we come to the Bible, we must understand its cultural setting for the purpose of interpretation.
- F. It is not only geography, time, and culture which affect us, but also our parental training. Parents are so influential and sometimes it is in a negative sense. Their biases are often passed on to their children or else the children totally reject the teachings and lifestyle of the parents. When one adds denominational factors to this mixture, it is clear how presuppositional we can become. The sad division of Christendom into splinter groups, each claiming priority and preeminence over all others, has caused great problems in interpreting the Bible. Many know what the Bible says before they ever read or study it personally, because they have been indoctrinated by a particular perspective.

Tradition is neither good nor bad. It is neutral and can be very helpful. However, every generation of believers must be allowed to analyze it in light of the Bible; tradition can protect us or bind us (i.e., the movie “Fiddler on the Roof”).

- G. Every one of us has been, and continues to be, affected by sin and rebellion, both overtly and inadvertently, knowingly and unknowingly. Our interpretations are always impacted by our spiritual maturity or lack thereof. Even the most Christlike believers are affected by sin and the most carnal believers have the light of the indwelling Spirit. All of us, hopefully, are going to continue to grow in our relationship with God through Christ by means of the Spirit. We must walk in the light we have, always being open to more light from the Scriptures by means of the Spirit. Our interpretations will surely change and modify the longer we live, the more contact we have with God’s people and God Himself.

If you have not had a new thought about God in several years, you are probably “brain dead”!

II. Some Examples of Evangelical Conditioning

At this point I would like to give some concrete examples of the relativity that results from the above mentioned factors (i.e., using 20th century examples from southern USA evangelical issues).

- A. Christian music is said to be evil, especially certain instruments, beat, form, or the participation of the audience, all of which are cultural or generational (see Eph. 5:19).
- B. Mixed swimming (boys and girls swimming together) is a real issue in some churches, usually those geographically removed from places where swimming can take place easily.

- C. Use of tobacco is a real issue in some churches (especially Central and South America), but usually not in those geographical places where it is not a major cash crop (believers, often physically out of shape themselves, use tobacco to accuse others of hurting their bodies).
- D. Use of alcohol in America is an important issue in many church groups, while in parts of Europe and South America it is not an issue. America is more affected by the 1920's temperance movement than by the Bible. Jesus surely drank fermented wine. Are you more "spiritual" than Jesus?

The following is a Special Topic taken from Dr. Utley's commentaries. You can view and download all of them free at www.freebiblecommentary.org.

See Special Topic: [Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse](#)

- E. Storehouse tithing is often proclaimed as (1) a way to personal wealth, but only in cultures where wealth is possible or (2) a way to avoid God's judgment (i.e., Mal. 3). See **Special Topic: [Tithing](#)**
- F. Inter-racial marriage is said to be out of the will of God based on Leviticus or Ezra-Nehemiah (which is not inter-racial, but inter-religious), but Num. 12:2 is ignored.
- G. Baptismal time, method, administrator, or formula (also Lord's Supper)
- H. How one celebrates Christmas and Halloween (or other cultural holidays)

III. What Can Be Done?

The above list could go on and on. Obviously, it needs to be stated that these personality factors usually affect only peripheral areas. It is helpful for each of us to analyze what we believe to be the irreducible minimums of the Christian faith. What are the major pillars of the church in every age and any culture (see **Special Topic: [The Kerygma of the Early Church](#)**)? This is not an easy question, but I think it is a necessary one. We must be committed to the essential core of historical Christianity, but discuss in love our cultural and individual differences in areas that are not crucial (cf. Rom. 14:1-15:13; 1 Corinthians 8-10; see **Special Topic: [Christian Freedom vs. Christian Responsibility](#)**). The more I understand myself and the Bible, the smaller my irreducible core has become. Primarily, for me, it involves the person and work of the Triune God and how one comes into fellowship with Him. All else becomes less crucial in light of these major issues. Maturity will tend to make us less dogmatic and judgmental!

All of us have presuppositions, but few of us have ever defined, analyzed or categorized them. However, we must recognize their presence. We all wear historical, cultural, and denominational glasses or filters of one kind or another. The books that have helped me to differentiate between the eternal and cultural aspects recorded in Scripture are

1. Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, especially chapters 4 and 5.
2. Gordon Fee, *The Gospel and Spirit*
3. John Newport, *Why Christians Fight Over the Bible*

II. The Responsibility of the Interpreter

In light of the above discussion, what is our responsibility as an interpreter? It involves the following.

1. Christians are personally responsible to interpret the Bible for themselves. This has often been called the priesthood of the believer (soul competency). This phrase never appears in the Bible in the SINGULAR, but always PLURAL (cf. Exod. 19:5; 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6). Interpretation is a community of faith's task. Be careful of an over emphasis on western individualism. We dare not relegate this responsibility to another person (1 Cor. 12:7).
2. The Bible is a book that demands interpretation (i.e., Matt. 5:29-30). It cannot be read as if it were the morning newspaper. The Bible was written for you but not to you! Its truth is historically conditioned, just as we are. We must bridge the gap between "the then" and "the now."
3. Even after we have done the best we can our interpretations will still be fallible to some extent. We must walk in the light we have, but always seeking more light from the Bible and the Spirit. We must love and respect other believers who have a different understanding (i.e., Rom. 14:1-15:13; 1 Corinthians 8- 10).
4. "Practice makes perfect." This is true in the area of interpretation. Prayer and practice will improve ones ability to interpret.
5. Hermeneutics cannot tell one exactly what every text means, but it can show what it cannot mean!

THE COMMON SENSE METHOD OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

I. The History and Development of Hermeneutics in the Early Church

A. The Jewish Precursor

1. There was a slight tendency among Palestinian rabbis to make the ancient laws applicable to their day by means of allegory (cf. Asher Feldman, *The Parables and Similes of the Rabbis, Agricultural and Pastoral*). See **Special Topic: [Rabbinical Hermeneutics](#)**.
2. Philo
 - a. He (20 B.C.- A.D. 55) was an intellectual Jewish Neo-Platonist from Alexandria, Egypt.
 - b. He learned his method from the allegorical tradition of the Greeks. They had wed the religious writings of Homer to the philosophical and historical writings by the use of allegory, *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer were used to teach logic, ethics, and science. Philo was heavily influenced by Plato and Pythagoras (160 B.C.), another Alexandrian Jew.
 - c. He was not influential among the Palestinian rabbis because he lived in the Diaspora and was not a rabbi.
 - d. He found
 - (1) the historical setting
 - (2) the main meaning of words
 - (3) the intent of the original biblical author's message
 - e. He attempted to remove the exclusiveness of Israel and the physical aspects of YHWH (i.e., anthropomorphism following Aristobulus of Alexandria; see **Special Topic: [Anthropomorphic Language to Describe God](#)**).
 - f. He allegorized the Old Testament in an attempt to make it relevant to his day and culture.
 - g. He believed that God spoke to humans supremely through the Jewish Scriptures but also by His Spirit through the Greek philosophers.

The rabbis' interpretation is characterized by a focus on "how to," especially in relation to the Law of Moses. Philo, although using some of the same idiosyncrasies of grammar and spelling, found hidden meanings in the text as it related to Neo-Platonism. The rabbis were interested in applying the Mosaic Law to daily life, while Philo wanted to reinterpret the history of Israel in light of his Platonic world view. To do this he had to totally remove the Old Testament from its historical context.

"In his mind many of the insights of Judaism, properly understood, do not differ from the highest insights of Greek philosophy. God reveals Himself to the chosen people of Israel but He revealed Himself in no radically different way from the way in which He reveals Himself to the Greek" (Grant and Tracy 1984, 53-54).

Special Topic: [Rabbinical Hermeneutical Techniques](#)

Philo's basic approach was to allegorize the text if:

1. the text spoke of that which seemed to be unworthy of God (physicalness of God)
2. the text contained any perceived inconsistencies
3. the text contained any perceived historical problems
4. the text could be adapted (allegorized) to his philosophical world view (Grant and Tracy 1984, 53)

B. **The Alexandrian School**

The basics of Philo's approach to interpretation were continued in the Christian School of Interpretation, which developed in this same city. One of its first leaders was Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215). He believed that the Bible contained different levels of meaning in order to make the Scriptures relevant to different kinds of people, cultures, and periods of time.

These levels were:

1. the historical, literal sense
2. the doctrinal sense (moral, religious, theological)
3. the prophetic or typological sense
4. the philosophical sense
5. the mystical or allegorical sense (Grant and Tracy 1984, 55-56)

This basic approach was continued by Origen (A.D. 182-251), who probably was the greatest mind of the ancient church (Silva 1987, 36-37). He was the first textual critic, apologist, commentator, and systematic theologian. Initially his method was developed in reaction to the literalism of the uneducated Christians of his culture/day. A good example of his approach can be found in his interpretation of Prov. 22:20-21. He combines it with 1 Thess. 5:23. In this way every passage in the Bible has three levels of interpretation (e.g., Watchman Nee).

1. a "bodily" or literal sense (for the common man)
2. a "soulish" or moral sense (for leaders and merchants)
3. a "spiritual or allegorical/mystical" sense (for the pneumatikoi who have the time, education, and interest to pursue Bible study, Grant and Tracy 1984, 59)

The allegorical method of interpretation focused on the symbolic use of numbers:

- a. The alphabet of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) languages were also used for their numbering system: aleph = 1, beth = 2, gimal = 3, delet = 4. Therefore, words had numerical values. Words with equivalent values could be substituted for each other in Bible passages.
- b. Numbers also had symbolic meaning themselves (this is also true of the OT):
 - (1) 1 – God
 - (2) 4 – the earth
 - (3) 6 – human imperfection
 - (4) 7 – divine perfection

- (5) 10 – completion
 - (6) 12 – organization
2. Ambrose's (A.D. 340-379) allegory influenced Augustine (A.D. 354-430) in his four levels of interpretation, the last being the best. Augustine used 2 Cor. 3:6 ("Not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life") as a proof-text for his practical depreciation of the literal sense.
 - a. the literal – teaches historical events
 - b. the allegorical – what you should believe
 - c. the moral – what you should do
 - d. the mystical – what you should hope
 3. An example of Augustine's four-fold method is "Jerusalem" in Gal. 4:22ff.
 - a. literal – the city
 - b. allegorical – the church of Christ
 - c. moral – the human soul
 - d. mystical – the heavenly city which is mother of us all
 4. Augustine's theory of hermeneutics was very different from his practice. His theory was similar to the principles of the literal school, but his practice tended to be allegorical (cf. Bernard Ramm's *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 36-37).
 5. See Augustine's use of the parable of the Good Samaritan in *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, p. 136.
 6. The strengths of the allegorical method:
 - a. attempted to use the Old Testament as a Christian document pointing to Christ.
 - b. followed the example of Jesus (Matt. 13; Mark 4; parable of the soils) and Paul (Gal. 4:25-26, the two mountains, Sinai and Moriah) who used typology
 - c. attempted to relate gospel truth to their day (as did Philo and Gnostics)
 - d. suggested reading: *How The Church Misread the Bible?* By Moises Silva
 7. The problems of the allegorical method:
 - a. it imported meaning into the text
 - b. it forced a hidden meaning behind every text
 - c. it put forth fanciful and far-fetched interpretations
 - d. it did not allow words and sentences to bear their obvious, normal meanings
 - e. it allowed human subjectivity (the interpreter) to dominate the plain message of the original author
 - f. there are no controls on interpretation, no way to evaluate an interpretation
 - g. Martin Luther called it "clerical jugglers performing monkey tricks," "a sort of beautiful harlot"
 - h. in Hexaemeron (9,1) Basil of Caesarea (A.D., 330-379) says:
 "I know the laws of allegory, though less by myself than from the works of others. There are those who do not admit the common sense of the Scriptures, for whom water is not water, but something else, who see in a plant, in a fish,

what their fancy wishes, who change the nature of reptiles and of wild beasts to suit their allegories, like the interpreters of dreams who explain visions in sleep, to make them serve their own ends. For me grass is grass—plant, fish, wild beast, domestic animal, I take it all in the literal sense. For I am not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16).”

There are the two extremes—allegory and literalism. The Bible is a library of literary works related to a specific time and culture. Genre and context are crucial! It needs to be admitted that the early “orthodox” theologians were from Alexandria. God used this approach to interpretation to speak to the lost and the saved for several centuries.

8. The hermeneutics of Alexandria held sway over most of the Church in the area of interpretation until the time of the Protestant Reformation. It can be characterized in its developed form by Augustine (A.D. 354-430) in his four levels of interpretation of the city of Jerusalem from Gal. 4:22ff
 - a. the literal, the city – (teaches historical events)
 - b. the allegorical, the church of Christ – (teaches what you should believe)
 - c. the moral, the human soul – (teaches what you should do)
 - d. the mystical, the heavenly city which is the mother of us all – (teaches what you should hope)

For the church as a whole, the non-literal (#b,c,d) contained the purist spiritual insight.

9. However, the abuses of the non-historical, non-grammatical method led to the formulation of another school of interpretation. The Historical-Grammatical textual-focused school of Antioch of Syria (third century) accused the allegorist of
 - a. importing meaning into the text
 - b. forcing a hidden meaning into every text
 - c. putting forth fanciful and far-fetched interpretation
 - d. not allowing words and sentences to bear their obvious, normal meaning (Sire 1980, 107)
 - e. allowing human subjectivity to dominate the plain message of the original author

Allegory, when done by a well-trained, godly interpreter, can have great value. It is obvious that Jesus (Matt. 13:18-23) and Paul (1 Cor. 9:9-10; 10:1-4; Gal. 4:21-31) both set a biblical precedent for this approach (**Special Topic: [Typology](#)**).

However, when used as a tool to prove one’s pet theological doctrine or to defend one’s inappropriate actions, it becomes a great stumbling block. The major problem is that there is no means to substantiate the meaning from the text itself (Silva 1987, 74). The sinfulness of mankind has turned this method (and all methods to some extent) into a means to prove almost anything and then to call it biblical.

“There is always the danger of eisegesis, reading into the Bible the ideas which we have received from elsewhere and then receiving them each with the authority with which we have come to surround the book” (World Council of Churches Symposium on Biblical Authority for Today, Oxford, 1949).

“Origen, and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the outer back of the letter, there lurks deeper mysteries, which cannot be extracted but by beating out allegories. And this they had no difficulty in accomplishing; for speculation which appear to be ingenious have always been preferred, and always will be preferred, by the world to solid doctrine. . .with approbation the licentious system gradually attained such a height, that he who handled Scripture for his own amusement not only was suffered to pass unpunished, but even attained the highest applause. For many centuries no man was considered to be ingenious, who had not the skill and daring necessary for changing into a variety of curious shapes the sacred word of God. This was undoubtedly a contrivance of Satan to undermine the authority of Scripture, and to take away from the reading of it the true advantage. God visited this method by a just judgment, when he suffered the pure meaning of the Scripture to be buried under false interpretations. Scripture, they say, is fertile, and this produces a variety of meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign. Let us know then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us not only neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions, which lead us away from the natural meaning” (John Newport dissertation, N.D., 16-17).

C. **The Antiochian School**

It is obvious that the Alexandrian school was justifiably open to the charge that its interpretations relied more on the cleverness of the interpreter than on the intent of the original inspired author. One could, and can, assert any interpretation and “prove” it from the Bible by using this method. The Antiochian method focused on the plain, obvious meaning of the text of Scripture (Cole 1964, 87). Its basic focus is understanding the message of the original author. This is why it is called the Historical-Grammatical, or common sense, approach of hermeneutics. Antioch insisted on both a historical context and the normal use of human language. It did not eliminate figures of speech, prophecy, or symbols, but forced them to be linked to the purpose, historical setting, and style of the original author, along with the original author’s choice of genre.

“The school of Antioch insisted on the historical reality of the biblical revelation. They were unwilling to lose it in a world of symbols and shadows. They were more Aristotelian than Platonist” (Grant and Tracy 1984, 66).

Some early leaders of this school of interpretation were: Lucian (A.D. 240-213), Diodorus of Tarsus (A.D. ?-392), Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 350-428), and John

Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407). This school became involved in an over-emphasis on the humanity of Jesus. This has been labeled the Nestorian Heresy (Jesus had two natures, one divine and one human)—and it was rightly labeled a heresy (cf. 1 John 4:1-3) by the church councils of Ephesus in A.D. 431 and cancelled in A.D. 451. For this reason the school lost its influence and many of its followers. Its headquarters moved from Antioch, Syria into Persia so as to be beyond the discipline of the Roman Church. It split the eastern church.

D. **The Antiochian School's Basic Tenets**

Although the basic tenets of the Antiochian School were continued in isolated places, it burst forth again in full bloom in Martin Luther and John Calvin, as it had been demonstrated in the historical, textual exegesis of Nicholas of Lyra (14th century A.D.). It is basically this historically and textually-focused approach to hermeneutics that this Textbook is attempting to introduce. Along with the added emphasis on application, which was one of the strengths of Origen, the Antiochian approach clearly distinguished between exegesis and application (Silva 1987, 101). Because this Textbook is primarily for the whole body of Christ, the methodology will focus around the text of Scripture in translation rather than the original languages. Study helps will be introduced and recommended, but the obvious meaning of the original author can, in the vast majority of cases, be ascertained without extensive outside help. The work of godly, diligent scholars will help us in areas of background material, difficult passages, and seeing the big picture, but first we must struggle with the plain meaning of the Scriptures ourselves. It is our privilege, our responsibility, and our protection to learn to interpret the Bible for ourselves. The Bible, the Spirit, and you are priority! Insight into how to analyze human language on a non-technical level, along with the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, are the twin pillars of this contextual/textual approach. Your ability to be somewhat free to interpret the Bible for yourself without an intermediary, be it priest, pastor, or professor, is the primary goal of this Textbook. James W. Sire in his book *Scripture Twisting* makes two good points.

“The illumination comes to the minds of God’s people—not just to the spiritually elite. There is no guru class in biblical Christianity, no illuminati, no people through whom all proper interpretation must come. And, so, while the Holy Spirit gives special gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual discernment, He does not assign these gifted Christians to be the only authoritative interpreters of His Word. It is up to each of His people to learn, to judge and to discern by reference to the Bible which stands as the authority over even those to whom God has given special abilities.”

“To summarize, the assumption I am making throughout the entire book is that the Bible is God’s true revelation to all humanity, that it is our ultimate authority on all matters about which it speaks, that it is not a total mystery but can be adequately understood by ordinary people in every culture” (pp. 17-18).

We dare not naively trust any other person or denomination with the interpretation of Scripture, which affects not only life, but also the life to come.

The secondary goal of this Textbook is gaining the ability to analyze the interpretations of others. This Textbook desires to provide the individual believer with a method for personal Bible study and a shield against the interpretation of other dynamic, logical, and enthusiastic religionists! Scholarly helps will be recommended, but must not be accepted without proper analysis and textual documentation.

II. Interpretative Questions

Our discussion of a historically informed and textually-focused methodology will revolve around seven interpretive questions which one must ask in the study of every Scriptural context. I have taken the general principles of the Antiochian School and put them into a modern thematic and procedural outline (i.e., 7 questions and 4 reading cycles).

- A. What did the original author say? (textual criticism)
- B. What did the original author mean? (exegesis)
- C. What did the original author say elsewhere on the same subject? (parallel passages)
 - 1. same book
 - 2. other books by the same author
- D. What do other biblical authors say on the same subject? (parallel passages)
 - 1. other NT writers
 - 2. OT writers
- E. How did the original hearers understand the message and respond to it? (historical application)
- F. How does this truth apply to my day? (modern application)
- G. How does this truth apply to my life? (personal application)

The First Interpretive Question (textual criticism)

A. Must one be able to read Hebrew and Greek to interpret Scripture?

The initial step in the interpretive procedure is to establish the original text. Here we come face to face with the subject of the original languages of ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek. Must one know these languages, and all of their textual variants, before one can adequately interpret Scripture? Let me share my presuppositions about the Bible again.

1. God wants mankind to know Him (the very purpose of creation, Gen. 1:26-27).
2. He has provided us with a written record of His nature, purpose, and acts.
3. He has sent us His supreme revelation, His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament contains His life and teachings as well as their interpretations.
4. God speaks to the common person. He wants all humans to be saved (Ezek. 18:23,32; John 3:16; 4:42; Acts 10:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:4.6; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14; See **Special Topic: [YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan](#)**).
5. The vast majority of the world will never know God's revelation except in a translation (Sterrett 1973, 28).
6. We must not see scholars as infallible interpreters. Even scholars must rely on other scholars. Even scholars within the same field do not always agree (Triana 1985, 9).
7. Scholars can help us. Christian scholars are gifts of God given to the church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph 4:11). Yet, even without their help believers can know the plain, simple truth of the Scriptures. They will not have complete or exhaustive knowledge. They will not see the wealth of detail that a biblical scholar might perceive, but believers can know enough for faith and practice.

B. Use of modern translations

Modern translations are a result of scholarly research. They use differing philosophies in translation. Some are very free in translating concepts (paraphrasing) instead of words (word for word) or clauses (dynamic equivalent). Because of this wealth of research and effort in modern Study Bibles, believers, by comparing these translations and using marginal notes, have a variety of technical information available to them, even if believers do not understand the technical process or theories behind them. By comparing modern translations they are able to more fully understand the message of the original author. This is not meant to imply that there are not dangers.

The use of modern translations

1. They are adequate for understanding biblical truths, but need to be handled with caution.
2. When studying the Bible compare at least two translations which differ in translation theory:
 - a. literal (word for word correspondence)
 - (1) interlinears (Hebrew or Greek text with English under each word)
 - (2) King James (KJV)
 - (3) New King James (NKJV)

- (4) American Standard Version (ASV)
 - (5) New American Standard Bible (NASB)
 - (6) Revised Standard Version (RSV)
 - (7) New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- b. idiomatic (dynamic equivalent, expresses the same meaning but does not focus on how many words)
- (1) New English Bible (NEB)
 - (2) Revised English Bible (REB)
 - (3) Jerusalem Bible (JB)
 - (4) New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)
 - (5) New International Version (NIV)
 - (6) The New Testament in the Language of the People by Charles Williams
 - (7) Good News for Modern Man or Today's English Version (TEV)
3. Most manuscript problems can be identified by referring to the marginal notes of modern study Bibles (especially helpful is the NIV Study Bible, which is the only modern study Bible where the translators of the original text also wrote the footnotes; now available in NASB Study Bible.
4. The comparing of English translations from differing translation theories will identify problem areas.
- a. manuscript variations
 - b. word meaning options
 - c. grammatical options
 - d. theological biases
5. Suggested reading
- a. *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, pp. 34-44
 - b. *Translator's Handbooks* published by United Bible Societies (on each separate book of the Bible)

“The person who reads the Bible only in English is at the mercy of the translator(s), and translators have often had to make choices as to what in fact the original Hebrew or Greek really intended to say” (Fee and Stuart 1982, 29).

“The Bible student can overcome this handicap (not knowing originals and having to use translations) by an educated use of the better commentaries. Above all, everyone must be aware of the dangers. The student should compare the translations as he studies the passage, and should take none of them for granted” (Osborne and Woodward 1979, 53).

I hope you have been encouraged by the above discussion about the adequacy of English translations. I would suggest that for the purposes of Bible study that you use at least two different translations which vary in translation theory. Primarily you will want to use one that is very literal (i.e., word for word) and compare it with an idiomatic translation (dynamic equivalent). By comparing these two types of translations, most of the problems in word meaning, sentence structure, and textual variants become obvious. When major differences occur, refer to technical commentaries and research tools.

C. Hebrew and Greek manuscript variants

Another thorny problem to be dealt with in the area of “what did the original author say?” concerns original manuscripts. We do not have any of the original writings of the biblical authors (autographs). As a matter of fact, we are removed by hundreds of years from those originals (autographs). Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, our oldest complete Old Testament manuscript was from the ninth century A.D., called the Masoretic Text. The Masoretes were a group of Jewish scholars who placed the vowels (vowel points) into a consonantal, Hebrew text. This project, started in A.D. 100, was not completed until the ninth century A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls allow us to verify this Hebrew text back into the B.C. era. They confirmed the accuracy of our Old Testament based on the MT. This enables scholars to compare Hebrew manuscripts with their Greek translations:

1. the Septuagint (third century B.C.)
2. Theodotian (A.D.150)
3. Aquila (before A.D.177)
4. Symmachus (late second century A.D.)

The point of all this is that there are many differences among all of these Hebrew into Greek translations.

The New Testament is also involved in the same difficulty. We do not have the writings of the Apostles, as a matter of fact, our copies are several hundred years removed from them. The oldest manuscripts available of the Greek New Testament are fragments of certain books written on papyri. These date from the second and third centuries A.D. and none have the complete New Testament. The next oldest group of Greek manuscripts comes from the fourth through eighth centuries. They are called uncial manuscripts. They are written in all capital letters with no punctuation marks or paragraph divisions. After this comes thousands of manuscripts from later centuries, mostly the 9th – 16th (written in small cursive letters, later called minuscule manuscripts). None of these Greek MSS agree completely. However, it needs to be strongly emphasized that none of the variants affect major Christian doctrines (Bruce 1969, 19-20).

This is where the theory of textual criticism comes onto the scene. Scholars in this academic area have analyzed and classified these different texts into “families,” which are characterized by certain common errors or additions.

1. Alexandrian (the oldest and more concise text)
2. Western Text (an expansive text from old Peshitta texts)
3. Byzantine (used by Erasmus, also called the “Textus Receptus” or majority texts associated with John Chrysostom)
4. Caesarean (unique Gospel texts)

If you would like more information on this subject read

- a. *The Books and the Parchments* by F. F. Bruce
 - b. “Texts and Manuscripts of the Old Testament,” *Zondervan’s Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, pp. 683ff
 - c. “Texts and Manuscripts of the New Testament,” *Zondervan’s Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, pp. 697ff
 - d. *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* by J. H. Greenlee
 - e. *The Lost World of Scripture* by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy. It deals with how ANE oral cultures passed on their traditions.
- D. The problem of textual criticism is not solved, but the work thus far has surely helped to clear up much of the confusion in this area (see **Special Topic: [Textual Criticism](#)**).

“Rarely will one repeat the labors of the textual critics, unless an alternate reading is mentioned as a footnote in the version commonly used” (Liefeld 1984, 41).

I have found that these manuscript problems can be readily found by noticing the marginal notes in our modern Study Bibles. The Revised Standard Version and The New English Bible provide many interesting alternative translations. All modern translations provide alternate readings to some extent. Another helpful resource at this point is the new *Twenty-Six Translations of the Bible* edited by Curtis Vaughn, published by AMG Publishers. This three volume set provides the King James Version in bold print and three to five alternate translations from a pool of twenty-six translations. This tool quickly shows the textual variations. These variations may then be adequately explored in commentaries and other research tools.

- E. The limits of human language

Still another factor involved in the question, “what did the original author say?” involves the ambiguities of human language. When human language, which is basically a set of analogous relationships between words (sounds) and concepts (things and human thoughts), is forced to describe God and spiritual things, major problems arise. Our finitude, our sinfulness, our corporality, and our experience of time (past, present, future) all affect our language as we attempt to describe the supernatural. We are forced to express these concepts in human categories (Ferguson 1937, 100). One type of these metaphorical categories is anthropomorphisms (man-form; see **Special Topic: [God Described As Human](#)**). These categories were one reason why the rabbis, Philo and Origen (Silva 1987, 61), began to use allegory. In reality, our description and understanding of God and the supernatural is

analogous only (i.e., negation, analogy, and imagery). It can never be complete or exhaustive. It is presuppositional, but by faith Christians believe it is adequate.

This problem of human language is further complicated when put into a written form. So often the inflection of the voice or some bodily gesture helps us understand the subtleties of human communication, but these are not present in a written text. Yet, even with these obvious limits, we are still able, for the most part, to understand each other. Our study of the Bible will be limited by these ambiguities, as well as the additional problem of translating three separate languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek). The study of hermeneutics can tell you what a text does not mean, but it cannot tell you for sure what it does mean! We will not be able to know for certain the complete meaning of every passage.

A good book in this area is *God's Word in Man's Language* by Eugene Nida. With the help of the Holy Spirit we will be able to understand the plain sense of most Scripture. Maybe the ambiguities are there to humble us and cause us to be dependent on God's mercy.

F. Four Reading Cycles (summary of information to identify)

1. Identify the original author's main purpose(s) in the whole Bible book.
 - a. Understanding the whole bible book or literary unit will help analyze the parts (deductive reasoning).
 - b. Outlining of the entire book to paragraph level is the best approach to facilitate identifying and following the original author's thought units. This should be done without the use of research helps.
 - c. Use a series of four reading cycles to identify the genre, the literary context, and the historical setting.
 - (1) First reading (read the whole book or at least the literary unit you are studying in one sitting)
 - (a) look for overarching plan or purpose(s) of the book
 - (b) look for the key verse(s) or paragraph(s) that express its theme(s)
 - (c) identify the literary genre of the book or literary unit
 - (2) Second reading
 - (a) Note the major literary units (thought units or topics)
 - (b) Summarize their content in your own words in a simple phrase or sentence
 - (c) check your outline with study aids
 - i. study Bibles
 - ii. Bible encyclopedia, handbooks, or dictionaries
 - iii. commentaries
 - iv. biblical introductions
 - (3) Third reading
 - (a) Note the internal information (i.e., from the writing itself) about the

historical setting

- i. author of writing
- ii. date of writing
- iii. recipients of writing
- iv. occasion of writing

- (b) Add to your outline the major literary units and paragraph divisions. This will form a detailed outline of the entire book. Paragraph divisions will change from translation to translation (compare several translations). They are not inspired. Look at several and decide for yourself which one best divides the original author's thought units into subjects.
 - (c) Capsule the content of each paragraph in a brief statement (try to express the central thought or topical sentence of the paragraph in your own words). This is the best way to follow the original author's topics and thoughts.
 - (d) The difficulty in outlining to paragraph level is that paragraphs often function at different levels of our outlining. Sometimes they form a major unit in and of themselves. But oftentimes they form a small part of a larger literary unit. When you first begin this interpretive procedure, compare your outline with several study Bibles, commentaries, and other Bible interpretation helps.
- (4) Fourth reading
- (a) Use parallel passages (in the Bible) and systematic theologies (a type of research book) to gain the big picture (i.e., biblical worldview)
 - i. The need to compare parallel passages asserts the belief that all biblical texts have one divine author—the Holy Spirit, and therefore, do not contradict, but rather complement each other. However, for study purposes there is an order of exegetical significance.
 - * the same literary unit
 - * the same book
 - * the same author
 - * the same genre
 - * the same Testament
 - * all of the Bible
 - ii. The use of a type of theology book generically called “systematic theologies” is very helpful (but the most denominationally biased). They divide the truths of the Bible into categories (God, mankind, Scripture, salvation, etc.). By using the Scriptural index at the back of these books one is able

to quickly see how the text being studied relates to the major themes of the Bible (only one, one of several, part of a paradox).

- (b) Develop specialized ways to develop specialized lists in order to discern the original author's structure/thought.
 - i. list the major and minor characters (i.e., Genesis)
 - ii. list key term(s)
 - Major theological terms
 - Recurrent terms
 - Terms used to express the central truth of the passage
 - Unusual or unknown terms
 - iii. list the major events (Acts)
 - iv. list geographical movements (Exodus and Numbers or Acts)
- (c) Note especially difficult passages (textual, historical, theological, or verses that cause confusion).
- (d) At this point it is helpful to complete the detailed outline of the entire book. On the left hand side of a page put the content outline (major literary units and paragraph divisions with your brief statement of their central truth). On the right hand side of the page put the possible application points related to each item in the content outline. There should be an application truth for each major literary unit and paragraph. As you discern the author's central thought in each paragraph, how does that truth, illustration, parable, example, etc. apply to your culture, your day, your life? There are examples, e.g., Romans 1-3 and Titus, in the back of this Seminar.

The Second Interpretive Question (exegesis)

A. Outline the literary units

One way, possibly the best way, to understand a written document is to identify the author's purpose and the major divisions (i.e., literary units) in his whole written presentation. We write with a purpose and goal in mind. So too, did the biblical authors. Our ability to identify this overarching purpose and its major divisions will greatly facilitate our understanding of its smaller parts (paragraphs and words). A key to this deductive approach (Osborne and Woodward 1979, 21) is outlining (Tenney 1950, 52). Before one tries to interpret a paragraph within a biblical book, he needs to know the purpose of the literary unit of which it is a part in light of the surrounding passages and the structure of the whole book. Every Bible book has one major topic. This is developed by literary units which clarify this subject. I know that this procedure seems overwhelming at first, as far as putting it into practice, but it is crucial as far as interpretation is concerned.

“From the standpoint of the Bible or literature, the simplest error of reading is the failure to consider the immediate context of the verse or passage in question” (Sire 1980, 52).

“The principle of contextual interpretation is, at least in theory, one of the few universally accepted hermeneutical guidelines, even though the consistent application of the principles is a notoriously difficult enterprise” (Silva 1983, 138).

“The context does not merely help us understand meaning—it virtually makes meaning” (Silva 1983, 139).

“How the passage fits within that—what it contributes to the entire flow of that book and what the structure of that book contributes to it—constitutes a paramount interest of the literary context step in exegesis” (Stuart 1980, 54).

This task can be accomplished in a very simple way. One can do several steps of interpretation at one time. It is obvious that if one wants to interpret a passage in light of the original author's intent, they need to read and become familiar with the author's whole message (the book). As one reads the biblical book several times in order to gain familiarity with its contents, he should take notes of his observations. On the first reading look for the major purpose of the book and its genre. On the second reading note the large blocks of related material, which we call literary units.

An example from the book of Romans reveals major themes.

1. brief introduction (1:1-15)
2. theme (1:16-17)
3. the lostness of all men (1:18-3:21)
4. justification by grace through faith is a gift (4:1-5:12)
5. Justification affects our lifestyle (6:1-8:39)
6. The Jews' relationship to justification (9:1-11:36)

7. Practical section of living out justification on a daily basis (12:1-15:37)
8. Greetings, farewells, and warnings (16:1-27)

“Try to construct an outline that genuinely represents the major units of information. In other words, the outline should be a natural, not artificial, outgrowth of the passage. Note which components are included within each topic (quantitative) and also the intensity or significance of the components (qualitative). Let the passage speak for itself. When you see a new topic, subject, issue, concept, or the like, you should start a new topic for your outline. After outlining the major divisions work on the more minor divisions such as sentences, clauses and phrases. The outline should be as detailed as you can make it without seeming forced or artificial” (Stuart 1980, 32-33).

Outlining to paragraph level (and beyond) is a key in allowing the original author to speak. It will keep us from majoring on minors or going off on tangents. Your finished outline can then be compared with a Study Bible, such as the NIV Study Bible or NASB Study Bible, a Bible encyclopedia, or a commentary, but only after you have read the biblical book or literary unit several times and developed your own tentative outline.

“This is the crucial task in exegesis, and fortunately it is something one can do well without necessarily having to consult the ‘experts’” (Fee and Stuart 1980, 24).

Once the large literary blocks have been isolated, then the smaller units can be identified and summarized. These smaller units of thought may be several paragraphs or even a chapter or more. In most literary genres the paragraph is a key (Liefeld 1984, 90) to interpretation. One should never attempt to interpret less than a paragraph. As a sentence forms the context for words, paragraphs form the context for sentences. The basic unit of purposeful writing is the paragraph. In high school we were taught how to isolate the topical sentence of a paragraph. This same principle will help us tremendously in biblical interpretation. Every paragraph has one major purpose in the author’s overall presentation of truth. If we can isolate this purpose and summarize its truth in one simple, declarative sentence, we can complete our outline of the author’s structure. If our interpretation is alien to the purpose or thrust of the original author, we are abusing the Bible and have no biblical authority!

“Do not trust the chapter and verse divisions. They are not original and are often completely wrong” (Stuart 1980, 23).

“Decisions about paragraphing are sometimes subjective, and you will find that the various editors’ groupings of contents do not always agree. But if you decide to start your passage where no editor has begun a paragraph or end a paragraph where no editor has ended a paragraph, then it is your responsibility to explain fully for your decision” (Stuart 1980, 45).

B. Note the historical and cultural setting

The previous discussion of literary units is valuable, not only for the first question, “what did the original author say” (textual criticism), but also for the second, “what did the original author mean?” (exegesis). These questions are related, but distinct. The first focuses on the words of the original

author (textual criticism). The second focuses on three very significant aspects of interpretation which are related to meaning.

1. the historical background of the author and/or the events of the book
2. the type of literary form (genre) in which the message is given
3. the basic grammatical and linguistic aspects of the text

One of the characteristics of allegory is that it completely separates the interpretation of a text from its historical setting. It is a major tenet of the contextual/textual or Antiochian Method that one establish the historical context. This principle was reemphasized by Nicolas of Lyria followed by Martin Luther. This emphasis on background material in interpretation has come to be called, in a broad sense, “higher criticism”; whereas the information about the original text has come to be called “lower criticism.” In higher criticism one tries to ascertain from both internal (the biblical book itself) and external (secular history, archaeology, etc.) the following items.

1. information about the author
2. information about the date of writing
3. information about the recipients of the writing
4. information about the occasion of the writing
5. information about the writing itself
 - a. recurrent or unique terms
 - b. recurrent or unique concepts
 - c. basic flow of the message
 - d. the form in which the message appears (genre)

“World view confusion. . .occurs whenever a reader of Scripture fails to interpret the Bible within the intellectual and cultural framework of the Bible itself, but uses instead a foreign frame of reference. The usual way in which it appears is for scriptural statement, stories, commands or symbols which have a particular meaning or set of related meanings within the biblical frame of reference to be lifted out and placed within another frame of reference. The result is that the original intended meaning is lost or distorted, and a new and quite different meaning is substituted” (Sire 1980, 128).

On this subject of “worldview confusion” I would like to recommend two books.

1. Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death*
2. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*

This type of information is often (but not always) helpful in interpreting the writing. This historical aspect of interpretation, like outlining, can be done to some extent without the help of the “experts.” As you read the biblical book, write down the historical background information from the Bible itself and it will amaze you the amount of information you have gleaned. As a matter of fact, most of this information is available only from the biblical book itself (usually the first few verses). There will often be many theories expressed in the commentaries which are actually presuppositions

with little biblical or historical evidence. Once you have gathered all the information that is obvious to you from the biblical book, it is time to expand your insight by using one of the following types of research helps:

1. introductory books usually divided into separate books on the Old and New Testaments
2. articles in Bible encyclopedias, dictionaries, or handbooks, usually under the name of the biblical book
3. the introductions found in commentaries
4. the introductions found in Study Bibles

These types of research tools are meant to give you the historical setting in a brief amount of study time. Most often these materials will be relatively brief because we simply do not have much information about many aspects of ancient history. Also, this type of material will usually be written in non-technical language. Again, as is obvious to you, my basic approach to interpretation is to see the big picture first and then to analyze the parts in detail.

C. The type of literature (genre)

The next area of interpretation related to the meaning of the original author is related to the literary genre. This is a French term which means a specialized category of literature characterized by style, form, or content. This is significant because the style in which one chooses to write affects how we are to understand it. Bruce Corley has said that the type of genre the inspired author chooses to convey his message is a literary contract with the reader on how to interpret the writing.

Often ridiculous interpretations of prophecy or poetry have been propounded on what one calls “the literal” method of interpretation. However, the “literal” method from Antioch means that we interpret human language in its normal meaning. If it is apocalyptic literature, it was not meant to be interpreted literally. This is also true of poetry, idioms, parables, and figures of speech.

The basic unit of thought, which in prose is normally the paragraph, is modified by the genre. Some examples of this significant factor in the identification of capsuled units of thought for the purposes of interpretation follow.

1. For poetry the basic unit is the strophe or stanza, which is defined as a series of lines arranged together as a patterned unit (see **Special Topic:** [Hebrew Poetry](#)).
2. For a proverb the basic unit is the central or summary theme of the verse in its relation to the same theme located within the same book, another book by the same author, or other wisdom literature. Here, the thematic subject, more than the isolated proverb, is the key to interpretation. Not only synonymous themes (the same), but also antithetical themes (opposites) or synthetical development (additional information) of the same theme are crucial to a proper interpretation of Hebrew wisdom literature (see **Special Topic:** [Wisdom Literature](#)).
3. For prophecy the basic unit must be the entire oracle. This can vary from a paragraph, a chapter, several chapters, to an entire book. Again, the basic theme and style will isolate the prophetic unit (see **Special Topic:** [Prophecy \(OT\)](#) and **Special Topic:** [Prophecy \(NT\)](#)).

4. For the Gospel parallels the basic unit will relate to the type of literature involved. Usually the unit will relate to one event, one teaching session, one subject, etc. This could involve an event or a series of events, parable or a series of parables, a prophecy or a series of prophecies, but all focusing on one main theme. It is usually better to look at the literary flow of each Gospel instead of going to the parallel passages in other Gospels.
5. For letters the basic unit is usually the paragraph. However, several paragraphs usually form larger literary units. These must be identified and characterized as a whole literary unit before the smaller parts can be properly interpreted. Some examples of these larger literary units follow.
 - a. Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount)
 - b. Romans 9-11 (what about unbelieving Israel)
 - c. 1 Corinthians 12-14 (spiritual gifts) [or 1 Corinthians 11-14 guidelines for gathered worship]
 - d. Revelation 2-3 (letters to churches) or 4-5 (events in heaven)

Analysis of literary types is crucial to their proper interpretation (Fee and Stuart 1982, 105). As in outlining, and to some extent, the historical background, this can be done by the average reader with the help of a translation which identifies poetry and paragraphs (Fee and Stuart 1982, 24). The reason that classification of literary genre is so important is that besides the general guidelines for interpretation (i.e., general hermeneutical principles), there are special needs of each literary type (i.e., special hermeneutical principles related to each genre). This is only logical. If each type represents a different mode of human communication, then it is obvious that there needs to be special treatment in order to arrive at the author's intent. It is just as condemning to add to the biblical author's intent as it is to detract from it.

6. Historical Narratives usually cover many chapters in the OT and chapters in Acts. They never state the purpose. You must ask, "What is this about?"
7. Apocalyptic Literature – see full note at D. 8. below

D. Special interpretive procedures related to genre

Let me summarize some of the specific guidelines involved in these special genres.

1. Poetry (**Special Topic: [Hebrew Poetry](#)**)
 - a. Structure is important. Ancient Hebrew developed its poetic structure or pattern around thought (expressed in beats per line), not rhyme.
 - (1) synonymous (the same thought, i.e., Ps. 8:4)
 - (2) antithetical (an opposite thought, i.e., Ps. 10:1; 15:1)
 - (3) synthetic (the development of thought, i.e., Ps. 19:7-9)
 - (4) chiasmic where the middle line is the key thought (A,B,C,B,A)
 - b. Poetry is usually figurative, not literal. It attempts to speak to our common human desires and experiences. Try to identify figures of speech (Sterrett 1973, 93-100) and understand their function or purpose.

- c. Try to get an overall impression of the literary unit and do not push the details or figures of speech in doctrinal formulations.
2. Proverbs (**Special Topic: [Wisdom Literature](#)**)
- a. Because they deal with daily life, look for the practical application.
 - b. Parallel passages will be much more helpful here than context or historical setting. Try to compile a list of proverbs with the same practical application, as well as other passages which might modify or develop this same, opposite, or developed truth.
 - c. Try to isolate the figures of speech and identify their purpose in the proverb.
 - d. Be sure that you do not interpret the proverbs in a particularistic manner, but in the sense of a general truth.
3. Prophecy (**Special Topic: [Prophecy \[OT\]](#)**)
- a. The historical context is crucial (but often not given)
 - b. Focus on central truth of the whole oracle, not details
 - c. There are often multiple fulfillments (i.e., virgin birth in Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:26-38; and abomination of desolation in Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14)
 - (1) Check OT background or parallels
 - (2) Check Jesus' teachings
 - (3) Check NT parallels
 - (4) Check immediate context both before and after the passage or literary unit for possible historical setting
 - d. Messianic prophecy (i.e., OT) has two foci
 - e. The prophets often record more than they understood. In this case it is the authorial intent of the Holy Spirit, not the original human author, that is the key. This can be ascertained by historical and/or New Testament fulfillments. Parallel passages become very helpful at this point.
 - f. This genre is often hard to interpret.
 - (1) H. H. Rowley: "it is not to be denied that prophetic books are not easy to understand. They consist so largely of brief oracles, put together on no very clear principles of arrangement, with sudden transitions from one oracle to another, and usually with but the scantiest of evidence of the situation that gave them birth." *The Relevance of the Bible* (p. 53)
 - (2) R. Girdlestone: "There is no royal road to the scientific study of prophecy." *The Grammar of Prophecy* (p. 104)
 - (3) T. Miles Bennett: "Prophecy has its own peculiar time perspective. . . For a correct understanding of their point of view the interpreter must think first of the signpost rather than the blueprint."

- (4) Douglas Stuart in *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, says, “Less than 2 percent of OT prophecy is messianic. Less than 5 percent specifically describes the New Covenant Age. Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come.” (p. 166)

4. Historical Narratives

- a. Read much larger sections of Scripture, often several chapters (i.e., life of Abraham or Joseph).
- b. Often the truth is implied, not stated.
 - (1) Notice the dialogue between characters
 - (2) Notice repeated words or phrases
 - (3) Notice authorial comments
 - (4) Look for summary statements which conclude the literary units
- c. This type of genre expects the reader to
 - (1) Have read the whole book
 - (2) Be familiar with previous Scripture
- d. A good book in the area is *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* by Robert H. Stein, pp. 151-167.

5. The Four Gospels (see Introduction to Mark, “Genre”)

- a. Although we have four Gospels and we are able to compare them, this is not always the best method in trying to find the purpose or meaning of one particular Gospel writer. We must look at the way he uses the material, not how other Gospel writers use it or develop it. Comparison will be helpful, but only after you have determined the meaning of a particular writer.
- b. The literary or historical context is crucial in interpreting the Gospels. Try to identify the literary limits of the general subject being discussed and not its isolated parts. Try to see this subject in light of first century Palestinian Judaism.
- c. It is important to remember that the Gospels record the words and acts of Jesus, but it is the Epistles which interpret them into specific church settings. Check the parallels in the Epistles.
- d. Jesus said some ambiguous and difficult things, some of which we may not fully understand until we see Him. He also said much that is plain and obvious—start there. Act on what you do know and often the rest will be made clear to you. If not, the message is possibly not for us, for our day (Dan. 12:4).

6. Parables (see **Special Topic: [Interpreting Parables](#)**)
 - a. Be certain of the context. Notice
 - (1) who Jesus addressed the parable to
 - (2) Jesus' purpose for telling the parable
 - (3) how many parables are told in a series. Read further to see if He interprets it.
 - b. Do not push the details. Major on His major point(s). Usually there is just one central truth per parable or main characters.
 - c. Do not build major doctrines on parables. Doctrine should be grounded on extended clear teaching passages.
 - d. (see **Special Topic: [Interpreting Parables](#)**)
7. The NT Letters
 - (1) Compared to the other types of literary genres these are the easiest to interpret.
 - (2) The contextual setting is the key, both historical and literary.
 - (3) The literary unit and the paragraph will be the key literary unit.
8. Apocalyptic Literature (see **Special Topic: [Apocalyptic Literature](#)**)
 - a. Apocalyptic is a uniquely Jewish literary genre. It was often used in tension-filled times to express the conviction that God was in control of history and would bring deliverance to His people. This type of literature is characterized by
 - (1) a strong sense of the universal sovereignty of God (monotheism and determinism)
 - (2) a struggle between good and evil, this evil age and the age of righteousness to come (dualism)
 - (3) use of secret code words (usually from the OT or intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature)
 - (4) use of colors, numbers, animals, sometimes animals/humans
 - (5) use of angelic mediation by means of visions and dreams, but usually through angelic mediation and interpretation
 - (6) primarily focuses on the soon-coming, climatic events of the end-time message from God
 - (7) use of fixed set of symbols, not reality, to communicate the end-time (new age)
 - b. There is a sense of duality in this genre. It sees reality as a series of dualisms, contrasts, or tensions (so common in John's writings) between:
 - (1) Heaven – earth

- (2) Evil age (evil humans and evil angels) – new age of righteousness (godly humans and godly angels)
- (3) Current existence – future existence

All of these are moving toward a consummation brought about by God. This is not the world God intended it to be, but He is continuing to plan, work, and project His will for a restoration of the intimate fellowship begun in the Garden of Eden. The Christ event is the watershed of God’s plan, but the two comings have brought about the current dualisms.

c. These apocalyptic works were never presented orally; they were always

Two very helpful and insightful books are D. Brent Sandy’s *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* and John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*.

These special hermeneutics linked to literary types are discussed in detail in the following excellent books.

1. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
2. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* by Bernard Ramm
3. *Linguistics and Bible Interpretation* by Peter Cotterell and Max Turner
4. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* by Tremper Longman III
5. *Exegetical Fallacies* by D. A. Carson
6. *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* by D. Brent Sandy
7. *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* by Robert H. Stein

E. Syntax and grammatical features of the original languages

Another aspect in obtaining the author’s original intent or meaning is called syntax or grammatical structure. This is often difficult because of the idiomatic and structural differences between the biblical languages and our own mother tongue. However, it is a fruitful area in interpretation and needs to be dealt with in some detail. Usually a comparison of modern translations and a basic knowledge of grammar will help tremendously. See **Special Topic: [Hebrew Grammar](#)** and **Special Topic: [Greek Grammatical Terms](#)**

“Grammar may not always show us the actual meaning, but it will show us possible meanings. We cannot accept any meaning that does violence to it. This grammar is important in understanding the Bible. This is not strange. Essentially it means that we understand the Bible according to the normal laws of human language” (Sterrett 1973, 63).

Grammar is something that the common person knows in usage, but not in technical definition. We learn grammar when we learn to speak. Grammar is forming sentences to

communicate ideas. We do not need to be experts in grammatical relationships in order to interpret the Bible, however, we do need to try to understand why the original author said it the way he did. Often the structure of a sentence will show us what the author is emphasizing. This can be ascertained in several ways.

1. As you read the passage in several English translations notice the word order. A good example of this is in Heb. 1:1. In the King James Version the subject of the sentence, “God,” appears first, but in the Revised Standard Version the descriptive phrase, “in many and various ways,” appears first. This is significant because it reflects the true intent of the author. Is the major thrust of this text that God has spoken (revelation) or is it how God has spoken (inspiration)? The latter is true because the Revised Standard Version reflects the Koine Greek word order (use an interlinear). Also, a technical commentary will help on these word order and grammatical issues.
2. As you read the passage in several English translations note the translation of the VERBS. VERBS are very important in interpretation.
 - a. A good example is I John 3:6,9. When one compares the King James Version with modern translations the difference is obvious. This is a PRESENT TENSE VERB. These verses are not teaching “sinlessness,” but “sinning less.”

Special Topic: [Hebrew Grammar](#)

Special Topic: [Greek Grammatical Terms](#)

- b. Another example

VERBS (every form except AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE) have some type of marked prominence

- (1) TENSE (kind of action and indicative of time)
- (2) VOICE (the who of the action)
- (3) MOOD (the reality of the action)
- (4) an example: the VERB TENSES describe salvation
 - (a) saved: AORIST, Acts 15:11; Rom. 8:24; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5
 - (b) have been saved: PERFECT, Eph. 2:5,8
 - (c) being saved: PRESENT, 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15
 - (d) shall be saved: FUTURE, Rom. 5:9,10; 10:9; 1 Cor. 3:15; Phil. 1:28; 1 Thess. 5:8-9; Heb. 1:14; 9:28

Word and clause order (use interlinear)

- (1) Normal WORD order for Koine Greek is VERB, SUBJECT, OBJECT.
- (2) Usually the emphatic word is placed first. This is called “fronting”
 - (a) Gal. 2:29, “with Christ”
 - (b) Heb. 1:1, “bit by bit and in many different ways”

3. As you read the passage in several English translations note the thought connectives. Often these help us know the purpose of a clause or how sentences and contexts are related. Notice the following connectives (Traina 1985, 42-43).
- a. temporal or chronological connectives
 - (1) “after” (Rev. 11:11)
 - (2) “as” (Acts 16:16)
 - (3) “before” (John 8:58)
 - (4) “now” (Luke 16:25)
 - (5) “then” (1 Cor. 15:6)
 - (6) “until” (Mark 14:25)
 - (7) “when” (John 11:31)
 - (8) “while” (Mark 14:43)
 - b. local or geographical connectives (“where,” Heb. 6:19-20)
 - c. logical connectives
 - (1) reason
 - (a) “because” (Rom. 1:25)
 - (b) “for” (Rom. 1:11)
 - (c) “since” (Rom. 1:28)
 - (2) result
 - (a) “so” (Rom. 9:16)
 - (b) “then” (Gal. 2:21)
 - (c) “therefore” (1 Cor. 10:12)
 - (d) “thus” (1 Cor. 8:12)
 - (3) purpose
 - (a) “in order that” (Rom. 4:16)
 - (b) “so that” (Rom. 5:21)
 - (4) contrast
 - (a) “although” (Rom. 1:21)
 - (b) “but” (Rom. 2:8)
 - (c) “much more” (Rom. 5:15)
 - (d) “nevertheless” (1 Cor. 10:5)
 - (e) “otherwise” (1 Cor. 14:16)
 - (f) “yet” (Rom. 5:14)

- (5) comparison
 - (a) “also” (2 Cor. 1:11)
 - (b) “as” (Rom. 9:25)
 - (c) “as – so” (Rom. 5:18)
 - (d) “just as – so” (Rom. 11:30-31)
 - (e) “likewise” (Rom. 1:27)
 - (f) “so also” (Rom. 4:6)
- (6) series of facts
 - (a) “and” (Rom. 2:19)
 - (b) ”first of all” (1 Tim. 2:1)
 - (c) “last of all” (1 Cor. 15:8)
 - (d) “or” (2 Cor. 6:15)
- (7) condition (e.g., “if,” Rom. 2:9)

Special Topic: [Greek Grammatical Terms](#), VII

d. emphatic connectives

- (1) “indeed” (Rom. 9:25)
- (2) “only” (1 Cor. 8:9)

These illustrations of thought connectives were taken from *Methodical Bible Study* by Robert A. Traina, pp. 42-43. Although his illustrations are mostly from the writings of Paul and predominately from the book of Romans, they do serve as good examples of how we structure our thoughts with these thought connectives. By comparing modern translations of both the Old and New Testaments these implied and expressed relationships become clear. Traina also has an excellent summary about grammatical structure on pp. 63-68. Be a careful Bible reader! See **Special Topic: [A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)**

- 4. As you read the passage in several English translations, notice the repetition of terms and phrases. This is another way to ascertain the original author’s structure for the purpose of communicating his intended meaning. Some examples are:
 - a. The repeated phrase in Genesis, “these are the generations of. . .,” (2:1; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12,19; 36:1,9; 37:2). This phrase shows us how the author himself divided the book.
 - b. The repeated and unique use of “heavenlies” in Ephesians (i.e., 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12), where at first it seems to mean heaven but later is confirmed to be clarified as the current spiritual conflict.
 - c. The repeated use of “rest” in Hebrews 3-4. The term is used with three distinct meanings.
 - (1) a Sabbath rest as in Genesis 1-2

- (2) the promised land of Exodus through Joshua
- (3) heaven
- d. The repeated use of the phrase “who was, who is, and who is to come”

If one misses this structure then he will probably miss the author’s intent and probably think that all the people who died in the wilderness were spiritually lost.

5. Biblical Idioms

- a. Read the passage you are studying in several English translations, particularly a word-for-word one, such as the New American Standard Bible, with the dynamic equivalent one, such as the New International Version. In this way one is able to identify some of the idioms.
- b. Every language has its own quirks or expressions. For one to interpret an idiom literally would be to totally miss the point.
 - (1) A good example is the Hebrew term “hate.” If we notice its New Testament usage, particularly John 12:25; Luke 14:26; or Rom. 9:13, one sees how this idiom could be misunderstood. However if its Hebrew background and usage in Gen. 29:31,33 or Deut. 21:15 is identified (i.e., “unloved”) then it is obvious that it does not mean “hate” in our English sense of the word, but it is an idiom of comparison.

Technical commentaries will be of real help in these matters. Two good examples of this type of commentary are

- * *The Tyndale Commentary Series*
- * *The New International Commentary Series*
- * Hopefully mine, freebiblecommentary.org

(2) “bless” (cf. Job 1:5,11; 2:5,9)

(3) “all” versus “many” (cf. Isa. 53:6,11-12 and Rom. 5:15-19, esp. compare v. 18)

6. Word Studies

Another aspect of this second question, “What did the original author mean?” is word studies. I have chosen to deal with it last because word studies have been so abused!

- a. Identify the Key Words in a given context
 - (1) Find the most important words of the paragraph or literary unit. These are the words that communicate (or confuse) the central truth of the context.
 - (2) Be sure not to read your historically, culturally, and theologically (i.e., denominationally) conditioned definitions into biblical words.
 - (a) “dog,” Deut. 23:18 (male prostitute of the fertility cult)
 - (b) “righteousness,” Matt. 6:1 (giving of alms every week)
 - (c) “leaven,” Matt. 13:33 (in this case it is positive, used of permeation)

- (d) “Pharisees,” Luke 18:9-14; Matt. 5:20 (they were the most respected religionists)
 - (3) Remember that the context determines the meaning of words, not a preset (dictionary or lexicon) definition.
 - (4) Be careful of reading one biblical author’s fully developed theological definitions into every usage of that term in Scripture
- b. Often etymology has been the only aspect of meaning that one uses to interpret a passage. The writings of
- (1) James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*;
 - (2) D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*;
 - (3) Moises Silva’s *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*,
- have helped modern interpreters to reevaluate their word study techniques. Bible interpreters as a group have been guilty of numerous linguistic fallacies.

“Perhaps the principal reason why word studies constitute a particularly rich source for exegetical fallacies is that many preachers and Bible teachers know Greek only well enough to use concordances, or perhaps a little more. There is little feel for Greek as a language, and so there is the temptation to display what has been learned in study” (Carson 1984, 66).

It must be stated emphatically that context, not etymology, determines meaning!

“The root fallacy presupposes that every word has a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. In this view meaning is determined by etymology” (Carson 1984, 26).

“We must agree the obvious fact that the speakers of a language simply know next to nothing about its development; and this certainly was the case with the writers and immediate readers of Scripture. . . our real interest is the significance of Greek or Hebrew in the consciousness of the biblical writers; to put it boldly, historical considerations are irrelevant to the investigation of the state of Koine, at the time of Christ” (Silva 1983, 38).

“Since usage is so important, a safe rule for the interpreter is to leave etymology in the hands of the expert and to apply himself diligently to context and usage” (Mickelsen 1963, 121-122).

We must seek out original usage, or to put it another way—the meaning understood and intended by the original author and readily understood by the original hearers. Biblical terms have several different connotations (semantical field). D. A. Carson’s *Exegetical Fallacies*, pp. 25-66, is very helpful at this point—painful, but helpful. To illustrate, notice how English meanings change over time.

- a. In I Thess. 4:15, the King James Version has “shall not prevent them which are asleep.” In the American Standard Version the term is translated “precede.” Notice how the meaning of “prevent” has changed.
- b. In Eph. 4:22 the King James version has “put off concerning the former conversation the old man. . .” In the American Standard Version the term is translated “manner of life.” Notice how the meaning of “conversation” has changed.
- c. In I Cor. 11:29 the King James has “for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.” In the American Standard version the term “damnation” is translated as “judgment.” Notice how the term has changed.

Most of us are prone to define biblical terms in light of our understanding of that term in our contemporary culture, our denomination or our theological system. The problem with this is twofold.

- a. We must be careful that we are using the definition from the original author’s intent and not our denominational or cultural background.
- b. We must be careful not to force a word to mean one technical religious definition and then see that in every context where it appears. Often the same author uses the same term in different senses. See **Special Topic: [Mystery](#)**
- c. Examples of the different biblical authors using the same word with different meaning:
 - (1) John’s use of “world” (**Special Topic: [Kosmos](#)**)
 - (a) physical planet and all who live on it (John 3:16; 16:33; 1 John 4:1,14)
 - (b) human society organized and functioning apart from God (1 John 2:15; 3:1; 5:4-5)
 - (2) Paul’s use of “flesh” (**Special Topic: [Flesh](#)**)
 - (a) physical body (Rom. 1:3; Eph. 2:11,14; 5:29,31; 6:5,12)
 - (b) sin nature (Rom. 8:3-4; Eph. 2:13)
 - (3) Paul’s use of “temple” (*nous*)
 - (a) entire local congregation (1 Cor. 3:16-17)
 - (b) the individual believer (1 Cor. 6:19)
 - (4) James’ use of the term “save” (*sōzō*, **Special Topic: [Salvation](#)**)
 - (a) spiritual salvation (James 1:21; 2:14)
 - (b) physical deliverance (James 5:15,20)
 - (5) author’s use of “rest” in Hebrews 3 and 4 (*katapausis, katapauomai*)
 - (a) the Promised Land (cf. Heb. 3:11,18; 4:8)
 - (b) the Sabbath rest (cf. Heb. 4:3,4,9,10)
 - (c) the Kingdom of God (cf. Heb. 4:1,9-10,11)
 - (6) use of “all” vs. “many” in Isaiah and by Paul
 - (a) “all” means “all” (cf. Isa. 53:6; Rom. 5:18)
 - (b) “many” can mean “all” (cf. Isa. 53:11,12; Rom. 5:18,19)

- (c) the above is a good example of
 - i. the use of idioms
 - ii. the significance of parallel passages
 - iii. the use of context
- d. Helpful guidelines for determining the meaning of words in a given context (see concordance or reference Bible).
 - (1) use of the same term by the same author (“heavenly *places*” in Eph. 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12)
 - (2) relation of term to its immediate context (“righteousness,” Matt. 6:1)
 - (3) be sure to focus on contemporary usage of the term (“it is finished,” John 19:30 from Koine papyri found in Egypt, “paid in full”)
 - (4) check the OT usage and relate this to the developed meaning (faith, Hebrew – *emun, aman, emunah* to Greek – *pistis, pistos*)
 - (5) suggested resources for word studies
 - (a) an exhaustive concordance such as Young’s or Strong’s or a good reference Bible
 - (b) for those with no background in OT and NT words
 - i. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine
 - ii. *New Testament Words* by William Barclay
 - iii. *Synonyms of the Old Testament* by Robert Girdlestone
 - (c) For those with some background in Hebrew and Greek
 - i. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols)
 - ii. *New International Dictionary of Theology* (4 vols)
 - (d) *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* by Moises Silva
 - (e) *Exegetical Fallacies* by D. A. Carson
 - (f) Introductory Articles in New International Dictionaries
 - (g) Walter Hendricksen, in *A Layman’s Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 1973, pp. 54-56, gives these steps:
 - i. The term’s use by the writer.
 - ii. The term’s relation to its immediate context.
 - iii. The term’s ancient use at the time of the writing.
 - iv. The term’s root meaning (etymology)

Try to sample the other uses in the same Testament.

Walter Hendricksen, in *A Layman’s Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 1973, pp. 54-5, gives these steps.

- (1) the term’s use by the writer
- (2) the term’s relation to its immediate context

- (3) the term's ancient use at the time of the writing
- (4) the term's root meaning (etymology)

Try to verify the basic meaning from the other Testament (remember that the NT writers were Hebrew thinkers writing Koine Greek). Then it is time to go to a theological word book, Bible encyclopedia, dictionary, or commentary in order to check your definition. I have written a sample academic guide to NT word studies at the end of this textbook to illustrate how much effort must be used to ascertain a word's meaning in a specific context. I encourage pastors to do only one major word study per sermon. But over time that translates into a vast knowledge of biblical word meanings.

The Third and Fourth Interpretive Questions

A. The next questions which the interpreter tries to answer is, “What else did the same author say on the same subject?” It is closely related to the fourth basic question, “What did other inspired authors say on the same subject?” These two questions can be combined by the descriptive concept of concentric circles of parallel passages. Basically we are talking about how the word or theological concept is used elsewhere by an inspired author. This principle of interpretation has been called “the analogy of Scripture.”

“The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one) it may be reached and known by other places that speak more clearly” (Westminster Confession, chap. 9).

It is based on three suppositions.

- that all Scripture is inspired by God (1 Tim. 3:15-17, compare Fee and Stuart 1982, 209)
- that Scripture does not contradict itself
- that the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture (Silva 1987, 68,93,94)

If these are true, then the best way to understand a passage is the contextual concentric circles of inspired writings.

1. the same topic or term in the same immediate context (paragraph or literary unit)
2. the same topic or terms in the same biblical book
3. the same topic or terms by the same author
4. the same topic or terms in the same period, genre, or Testament
5. the same topic or terms in the Bible as a whole

The farther we move from the specific passage that we are attempting to interpret, the more general and, to some extent, tentative the effectiveness of the parallel becomes.

“Interpret according to the narrow context before the wider. It is commonly agreed that Scripture should interpret Scripture. However, it needs to be understood that a term or passage must be interpreted first in its immediate context before it is studied in light of its broader application to the Bible as a whole” (Osborne and Woodward 1979, 154).

This area of interpretation can be very helpful in seeing how our passage relates to the whole of revelation (McQuilkin 1983, 43; Silva 1987, 83; Sterrett 1973, 86). Basically we are moving from

1. exegesis (number 1 above) to
2. biblical theology (numbers 2, 3, and 4 above) to
3. systematic doctrine (number 5 above)

We are moving from the magnifying glass to the telescope. We must first be relatively sure of the meaning of our focal passage before we move to systematized doctrine. This is one, though not the only, purpose of systematic theology books. The move is necessary, but dangerous. Systematic theologies are usually biased toward a denominational perspective. Our backgrounds, prejudices,

and denominational indoctrinations are always ready and able to intrude. If we use parallel passages (and we must) we must be certain that they are true parallels, not just the same term or phrase.

It is often true that parallel passages bring an overall balance to our interpretation. It has been my experience in interpreting that the Bible is often written in paradoxical or dialectical pairs (eastern mindset; see **Special Topic: [Eastern Literature \[biblical paradoxes\]](#)**). One must recognize the biblical tension between subjects without removing it for the purpose of making simplistic statements, attempting to categorize truth, or protecting cherished theological positions. One inspired text cannot be used to negate or depreciate another inspired text!

Here are some examples of the tension between biblical truths.

1. predestination versus human free will (**Special Topic: [Election/Predestination and the Need for a Theological Balance](#)**; and **Special Topic: [Covenant](#)**)
2. security of the believer versus the need for perseverance (**Special Topic: [Christian Assurance](#)**)
3. original sin versus volitional sin
4. Jesus as God versus Jesus as man
5. Jesus as equal with the Father versus Jesus as subservient to the Father
6. Bible as God's Word versus human authorship
7. sinlessness versus sinning less
8. initial instantaneous justification and sanctification versus progressive sanctification (**Special Topic: [Sanctification](#)**)
9. justification by faith (Romans 4) versus justification confirmed by works (cf. James 2:14-26)
10. Christian freedom (cf. Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:23-33) versus Christian responsibility (cf. Gal. 5:16-21; Eph. 4:1; **Special Topic: [Christian Freedom vs. Christian Responsibility](#)**)
11. God's transcendence versus His immanence
12. God as ultimately unknowable versus knowable in Scripture and Christ
13. Paul's many images for salvation
 - a. adoption
 - b. sanctification (**Special Topic: [Sanctification](#)**)
 - c. justification
 - d. redemption (**Special Topic: [Ransom/Redeem](#)**)
 - e. glorification
 - f. predestination
 - g. reconciliation
14. the kingdom of God as present versus a future consummation (**Special Topic: [Kingdom of God](#)**)
15. repentance as a gift of God versus repentance as a mandated response for salvation (**Special Topic: [Repentance \[NT\]](#)**)

16. the OT is permanent versus the OT has passed away and is null and void (cf. Matt. 3:17-19 vs. 5:21-48; Romans 7 vs. Galatians 3 (**Special Topic: [Paul's Views of the Mosaic Law](#)**))
17. believers are servants/slaves or children/heirs (**Special Topic: [Eastern Literature](#)**)

Moises Silva has been very helpful in listing the tensions which exist in our understanding Scripture.

1. The Bible is divine, yet it has come to us in human form.
2. The commands of God are absolute, yet the historical context of the writings appears to relativize certain elements.
3. The divine message must be clear, yet many passages seem ambiguous.
4. We are dependent only on the Spirit for instruction, yet scholarship is surely necessary.
5. The Scriptures seem to presuppose a literal and historical reading, yet we are also confronted by the figurative and nonhistorical (e.g., the parables).
6. Proper interpretation requires the interpreter's personal freedom, yet some degree of external, corporate authority appears imperative.
7. The objectivity of the biblical message is essential, yet our presuppositions seem to inject a degree of subjectivity into the interpretive process (Silva 1987, 36-38).

Which side of these paradoxes are true? To all of these I would answer "yes," because they are all true. Both sides are biblical. Our task as an interpreter is to see the big picture and integrate all of its parts, not just our favorite, or most familiar, ones. The answers to interpretation problems are not found in removing the tension so as to affirm only one side of the dialectic (Silva 1987, 38). This balance can be obtained from the proper use of a concordance or from systematic theology books. Be careful not to consult only systematic theologies from the denominational perspective from which you come or with which you agree. Let the Bible challenge you, roar at you—not just whimper. It will unsettle your cherished notions.

Systematic Theologies

- a. This type of reference book is one of the most helpful and the most biased.
- b. These books help us move from one context, through the limited scope of biblical theology, into the whole Bible, systematic theology.
- c. Be careful that you do not let systematic theology smother or silence individual texts that do not fit neatly into your theological system.
- d. Purchase several of these types of books from differing theological positions (see list of suggested books at the end of this Seminar).
- e. Helpful quote from *Answers to Questions* by F. F. Bruce, Zondervan, "It is important to remember that, when the teaching of Scripture is systematized, something is usually left out of the process" (p. 196).

It is true that the attempt to systematize doctrine, or relate seemingly contradictory biblical material, is presuppositional and usually conforms to one's doctrinal position. This should be less true for biblical theology which is primarily descriptive. This method (biblical theology) of study takes a small slice of the biblical material. It limits itself to an author, a period, or a genre. It tries to draw its theological categories only from a restricted biblical frame of reference. Often, in the act of

limiting the biblical material, we are forced to take seriously the difficult statements of Scripture without explaining away their meaning by allusion to other verses. It forces us to take seriously what an inspired author said. It is not looking for a balance, but for the vibrant, clear statement of the biblical author. It is a painful struggle to affirm both poles of biblical paradoxes (see Frank Stagg, *Polarities of Man's Existence in Biblical Perspective*). We consult all three of these concentric circles of parallel passages. One hopes to move through each stage in every context.

1. What did the author say and mean? (exegesis)
2. What did he say elsewhere on the same subject? What did others of the same period say? (biblical theology)
3. What does the Bible as a whole say on this and related subjects? (systematic doctrine)

Another potential problem in the use of parallel passages is called “the fallacy of collapsing contexts.”

“When two or more unrelated texts are treated as if they belonged together, we have the fallacy of collapsing contexts. This reading error can be especially knotty because it is the corruption of a perfectly good principle of reading: to compare Scripture with Scripture. We are responsible as good readers of the Bible to make use of every text bearing on the subject we wish to understand” (Sire 1980, 140).

“What gives interpreters the right to link certain verses together and not others? The point is that all such linking eventually produces a grid that effects the interpretation of the other texts” (Carson 1984, 140).

A good example of this problem has already been alluded to in this Textbook—Origen’s linking of a passage in Proverbs with an unrelated text in the book of 1 Thessalonians and, thereby building a hermeneutical grid.

- B. How did the original hearers understand the message and respond to it? This is the fourth interpretative question. It relates to only certain kinds of genres (i.e., historical narratives, Gospels, and the book of Acts). It is very helpful if the information is available because this is our goal as an interpreter, “hear as it was heard.”

The Fifth and Sixth Interpretive Questions

A. Application

Up until this point we have been looking at the interpretative questions which relate to the original author's intent. Now we must turn to the equally significant focus concerning its meaning to my day and to my life. No interpretation is complete unless this stage is reached and adequately incorporated. The goal of Bible study is not knowledge alone, but daily Christlikeness. The goal of the Bible is a deeper, closer relationship with the Triune God. Theology must be practical.

“According to Kierkegaard the grammatical, lexical, and historical study of the Bible was necessary but preliminary to the true reading of the Bible. ‘To read the Bible as God’s word one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God’s Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God’” (from *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* by Ramm, p. 75).

Application is not an option (Osborne and Woodward 1979, 150). However, application is less structured than interpretation (this is where the creativity and life experiences of the interpreter and proclaimer come into focus). Ideally there is but one original intent in Scripture. This could be expanded to two (multiple prophecy fulfillment or extended parables). Often the original author's intent was true, but not exhaustive of the Spirit's intent. Application is often determined by one's personal

1. need
2. situation
3. level of maturity
4. desire to know and follow God
5. cultural and denominational traditions
6. current historical situation

It is obvious that the leap from the “then” to the “now” is ambiguous. There are many factors which cannot be identified or controlled. One reason for the development of the allegorical method was the desire to apply the Bible to current needs. Some would say that allegory is necessary for application (Silva 1987, 63,65), but I would deny this. The Spirit is our mandatory guide in application as He is in interpretation. Application must be integrally related to the intended meaning of the original inspired author!

1. Some Helpful Guidelines
 - a. Be sure to apply the major intent of the biblical author, not just minor details of the passage.
 - b. Do not look for every aspect of our current situation to be addressed in detail. Often biblical “principles” are our only guide. However, our formulation of these are one more

level removed from inspiration. Also, their application is often very presuppositional. Some interpreters find biblical principles in every text. It is safer to limit one's principles to extended teaching passages or else principles can become proof-texts.

“The effort to discern between those things which are culturally and historically relative and those which are transcendent is in actuality engaged in by all Christians, in one way or another. At issue is only whether such discernment results from our likes and dislikes, our own cultural conditioning and prejudices, or whether it is the application of a clear principle that emerges from a proper understanding of the nature and purpose of Scripture” (from *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, p. 28)

- c. Not all truth is meant for immediate or personal application. The Bible often records that which it does not advocate. Also, not all biblical truth is applicable to every age, every situation, and every believer.
- d. Application of one biblical passage should never violate another passage. Believers do not have the right to choose some texts and ignore others! However, the New Testament does take precedence over the Old Testament. Gospel truths take priority over cultural aspects (i.e., slavery)..
- e. Application should never seem contrary to Christlike conduct. Extremes in application are as dangerous as they are in interpretation.
- f. Some basic application questions to ask of every biblical passage have been suggested by Richard Mayhue in *How To Interpret the Bible for Yourself*, 1986, p. 64
 - (1) Are there examples to follow? Are there commands to obey?
 - (2) Are there errors to avoid?
 - (3) Are there sins to forsake?
 - (4) Are there promises to claim?
 - (5) Are there new thoughts about God?
 - (6) Are there principles by which to live?

B. The Interpreter's Responsibility

At this point it will be helpful to discuss the individual interpreter's responsibility in relation to appropriate application of the Bible's eternal, relevant truths. It has already been stated that this procedure is ambiguous and that the Holy Spirit must be our guide. For me a key ingredient to this area is our motive and attitude. We must walk in the light we have. I am not responsible for your walk of faith, nor you for mine (illustration of wearing jewelry, Rom. 14:23). We can share our perspective in love (cf. Eph. 4:15) and hopefully from our understanding of specific passages of Scripture. We all must be willing to seek new light from the Scripture, but we are only responsible for what we do understand. If we walk in faith in the light that we have, more light will be given (Rom. 1:17). We must also be aware at this

point to remember that our understanding is not always superior to the understanding of others. Romans 14:1-15:13 (see **Special Topic: [Christian Freedom vs. Christian Responsibility](#)**) is so crucial in this area, but I am always surprised that we usually think our group is the “stronger brother” and everyone who does not agree with us is a member of the weaker group and in need of our help. We all need help. We all have areas of strengths and areas of weakness in our understanding and application of spiritual truth. I have heard it said that the Bible comforts the uncomfortable and discomferts the comfortable. We must walk down the tension-filled road of spiritual growth. We are all affected by sin and we will never arrive at complete maturity this side of heaven. Walk in the light you have—within the light of the Bible. “Walk in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). Keep on walking. The goal of mature faith is the health and growth of the Body!

C. Here are some helpful books

1. *Applying the Bible* by Jack Kuhatschek
2. *Understanding and Applying the Bible* by J. Robertson McQuilkin
3. *Living By the Book* by Howard G. Hendricks
4. *Why Christians Fight Over the Bible* by John Newport

SOME POSSIBLE INTERPRETIVE PITFALLS

I. Need for both a Logical Process (discussed in the next chapter) and a Textual Focus in Interpretation

It is obvious that these principles of interpretation can be abused, for hermeneutics is not a pure science. It is crucial that we state some of the obvious pitfalls involved in the inappropriate use or non-use of the contextually/textually-focused principles previously presented in this Textbook. This Contextual/Textual method is somewhat like the scientific method. Its results are meant to be corroborated and repeated by others. There needs to be a clear trail in our procedural method, points of interpretation and logic. These pieces of evidence will come from several contextual and textually-focused areas. **Remember, texts have priority over everything! Context, context, context!! Texts are inspired, but one's interpretation is not!!**

- A. The literary context of the passage
 1. immediate (paragraph)
 2. several related paragraphs
 3. larger literary unit (in the same book)
 4. entire biblical book (overarching purpose of the author)
- B. The historical context of the passage
 1. background and setting of the author
 2. background and setting of the hearer or reader
 3. background and setting of their culture
 4. background and setting of any problems addressed in the Bible's text
- C. The literary genre (type of literature) of the whole book or literary unit. See Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*
- D. The grammar/syntax (relationship of the parts of the sentence to each other and surrounding sentences) **Special Topic: [Hebrew Grammar](#); Special Topic: [Greek Grammatical Terms](#)**
- E. The original word meanings and connotations (definitions of significant terms)
 1. semantic field (*UBS Lexicon* by Louw and Nida)
 2. author's usage (concordance)
 3. other authors of the same period
 4. other biblical authors
- F. Appropriate use of parallel passages (concentric circles of significance)
 1. same author
 2. same literary unit
 3. same book
 4. same period
 5. same Testament
 6. the Bible as a whole

One can analyze another's interpretation based on how they utilize these component parts. There will still be disagreement, but at least it will be from the text itself. We hear and read so many different

interpretations of God's Word that it becomes crucial that we critically evaluate them, based on the possibility of verification and proper procedures, not just whether we personally agree with them.

As in all human language communication (verbal and written), there is the potential for misunderstanding. Because hermeneutics are the principles for interpreting ancient literature, it is obvious that their abuse is also possible. For every basic principle of interpretation there is the possibility of intentional or unintentional bias and abuse. If we could isolate the potential areas of our own presuppositions, it would help us to be aware of them when we come to our personal interpretations.

II. Examples of Abuses of the First Five Interpretative Questions

A. Our presuppositions — often our personality, our family, our experience, our denomination, or our culture causes us to interpret the Bible through theological glasses or filters. We only allow it to say what we want it to say. This existential bias affects all of us, but if we are aware of it we can compensate for it by attempting to allow the Bible and its day to speak before we attempt to apply the message to ourselves and our culture. Some examples of this pitfall can be seen in

1. William Barclay's interpretation of Matt. 15:37-39, where the miraculous multiplication of food by Jesus becomes simply the multitude sharing with one another what they brought. Barclay's philosophical filter of logical positivism radically alters the obvious intent of Matthew. Remember that there were seven baskets full of pieces of bread left over (Matt. 15:37).
2. Accounts of women in ministry can be seen in Exod. 15:20; Jdgs. 4:4ff; 2 Kgs. 22:14; 2 Chr. 2:22; Isa. 8:3; Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9; Rom. 16:1; 2 Cor. 11:5; and 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9-11.16. Modern evangelicals who are uneasy about this, either because of traditional views or the strong statements of 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 (please see my exegetical commentaries on these passages online), should not alter the proper and obvious interpretation of these other passages. One inspired text should not damage or depreciate another inspired text!

This subject is so controversial that I am listing my Special Topics on these subjects.

Special Topic: [Women Keep Silent](#)

Special Topic: [Women In the Bible](#)

Special Topic: [Women in Ministry](#)

Special Topic: [Qualifications for Female Church Workers](#)

3. Types of church polity

- a. Episcopal (one leader)
- b. Presbyterian (several leaders)
- c. Congregational (democratic vote)

Each claims they are biblical. Acts 15 is a good example of all three functioning in one church

- (1) one leader – James the half brother of Jesus
- (2) several leaders (the elders and Apostles)
- (3) the congregation voted for the final decision (Acts 15:22)

There is no one polity pattern. However, the Apostles are dying and local churches become autonomous. The polity cannot protect the church from agenda-driven, manipulative, egotistical leaders. Christlike people are crucial, not polity.

Special Topic: Church Polity

4. Some charismatic groups try to assert that Acts 4 teaches that true salvation is marked by speaking in tongues. However, the Greek text of 1 Cor. 12:29-30 shows this is not true (i.e., the MĒ PARTICLE).

Special Topic: Speaking in Tongues

- B. Our abuse of context — this refers both to the historical context and the literary context of a Bible passage. This may be the most common abuse of Scripture in our day. By removing a passage from the author's day and the author's intended purpose, one can make the Bible say anything. Remember Gordon Fee's famous quote, "A book that can mean anything, means nothing!" If it were not so common and deadly, the examples of this pitfall would be ludicrous.
1. A preacher of days past preached against the selling of "dogs" based on Deut. 23:18. The historical and literary settings of Deuteronomy were ignored. The term "dog" was transferred from male, cultic prostitution (Deuteronomy) to an animal (today).
 2. When the modern legalist uses Col. 2:21 to outlaw certain activities without even realizing that this verse is Paul's quote of the false teachers' message, the problem becomes evident.
 3. The modern use by soul winners of Rev. 3:20 as the closing appeal of "the plan of salvation," not even realizing that it is in the literary context of Christian churches (Revelation 2-3). This text is not addressing initial salvation, but the recommitment of a church, beginning with the individuals of that congregation.
 4. The modern cult of Mormonism quotes 1 Cor. 15:29 as a proof for "baptism for the dead." There are no parallel passages for this verse and the historical context is uncertain. The immediate context is the validity of the resurrection and this verse is

- one of several examples used to confirm this truth. See **Special Topic: [Baptism for the Dead](#)**
5. C. I. Scofield’s quote of 2 Tim. 2:15, “rightly dividing the Word of truth,” is used as Scriptural support for dividing the Bible into seven distinct covenants (i.e., dispensations).
 6. Use of John 6:52ff by sacramental churches to support the doctrine of transubstantiation (that the elements of the Eucharist actually become the body and blood of Christ) is another example of this pitfall. John does not record the Lord’s Supper itself, but only the dialogue of the upper room experience (John 13-17). This passage is in the context of the feeding of the five thousand, not the Eucharist.
 7. Preaching on sanctification from Gal. 2:20, not realizing that the focus of the context is on the complete effectiveness of justification.
 8. Prosperity passages proof-texted but ignores emphasis on obedience (cf. Leviticus 26; Deut. 28:1,2,9,11,13,15; 30:1,15,19; 1 John v. 2). See Gordon Fee’s *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*.
- C. Our abuse of the literary genre — this involves the misunderstanding of the original author’s message because of our failure to identify the literary form in which he spoke. Each literary form has some unique elements of interpretation. Some examples of this abuse follow.
1. Some literalists attempt to turn the poetry of Ps. 114:3-6 into historical narrative—often judging others by their literalistic interpretation.
 2. Some try to interpret the apocalyptic sections of Revelation 12 (woman and dragon) and 13 (two beasts and the dragon) as literal persons and animals. See **Special Topic: [Apocalyptic Literature](#)**
 3. Some try to describe “hell” from the parable of Luke 16:19-31. This is the fifth in a series of five parables, which are related to one central intent of Jesus in addressing the religious leaders (Pharisees) in Luke 15:1-2. Also, the term used is *Hades* and not *Gehenna*. See **Special Topic: [Where Are the Dead?](#)**
- D. Our abuse of figures of speech or cultural idioms is another pitfall. We all speak in symbolic language. Yet, because those who hear us live in the same culture, they understand our idiomatic phrases. How unusual our idioms and figures of speech must be to those from other cultures. I recall an Indian pastor who told me that he was so sorry when I told him “I was tickled to death.” It is good for us to reflect on our own colorful phrases, such as “that was awfully good”; “I am all ears”; “that just kills me”; or “cross my heart and hope to die.”
1. The Bible has idioms also.
 - a. The word “hate” in Luke 14:26; John 12:25; Rom. 9:13, and Mal. 1:2-3 is a Hebrew idiom of comparison, as can be seen in Gen. 29:31,33 and Deut. 21:15, but if we do not know this it can cause much misunderstanding.
 - b. The phrases, “cut off your limbs” and “pluck out your eyes,” in Matt. 5:29-30 are Oriental overstatements, not literal commands.

- c. The Holy Spirit is in the form of a dove in Mark 1:10; however, the Scriptures say, “like a dove” or “as a dove,” cf. Luke 3:22.
 - d. The Bible’s use of “many” and “all” as synonymous
 - (1) Isa. 53:6, “all” vs. 53:11-12, “the many”
 - (2) Rom. 5:18, “all” vs. 5:15,19, “the many”
- E. Our abuse by oversimplification. We say that the gospel is simple and by this we mean that it is easy to understand, however, many simple summaries of the gospel are faulty because they are not complete.
- 1. God is love (1 John 4:8,16), but this omits the concept of God’s wrath (Rom. 1:18-2:16).
 - 2. We are saved by grace alone, but this omits the concept that for individuals
 - a. repentance is required (**Special Topic: [Repentance \[NT\]](#)**, I. B.)
 - b. faith is required (**Special Topic: [Faith, Believe, or Trust](#)**)
 - c. maturity in Christ is evidence of and mandated (i.e., Matt. 5:48; Eph. 1:4; 2:10; James 2:14-26)
 - d. Perseverance is required (**Special Topic: [Perseverance](#)**)
 - 3. Jesus is truly God, but this omits the concept that He is also truly human (Phil. 2 6-8; 1 John 4:1-3).
- F. Our abuse by selectivity — this is similar to over simplification and proof-texting. We often select or combine only those Scriptures which support our theology.
- 1. An example is seen in John 14:13-14; 15:7,16; 16:23, in the phrase “whatever you ask for in prayer, you will receive.” For the proper balance one must assert the other biblical criteria concerning this subject.
 - (a) “keep on asking, seeking, knocking,” Matt. 7:7-8
 - (b) “according to God’s will,” 1 John 5:14-15, which is really what “in Jesus’ name” implies
 - (c) “without doubt,” James 1:6
 - (d) “without selfish goals,” James 4:1-3

See **Special Topic: [Prayer, Unlimited Yet Limited](#)**
 - 2. Using the text of 1 Cor. 11:6 to criticize men who wear long hair without noting Num. 6:5; Lev. 19:27, and the culture of Jesus’ day, is inappropriate.
 - 3. Disallowing women to speak or teach in church based on 1 Cor. 14:34 without consideration of 1 Cor. 11:5, which is in the same literary unit, is an overstatement.
 - Special Topic: [Women Keep Silent](#)**
 - Special Topic: [Women In the Bible](#)**
 - Special Topic: [Women in Ministry](#)**
 - Special Topic: [Qualifications for Female Church Workers](#)**

4. Disallowing or depreciating tongues, often based on I Cor. 13:8 (1 Corinthians 13 asserts that everything but love will pass away), without noting the teaching of 1 Cor. 14:5,18,39, is inappropriate.
5. Emphasizing the food laws of Leviticus 11 without noting Matt. 15:11; Mark 7:18-23; and, in an oblique way, Acts 10:10-16, is inappropriate.

See **Special Topic: [OT Food Laws](#)**

- G. Our abuse of majoring on minors — often we miss the original author’s intent because we get involved in an interesting, but not central, issue. This can be seen in the following.
1. Whom did Cain marry? Gen. 4:17
 2. Many are concerned about the recipients of Jesus preaching while He was in Hades. 1 Peter 3:19
 3. Another question concerns how God is going to destroy the earth. 2 Peter 3:10
 4. Angels that kept not their proper place, Jude, v. 6
 5. Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6)
- H. Our abuse of the Bible as history — the Bible often records what it does not advocate (Fee and Stuart 1982, 85). We must focus on clear teaching passages, not just historical accounts, for our theology and ethics.
1. Gideon’s fleece (Jdg. 6:36-40)
 2. Polygamy (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:9; Titus 1:6)
- I. Our abuse of the relationship between the Old and New Testament, Israel and the Church, Law and Grace. Presuppositionally, Christ is Lord of Scripture (cf. Matt. 5:17-19, 21-48; Grant and Tracy 1984, 95). All Scripture must ultimately point to Him. He is the fulfillment of God’s plan for humanity (Col. 1:15-23). This means that although the Old Testament must stand on its own feet, it points toward Christ (Sterrett 1973, 157-171). I think we must interpret the OT through the new revelation of the NT. Old Testament emphases have changed and been universalized. The New Covenant has superceded the Mosaic Covenant (cf. the book of Hebrews and Galatians 3).

Special Topic: [Why are OT Covenant Promises so Different from NT Covenant Promises?](#)

Special Topic: [Deity of Christ from the OT](#)

Special Topic: [Paul’s Views of the Mosaic Covenant](#)

Special Topic: [YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan](#)

Special Topic: [The Superiority of the New Covenant Over the Mosaic Covenant](#)

The examples of each of these pitfalls are legion. However, just because some over-interpret and some under-interpret and some falsely-interpret, does not mean there should be no interpretation. If we stay with the original author’s major intent expressed in a context and if we come to the Bible prayerfully and humbly we can avoid the vast majority of these pitfalls.

“Why is it that people so often find things in the Bible narratives, that are not really there—read into the Bible their own notions rather than read out of the Bible what God wants them to know?

1. they are desperate, desperate for information that will apply to their own situation
2. they are impatient; they want their answers now, from this book, from this chapter
3. they wrongly expect that everything in the Bible applies directly as instruction for their own individual lives” (Fee and Stuart 1980, 84).

J. Suggested Reading

1. *Scripture Twisting* by James Sire
2. *Exegetical Fallacies* by D. A. Carson
3. *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* by Moises Silva
4. *Why Christians Fight Over the Bible* by John Newport

PRACTICAL PROCEDURES FOR INTERPRETATION

I. The Spiritual Aspects of Bible Interpretation

Bible study is a combination of dependence on the Holy Spirit and the sharpening of your God-given abilities of reason and analysis (i.e., 2 Tim. 2:15). The spiritual aspect of Bible study is difficult to discuss because of the vast array of differing interpretations affirmed by godly, educated, prayerful, sincere believers. It is a mystery why there is so much disagreement, even hostility, among believers, all trying to understand and affirm Scripture. The Spirit is crucial, but all believers have the Spirit. The following is simply my attempt to address the needed spiritual attitude of every interpreter, every time we study the Bible.

A. Prayer should be “priority one” in interpretation and application. Prayer is not an automatic link to true interpretation, neither in its quality or quantity, but it is the first indispensable step. To go into Bible study without the Spirit is like going swimming without water. Again, this does not mean to imply that prayer is directly related to the quality of our exegesis—that is determined by additional factors. But one thing is for certain—a person unaided by God cannot know spiritual truth (Calvin). Prayer is not overcoming some reluctance on God’s part to open His book to us, but it is a recognition of our dependence on Him. The Spirit was given to help us understand God’s Word (John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:10-16). See **Special Topic: [Illumination](#)**

B. Personal cleansing is also significant. Known, unconfessed sin blocks our relationship with God. He does not require sinlessness in order to understand the Bible, but the Bible is spiritual truth and sin is a barrier to spiritual things. We need to confess known sin (1 John 1:9). We need to open ourselves to the Lord for inspection (Ps. 139:1,23-24). Many of His promises are conditional on our faith response, so too, our ability to understand the Bible.

See **Special Topic: [Repentance \(NT\)](#)**

C. We need to develop a desire to know God and His Word (Ps. 9:7-14; 42:1ff; 119:1ff). When we become serious with God, He is able to draw near to us and open His will for our lives (Zech. 1:3-4; James 4:8).

D. We need to immediately apply the truth gleaned from our Bible study (put into practice what we believe to be true) into our lives. Many of us already know much more biblical truth than we are living (Eph. 4:1; 5:2,15; Col. 1:10; 1 John 1:7). The criteria for more truth is that we walk in the truth we already have. Application is not optional, but it is daily. Walk in the light you have and more light will be given (Rom. 1:17).

“It perceives that no merely intellectual understanding of the Bible, however complete, can possess all its treasures. It does not despise such understanding, for it is essential to a complete understanding. But it must lead to a spiritual understanding of the spiritual treasures of this book if it is to be complete. And for that spiritual understanding something more than intellectual alertness is necessary. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the Bible student needs an attitude of spiritual receptivity, an eagerness to find God that he may yield himself to Him, if he is to pass beyond his scientific study into the richer

inheritance of this greatest of all books” *The Relevance of the Bible*, H. H. Rowley (p. 19).

- E. I have found two good sources of information about this spiritual aspect to hermeneutics.
 - 1. *Listening to the Spirit* by Gordon Fee
 - 2. An article in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, pp. 60-67

II. The Logical Process Described by 4 Reading Cycles

Regularly read the Bible! One cannot know what it means if he does not know what it says. Analytical reading and outlining are the keys to understanding. In this step several cycles (four) of reading the entire biblical book in one sitting are involved. We should read/study through biblical books!

- A. Read in several translations. It is hoped that you will read translations that utilize different theories of translation.
 - 1. formal correspondence (word-for-word) such as
 - a. the King James Version
 - b. the American Standard Version
 - c. the New American Standard Bible
 - d. the Revised Standard Version
 - 2. dynamic equivalence translations such as
 - a. the New International Version
 - b. the New American Bible
 - c. Good News for Modern Man (Today’s English Version)
 - d. the Jerusalem Bible
 - e. the New English Bible
 - f. Williams translation
 - 3. concept for concept translations such as
 - a. the Amplified Bible
 - b. Phillips translation
 - c. the Living Bible

Your personal study Bible should be from category (1) or (2). Also, a parallel Bible which utilizes several translations on the same page is very helpful (i.e., *The New Testament from 26 Translations* by Curtis Vaughn, AMG).

- B. Read the entire book or literary unit in one sitting
 - 1. When you read, allow yourself
 - a. a prolonged period of study time
 - b. a scheduled or regular time
 - c. a quiet place.

Reading is an attempt to understand another person’s thoughts (if you are an audio learner, listen to the reading of the book). You would not think of reading a personal

letter in sections. Try to read complete books of the Bible in one sitting (start with a small NT book).

2. One key to this non-technical, textually-focused methodology is reading and re-reading. It will amaze you how understanding is related to familiarity.

This Textbook's practical method is focused around these procedures.

- a. seven interpretive questions
 - b. four stages of reading with assignments
 - c. use of research tools at appropriate places
3. These procedures are an attempt to help us check all the steps of interpretation. They are similar to the way professional airline pilots use takeoff and landing checklists. They have done these hundreds of times, but sometimes human beings forget. The checklist is a way of assuring a well known procedure. Pilots have very important jobs, hundreds of lives depend on them. How much more important is the Bible interpreter's? People's eternal lives depend on them!

Our processes of interpretation and the reasons for our interpretations need to be documented so that other rational creatures made in God's image can follow our logic and evaluate our biblical evidence. Good interpretation is"

- a. common sense interpretation
- b. textual interpretation
- c. logical interpretation
- d. Spirit-guided interpretation
- e. biblically consistent interpretation

C. Write down your textual observations

Take notes of what you read. There are several steps in this section. They are not meant to be burdensome, but we must control our desire for instant Bible knowledge by depending too heavily on the interpretations of others. The worst thing you could do is go to a commentary first. Personal Bible study takes prayer, time, training, and persistence. It is not an easy road, but the benefits are outstanding. Reading the whole book at one sitting is not an easy road, but the benefits are outstanding.

1. Read the book that you want to study one time through. I recommend that you choose a shorter New Testament book first. The study of an entire book is best. It is better stewardship of your time and it is easier to retain background information and context between study times. Book studies, over a period of time, will give you a biblical balance. It will force you to deal with difficult, unfamiliar, and paradoxical truths.

Try to put into your own words, in one concise, precise sentence, what the author's overarching purpose was for writing the book. Also, try to isolate this central theme in a key verse, paragraph, or chapter.

Remember that the purpose is often expressed by the type of literary genre that is used. If books are made up of other genres than historical narrative, consult the special

hermeneutical procedural section concerning literary genre (See *How to Read The Bible For All Its Worth* by Fee and Stuart).

2. Read it again in the same translation. This time notice the major divisions (literary units) of the author's thoughts. These are identified by changes in subject, time, topic, tone, place, style, etc. At this point do not try to outline the structure of the book, only its obvious subject changes. Do not base your divisions on the chapter and verse of your English Bible. These are not original and are often misleading and incorrect. Summarize each of your divisions by using short, descriptive sentences which characterize the subject or topic of the section. Once you have isolated sections, see if you can link them together into related topics, contrasts, comparisons, persons, events, etc. This step is an attempt to isolate and relate the large blocks of seemingly unrelated material, which in reality, are the literary units of the author's overarching structure. These literary units show us the flow of the thoughts of the original author and point us toward his original intent.

- D. At this point it is helpful to check your outline and overarching purpose with other believers.

“When your private interpretation leads you to a conclusion different from the historical meaning men of God have given to the passage, an amber light of caution should flash in your mind” (Henricksen 1973, 38).

“In order for the exegesis to be your work and not merely a mechanical compendium of other's views, it is wise to do your own thinking and to arrive at your own conclusions as much as possible prior to this step” (Stuart 1980, 39).

“Constantly cross checking our grasp of Scripture with:

1. our pastor
2. our fellow Christians
3. the historic understanding of Scripture by orthodox Christians” (Sire 1980, 15)

Often your Study Bible will have an outline at the beginning of each book. If not, most have the subject of each chapter at the top of the page or somehow positioned in the text. Never look at theirs until you have written your own. You may have to modify yours, but shortcuts at this step will cripple your ability to analyze the literary units for yourself.

Not only do Study Bibles contain outlines of biblical books, but also

1. commentaries
2. books of introduction to the Old or New Testament
3. Bible encyclopedias or dictionaries under the name of the biblical book

- E. Re-read the entire biblical book and

1. on a separate sheet of paper, write down the paragraph divisions of your Bible under the literary units (different topics) that you have isolated and outlined. An outline is nothing

more than recognizing the original author's thoughts and their relationship to each other. Paragraphs will form the next logical division under literary units. As you identify the paragraph under each literary unit, characterize the context in one sentence as you did earlier to the larger division of the book. This simple outlining procedure will help keep you from majoring on minors.

Up until this point you have worked from only one translation. Now, compare your divisions with other translations.

- a. the larger units
- b. the paragraph divisions

Make a notation at the places of divergence.

- a. subject divisions
- b. paragraph divisions
- c. word choice
- d. sentence structure
- e. marginal notes (This usually involves manuscript variations. For this technical information consult commentaries)

2. At this point look for verses in the biblical text to answer these questions (the historical setting).

- a. who wrote the passage
- b. to whom was the passage addressed
- c. why was the passage written to them
- d. when was the passage written
- e. what historical circumstances were involved

This type of material can be gleaned from the book itself. Often all we know about the historical setting of biblical books is found within the book itself (internal evidence) or within parallel biblical passages. Certainly it is quicker to consult a "professional" commentator at this point, but resist doing it. You can do this for yourself. It will give you joy, increase your confidence, and help you remain independent of the "experts" (Osborne and Woodward 1979, 139; Jensen 1963, 20). Write down the questions you think might be helpful such as: Are there repeated words or phrases? Is there a noticeable structure? Is there a series of parallel passages from one other specific biblical book? With your questions before you, re-read the entire book. When you find an item in the text that relates to any of these questions, write it down under that section. With practice and careful reading it will amaze you how much you can learn from the text itself.

F. Fourth Reading

1. Use parallel passages (in the Bible) and systematic theologies (a type of research book) to gain the big picture (i.e., biblical worldview)

- a. The need to compare parallel passages asserts the belief that all biblical texts have one divine author—the Holy Spirit, and therefore, do not contradict, but rather complement each other. However, for study purposes there is an order of exegetical significance.
 - (1) the same literary unit
 - (2) the same book
 - (3) the same author
 - (4) the same genre
 - (5) the same Testament
 - (6) all of the Bible
 - b. The use of a type of theology book generically called “systematic theologies” is very helpful (but the most denominationally biased). They divide the truths of the Bible into categories (God, mankind, Scripture, salvation, etc.). By using the scriptural index at the back of these books one is able to quickly see how the text being studied relates to the major themes of the Bible (only one, one of several, part of a paradox).
2. Develop specialized ways to develop specialized lists in order to discern the original author’s structure/thought.
 - a. list the major and minor characters (i.e., Genesis)
 - b. list key term(s)
 - (1) major theological terms
 - (2) recurrent terms
 - (3) terms used to express the central truth of the passage
 - (4) unusual or unknown terms
 - c. list major events (Acts)
 - d. list the geographical movements (Exodus and Numbers or Acts)
 3. Note especially difficult passages (textual, historical, theological, or verses that cause confusion).
 4. At this point it is helpful to complete the detailed outline of the entire book. On the left hand side of the page put the content outline (major literary units and paragraph divisions with your brief statement of their central truth). On the right hand side of the page put the possible application truth for each major literary unit and paragraph. As you discern the author’s central thought in each paragraph, how does that truth, illustration, parable, example, etc. apply to your

culture, your day, your life? There are examples, e.g., Romans 1-3 and Titus, in the back of this Seminar.

G. Check your observations

Now it is time to check your observations of the biblical book with those of God's gifted men and women of the past and present.

“Interpretation is a social process. The best results can be achieved only by the cooperation of many minds. The results of scholars in one age are the natural and rightful heritage of those who labor in the same field in succeeding ages, and should be used by them. No interpreter of the New Testament can wisely ignore the results wrought by past generations and strike out for totally independent and original conclusions on all points. He should become familiar as far as possible with what has previously been accomplished. . .The commentaries which have been produced by the scholarship of the past form a very essential part of the materials for interpretation” (Dana 1946, 237).

“Charles H. Spurgeon. . . ‘It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to them should think so little of what He revealed to others’” (Henricksen 1973, 41).

“This stress on the primacy of firsthand study does not imply that an examination of commentaries is not recommended. On the contrary, when done in the proper place, it is recognized as an indispensable step in a methodical approach. Spurgeon rightly indicates that ‘two opposite errors beset the student of the Scripture: the tendency to take everything second hand from others, and the refusal to take anything from others’” (Traina 1985, 9).

For those who do not have commentaries or research tools available in their language, it is possible to fulfill this step by studying the same biblical book with other mature Christians in your area and comparing notes. Be sure to study with people from different perspectives. Hopefully, there is at least one Study Bible available in your language. You can get all the information from it if you learn how to use its margin and footnotes.

Be careful to notice the commentator's theories about historical setting versus their documentation of historical circumstances, either from the Bible itself or historical sources. If one is not careful one's presuppositions about the author's purpose and setting can affect his/her interpretation. A good example of this would be the supposed background of the book of Hebrews. Chapters six and ten are very difficult. Often, an interpretation is proposed based solely on supposed historical circumstances or denominational traditions (i.e., R. E. Glaze, Jr., *No Easy Salvation*, Insight Press, 1984).

H. Check the Significant Parallel Passages

Notice the concentric circles (parallel passages) of interpretive significance. One of the great dangers in interpretation is allowing other parts of the Bible to determine what a particular text means, but also, at the same time, it is one of our greatest helps. It is a matter of timing.

At what point do you look to the wider scope of biblical truth? There is disagreement at this point (Ferguson 1937, 101), but for me the point of focus must first be the original author and the contextual book you are studying. God inspired the biblical authors to say something to their day. We must first understand this message fully before we relate it to other Bible passages we know. If not, we begin reading our favorite, familiar and denominational views into every passage. We allow our personal systematic theology or denomination biases to crush and replace inspired texts! Texts have priority! These concentric circles, as I call them, move from a specific passage to the entire Bible, but only in graded, marked steps.

1. Carefully observe the logical and literary position of your passage within the biblical book. Studying an entire biblical book is crucial. We must see the whole before the significance of the parts is obvious. We must let the author speak in his setting and for his purpose. Never go beyond the particular passage and its immediate context until you have allowed it to speak with its own force. So often we want to solve all of the problems before we take seriously what is being said by a particular inspired biblical author. We often try to protect our theological bias!
2. Once we feel that we have wrestled with the text sufficiently enough to understand the basic message, then we move to the next logical step, which is the same author in his other writings. This is very helpful in twin writings, such as Ezra and Nehemiah; Mark and 1 and 2 Peter; Luke and Acts; John and 1 John; Colossians and Ephesians; Galatians and Romans.
3. The next concentric circle concerns different writers, but those who wrote in the same historical setting, such as Amos and Hosea or Isaiah and Micah, or Haggai and Zechariah. This concentric circle could also relate to the same type of literary genre on the same subject. An example is linking Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 with Daniel, Zechariah, and the book of Revelation. All of these, though written by different authors, relate to the end-time and are written in an apocalyptic genre. This circle is often identified as “biblical theology.” It is an attempt to allow specific sections of Scripture to relate to one another on a controlled basis. If exegesis is a solo, then biblical theology is an ensemble. We are looking for trends, themes, motifs, characteristic words, phrases, or structures of a given period, literary genre, subject, or author.
4. Since all of the Bible is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16) and since our basic presupposition is that it does not contradict itself (analogy of Scripture), then we must allow the Bible to fully explain itself on a given subject. If exegesis is a bite and biblical theology is a slice, then systematic doctrine is the whole pie. If exegesis is a solo and biblical theology is an ensemble, then systematic doctrine is the full choir. Be careful, try never to say, “the Bible says. . .” until you have carefully advanced through each concentric circle of interpretation.

I. Eastern people present truth in tension-filled pairs

The Bible often presents truth in dialectical pairs. If we miss the balancing truth (paradox) we have perverted the overarching biblical message. Unbalanced presentation of truth is what characterizes modern denominations. We must allow the biblical authors to speak, but also the Bible as a whole (other inspired authors). At this stage of interpretation a relevant parallel passage, either confirming, modifying, or seemingly contradicting, is extremely helpful. It must be emphatically stated that it is as damaging to add to the Bible's message as it is to take away from it. Bible truth is presented in clear, simple statements, but the relationship between these clear statements is often quite involved. The crowning glory of interpretation is the big picture, the balanced truth.

Special Topic: [Eastern Literature \(biblical paradoxes\)](#)

J. Concordances and Systematic Theology books

How does one present a book's biblical doctrine systematically? It is similar to biblical theology in that we allow categories, concepts, themes, and words to guide us to

1. other related passages (pro and con)
2. the definitive teaching passage on that subject
3. other elements of the same truth
4. the interchange of the two Testaments

The Bible speaks truly, but not always fully in a given context on a given subject. We must find the clearest biblical presentation of a given truth. This is done by using certain research tools. Again, you should try to work with the least interpretive helps first. An exhaustive concordance of the Bible can be very helpful. It will help you to find word parallels. Often this is all we need to discover the thought or concept parallels. The concordance will show us the different biblical terms which are translated into English. Concordances are now available for the King James Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version. We need to be sure that we are not confusing English words with Hebrew or Greek synonyms. A good concordance will list the different original words and the places of their occurrence. The concentric circles (parallel passages) come into relevance again here. The order of priority will be

1. the immediate context of the literary unit
2. the larger context of the whole book
3. the same author
4. the same period, literary genre, or Testament
5. the entire Bible

There is a new type of lexicon by the United Bible Societies, authored by Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 2 vols., which shows synonymous Greek words. This is often very helpful

Systematic theology books attempt to divide Christian truth into categories and then find all the references on that subject. Often they link these together in very denominational ways. Systematic theologies are the most biased of all reference books. Never consult just one. Always use those from other theological perspectives to force yourself to rethink what you believe, why you believe it, and where you can substantiate it from Scripture.

K. Use of Parallel Passages in Concordances and Systematic Theology books

If there are only a few references for the word you are studying, read all of them and also the entire paragraph in which they occur. If there are too many references, refer to the concentric circles again by reading the references that occur in the immediate context of the literary unit and the larger context of the entire book and select several to read in the other biblical books by the same author, or the same period, literary genre, Testament, or the entire Bible. Be careful because often the same word is used in a different senses in different contexts. Be sure to keep the biblical texts separate. Never allow a mixture of texts from all genres in the Bible without carefully checking the context of each one! Rather try to find parallel truths (pro and con). Some examples of this follow.

1. The use of the term “heavenlies” within the book of Ephesians. At first it seems to mean “heaven when we die,” but when all five uses are compared, it means “the spiritual realm coexisting with us now” (Eph. 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12).
2. The phrase “filling with the Spirit” is used in Eph. 5:18. This has been the focus of great controversy. The book of Colossians helps us with an exact parallel. The Colossian parallel has “let the mind of Christ richly dwell in you” (Col. 3:16).

The next source of help on locating these types of meaningful parallels is a good reference Study Bible. Like all good things, practice makes perfect. As you practice these procedures they will become easier. This is also true of research tools.

At this stage I would like to share with you a practical way to use a type of research tool (mentioned in J.) that most believers do not ever use—systematic theology books. These books are usually extensively indexed by both text and topic. Check the index for your text. Write down the page numbers. Notice what “theological category” they are in. Look at the page and find your text. Read the paragraph; if it is helpful and thought provoking read the page (the whole section).

Check the index for your text. Write down the page numbers. Notice what “theological category” they are in. Look at the page and find your text. Read the paragraph if it is helpful and thought-provoking, read the page (the whole section). Find out how your context fits into the whole of Christian theology. It may be the only text on this topic or one of several. It may be the dialectical paradox to another doctrine. These books can be a great help in seeing the big picture if they are used critically and in concert with several authors, denominations, systematic theologies! A complete listing of the better ones is found at the conclusion of this Textbook (IX p. 105). These books are not for light, devotional reading, but they are so helpful in checking your formulation of the big picture. A note of caution should be given here. These books are very interpretive. Whenever we put our theology into a structure it becomes biased and

presuppositional. This is unavoidable. Therefore, do not consult only one author, but several (this is also true of commentaries). Read systematic theologies from authors with whom you disagree or who are from other denominational backgrounds. Look at their evidence and ponder their logic. Growth comes with struggle. Force them to show you from the Bible what they are saying:

1. Historical context of the author and recipients
2. Literary context (immediate and larger)
3. syntax (grammatical structure)
4. current usage (semantical field word study)
5. parallel passages (concentric circles)
6. cultural issues of the day

God has spoken through Israel, Jesus, and the Apostles (see **Special Topic: [Inspiration](#)**), and in a lesser way, He continues to illumine the church to understand the Scriptures (Silva 1987, 21; see **Special Topic: [Illumination](#)**). The believing community is a guard against wild, radical interpretations. Read the gifted men and women of the past and present. Do not believe all they write (check their documentation), but listen to them through your own Spirit-led filter. We are all historically conditioned.

III. Proposed Order for the Use of Research Tools

Throughout this Textbook you have been encouraged to do your own analysis, but there comes a point beyond which none of us can go personally. We cannot be scholarly specialists in all areas. We must find capable, godly, gifted researchers to help us. This does not mean to imply that we do not critique them and their findings. There are so many research tools available today in the English language that the wealth of these tools can be overwhelming. Here is a proposed order. After you have done all of the preliminary observations of the passage yourself then supplement your information with the following (use different colored ink for your notes and for those from the helps in each area).

- A. Start with the historical setting
 1. use Bible introductions
 2. use articles in Bible encyclopedias, handbooks, or dictionaries
 3. use introductions in biblical commentaries
 4. use Study Bible notes
 5. A good book on how to use these study aids is *How to Use New Testament Greek Study Aids* by Walter Jerry Clark. A more scholarly approach would be *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* by Frederick W. Danker.
- B. Use several types of commentaries
 1. Small. These will help you get an overall understanding of the passage (example: Tyndale, Zondervan's Study Guide Commentary)
 2. Technical. These will help you answer difficult questions. (example: The New International Commentary, The Expositor's Bible Commentary)
 3. Devotional. These will help you develop application points. (example: Matthew Henry, Griffith Thomas)
- C. Use supplementary specialized reference materials
 1. word study books
 2. cultural background books
 3. geographically oriented books
 4. archaeology books
 5. apologetic books
- D. Finally, give this method a try
Remember that we receive truth in increments; do not take shortcuts in your study—do not expect instantaneous results—stay with the program. Expect tension and disagreement in interpretation. Remember that interpretation is a Spirit-led task as well as a logical process. Read the Bible analytically and research tools critically. Practice makes perfect.
- E. Start now. Make a commitment of regularly scheduled Bible study through a biblical book, find a quiet place and set aside a time, choose a small New Testament book first, assemble several Bible translations and a Study Bibles, get paper and pencil, pray, start.

F. FINAL EXHORTATIONS

1. Remember that we receive truth in increments.
2. Do not take shortcuts in your study.
3. Do not expect instantaneous results.
4. Do not become discouraged.
5. Stay with the program.
6. Expect tension and disagreement in interpretation. Remember that interpretation is a Spirit-led task as well as a logical process.
7. Read the Bible analytically.
8. Use research tools critically.
9. Make a commitment of at least thirty minutes every day.
10. Find a quiet place.
11. Set aside a specific time.
12. Choose a short New Testament book first.
13. Assemble some research tools.
14. Get paper and pencil
15. Pray—and start!

SAMPLE CATEGORIES FOR NOTE TAKING

The first suggestion is the use of a written work sheet or form. This will help you to record certain types of information as you read through the biblical book. If you take your personal observation notes in one color of ink, then use other colors for insight from different research tools. The following worksheet is tentative, but it is one which is helpful to me. You may want to develop your own order and headings. The following worksheet is merely a listing of categories of information which may be helpful in interpretation. You will need to leave more space between items on your worksheet. The enclosed sample form is primarily for topics and their relation to the four cycles of readings. Included at the end of this Textbook is a sample of the book of Romans., chapters 1-3 (one literary unit) and the book of Titus (whole book).

NOTE TAKING

I. Reading Cycles

A. First reading

1. The overarching theme or purpose of the whole book is: (brief description)

2. This theme is exemplified in (choose one)
 - a. Verse

 - b. Paragraph

 - c. Chapter

3. The type of literary genre is

B. Second reading

1. The major literary units or content divisions are
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.Etc.

2. Summarize the subject (in a declarative sentence) of each major division and note their relationship to each other (chronological, logical, theological, etc.)

3. List the places you checked your outline

C. Third reading

1. Internal information concerning the historical setting (give chapter and verse)

a. Author of the book

(1)

(2)

(3)

b. Date of its writing or date of event

(1)

(2)

(3)

c. Recipients of the book

(1)

(2)

(3)

d. Occasion of the writing

2. Fill in your working content outline by adding the paragraph divisions. Compare translations from the different translation theory groups, especially from the literal and idiomatic (dynamic equivalent). Then write out your own outline.

3. Summarize each paragraph in a declarative sentence.

4. List possible application points with each major division and/or paragraphs.

D. Fourth reading

1. Make note of significant parallel passages (both positive and negative). Observe these concentric circles of significance.

a. Same book or literary units

b. Same author

c. Same period, subject or literary genre

d. Same Testament

e. Entire Bible

2. Check systematic theology books.

3. Develop specialized lists in order to discern structure.

a. List the major and minor characters.

- b. List key terms (theological, recurrent or unusual terms).
 - c. List the major events.
 - d. List the geographical movements.
4. Make note of difficult passages.
- a. Textual problems
 - (1) from margin of your English Bible
 - (2) from comparing English translations
 - b. Historical problems and uniqueness
 - c. Theological problems of uniqueness
 - d. Those verses that cause you confusion
- E. Application truths
1. Write your detailed outline on the left side of a sheet.
 2. On the right side write down (in pencil) possible application truths for the major literary units and/or the paragraphs.
- F. Use of Research Tools
1. Read research tools in appropriate order. Take notes on a “work sheet.” Look for
 - a. points of agreement
 - b. points of disagreement
 - c. new thoughts or applications
 - d. record possible interpretations on difficult passages
 2. Analyze insights from research tools and develop a final detailed contextual outline (on the left side of a page) with application points (on the right side of a page). This master outline should help you to discern the original author’s purpose and structure.
 - a. Do not major on minors.
 - b. Do not forget the context, both historical and literary.
 - c. Do not read into the text more than, or less than, the original author intended.
 - d. Application points should be done on three levels:
 - (1) theme of the whole book—first reading
 - (2) major literary units—second reading
 - (3) paragraphs—third reading

- e. Allow parallel passages to confirm and clarify your interpretation as the final step. This allows the Bible to interpret itself. However, doing it last safeguards us from allowing our overall systematic theological understanding of the Bible from silencing, ignoring, or skewing difficult passages.

G. Theological Insight

1. Use systematic theology books to find how your text relates to the major truths of the Bible.
2. Describe in your own words the major truth(s) of your passage. Your sermon or teaching lesson should major on this truth!

II. Exegetical Procedures

A. The Text (minimum one paragraph in English)

1. Establish the original text (note any manuscript variants)
2. Translation options
 - a. Word for word (KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV)
 - b. Dynamic equivalent (NIV, NEB, Jerusalem Bible, Williams, TEV)
 - c. Other ancient translations (LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta, etc.)
 - d. No paraphrase translations (i.e., commentaries) at this stage
3. Check any significant variables in the translations and why
 - a. Greek manuscript problem(s)
 - b. Difficult word(s)
 - c. Unique construction(s)
 - d. Theological truth(s)

B. Exegetical items to be checked

1. Note immediate contextual unit (how is your paragraph related to the literary unit and how is it related to the surrounding paragraphs)
2. Note possible structural elements
 - a. Parallel structures
 - b. Quotes/Allusions
 - c. Figures of speech
 - d. Illustrations
 - e. Poem/Hymn/Song

3. Note grammatical elements (syntax)
 - a. VERBS or VERBALS (TENSE, VOICE, MOOD, NUMBER, GENDER)
 - b. Special construction (CONDITIONAL SENTENCES, prohibitions, etc.)
 - c. Word or clause order

Special Topic: [Hebrew Grammar](#)

Special Topic: [Greek Grammatical Terms](#)

4. Note key words
 - a. Give full semantical field
 - b. Which meaning(s) fit the context best
 - c. Be careful of set theological definitions

5. Note significant biblical parallels of words, topics or quotes
 - a. Same context
 - b. Same book
 - c. Same author
 - d. Same genre
 - e. Same period
 - f. Entire Bible

C. Historical Summary

1. How the specific occasion of the writing effects the truth statements.

2. How the cultural milieu effects the truth statements.

3. How recipients effect the truth statements.

D. Theological Summary

1. Theological truths
 - a. State clearly the author's theological assertion:
 - (1) Special terminology
 - (2) Significant clause or phrase
 - (3) Central truth of sentence(s) or paragraph(s)
 - b. How does this relate to the subject or truth of the literary unit?

 - c. How does this relate to the subject or truth of the entire book?

 - d. How does this relate to the subject or truth as revealed in Scripture?

2. Special points of interest
 3. Personal insights
 4. Insights from commentaries
- E. Application Truths
1. Application truth of literary unit
 2. Application truth(s) of paragraph(s) level
 3. Application truth of theological elements within the text

III. Basic Procedures for an Academic NT Word Study

- A. Establish the basic meaning and semantic field
Use *A Greek-English Lexicon* by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker
- B. Establish the contemporary usage (Koine Greek)
1. Use *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* by Moulton, Milligan for Egyptian papyri
 2. Use the Septuagint and Redpath's Concordance of the LXX for Palestinian Judaism
- C. Establish the semantic domain
Use *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* by Louw, Nida or *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by Vine
- D. Establish the Hebrew background
1. Use Strong's Concordance with its numbers linked to the *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver, Briggs
 2. Use *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by Van Gemneren (5 vols.)
 3. use *Synonyms of the Old Testament* by Girdlestone
- E. Establish the grammatical form of the word in context
1. use an interlinear Greek-English New Testament and an analytical lexicon
 2. use *Analytical Greek New Testament* by Timothy and Barbara Friberg
- F. check the frequency of usage by genre, authors, subject, etc. Use a concordance

- G. Check your study with
1. a Bible encyclopedia
 - a. use Zondervan's *Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia* (5 vols)
 - b. use *The International Bible Encyclopedia* (5 vols)
 2. a Bible dictionary
 - a. use *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
 - b. use *Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*
 3. a theological word book
 - a. use *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (3 vols) edited by Colin Brown
 - b. use *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged) by Bromiley
 4. a systematic theological book
 - a. use *Systematic Theology* by Berkhof
 - b. use *A Theology of the New Testament* by Ladd
 - c. use *New Testament Theology* by Stagg
 - d. use a number of others
- H. Write out summary of significant interpretive findings

IV. A Brief Summary of Hermeneutical Principles

- A. Always pray first. The Spirit is essential. God wants you to understand.
- B. Establish the Original Text
1. Check the notes in the margin of your Study Bible for Greek manuscript variants.
 2. Do not build a doctrine on a disputed text, look for a clear parallel passage.
- C. Understanding the Text
1. Read the entire context (literary context is crucial). Check the outline in a Study Bible or commentary to determine the literary unit.
 2. Never try to interpret less than a paragraph. Try to outline the main truths of the paragraphs in the literary unit. This way we can follow the original author's thoughts and their development.
 3. Read the paragraph in several translations which use different translation theories.
 4. Consult good commentaries and other Bible study aids only after you have studied the text first (remember the Bible, the Spirit, and you are priority in biblical interpretation).

D. Understanding the Words

1. The NT writers were Hebrew thinkers, writing in Koine (street) Greek.
2. We must find the contemporary meaning and connotations, not modern English definitions (see the Septuagint and Egyptian papyri).
3. Words have meaning only in sentences. Sentences have meaning only in paragraphs. Paragraphs have meaning only in literary units. Check the semantic field (i.e., various meanings of words).

E. Use Parallel Passages

1. The Bible is the best interpreter of the Bible. It has only one author, the Holy Spirit.
2. Look for the clearest teaching text on the truth of your paragraph (reference Bible or concordance).
3. Look for the paradoxical truths (tension-filled pairs of eastern literature).

F. Application

1. You cannot apply the Bible to your day until you understand what the inspired author was saying to his/her day (historical context is crucial).
2. Be careful of personal biases, theological systems, or agendas. Let the Bible speak for itself!
3. Be careful of principlizing every verse. Not all texts have universal relevance. Not all texts apply to modern individuals.
4. Respond immediately to new truth or insight. Bible knowledge is meant to produce daily Christlikeness and kingdom service.

Special Topic: [A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)

**A SELECTED LIST OF
RECOMMENDED RESEARCH TOOLS BY CATEGORY**

**(It must be remembered that I wrote this in 1987, so my
bibliography is dated. Most of these are still available as
used books)**

I. The Bible

- A. Understanding the process of translating.
 - 1. J. Beekman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God*
 - 2. Eugene Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language* (William Carey, N.D.)
 - 3. Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht, *So Many Versions* (Zondervan, 1983)
 - 4. F. F. Bruce, *The Book and the Parchments* (Revell, 1963)
- B. History of the English Bible
 - 1. F. F. Bruce *The English Bible: A History of Translations From the Earliest Versions to the New English Bible* (Oxford, 1970)
 - 2. Ira Maurice Price, *The Ancestry of Our English Bible* (Harper, 1956)

II. How To Do Research

- A. Walter J. Clark, *How To Use New Testament Greek Study Aids* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1983)
- B. F.W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (Concordia, 1970)
- C. R.T. France, *A Bibliographic Guide to New Testament Research* (JSOT Press, 1979)
- D. D. W. Scholer, *A Basic Bibliographic Guide for New Testament Exegesis* (Eerdmans, 1973)

III. Hermeneutics

- A. James Braga, *How to Study the Bible* (Multnomah, 1982)
- B. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 1982)
- C. Richard Mayhue, *How to Interpret the Bible for Yourself* (Moody, 1986)
- D. J. Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Moody, 1983)
- E. A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1963)
- F. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Broadman & Holman, 1996)
- G. Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*

IV. Exegesis

- A. Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*
- B. D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*
- C. John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Word, 1992)

V. Basic Introduction to Biblical Books

- A. Old Testament
 - 1. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1969)
 - 2. William Sanford LaSor, David Allen Hubbard, and Frederic Wm, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Eerdmans, 1982)
 - 3. Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1949)
 - 4. T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Baker, 1998)
 - 5. Peter C. Craigie, *The Old Testament: Its Background, Growth and Context* (Abingdon, 1990)
- B. New Testament
 - 1. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (IVP, 1970)
 - 2. Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth and Content* (Abingdon, 1965)
 - 3. D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1992)
 - 4. Robert H. Gendry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1994)

VI. Bible Encyclopedias and Dictionaries (multi-volumes)

- A. M. Tenney, ed. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, 5 vols (Zondervan, 1976)
- B. G. A. Buttrick, ed. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible and Supplement*, 5 vols. (Abingdon, 1962-1977)
- C. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 5 vols., rev. ed. (Eerdmans, 1979-1987)
- D. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and J. Howard Marshall, editors, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (IVP, 1992)
- E. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel Ge. Reid, editors, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP, 1993)
- F. David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (Doubleday, 1992)

VII. Commentary Sets

A. Old Testament

1. D. J. Wiseman, ed., *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (InterVarsity, 1970)
2. *A Study Guide Commentary Series* (Zondervan, 1977)
3. R. K. Harrison, ed., *The New International Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1976)
4. Frank. E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1958)
5. Bob Utley, www.freebiblecommentary.org

B. New Testament

1. R. V. G. Tasker, ed., *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans, 1959)
2. *A Study Guide Commentary Series* (Zondervan, 1977)
3. Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1958)
4. *The New International Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1976)
5. Bob Utley, www.freebiblecommentary.org

VIII. Word Studies

A. Old Testament

1. Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1897)
2. Aaron Pick, *Dictionary of Old Testament Words* (Kreel, 1977)
3. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody, 1980)
4. William A. Van Gemeren, editor, *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Zondervan, 1997)

B. New Testament

1. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Broadman, 1930)
2. M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (MacDonald, 1888)
3. W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Revell, 1968)
4. William Barclay, *A New Testament Wordbook* (SCM, 1955)
5. _____, *More New Testament Words* (Harper, 1958)
6. C. Brown, et. Al., *The New Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 5 vols. (Zondervan, 1975-1979)

C. Theological

1. Alan Richardson, ed., *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (MacMillan, 1950)
2. Evertt F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1975)

IX. Cultural Setting

A. Customs

1. Adolf Deissman, *Light From the Ancient East* (Baker, 1978)
2. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (McGraw-Hill, 1961)
3. James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Logos, 1972)
4. Fred H. Wright, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Moody, 1953)
5. Jack Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past*, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1974)
6. Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible* (Hendrickson, 1988)

B. Histories

1. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Westminster, 1981)
2. D. J. Wiseman, ed., *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford, 1973)
3. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1970)

C. New Testament

1. Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East* (Baker, 1978)
2. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1969)
3. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Harper's World of the New Testament* (Harper and Row, 1981)
4. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Eerdmans, 1971)
5. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford, 1963)
6. J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Eerdmans, 1939)

D. Archaeology

1. Jack Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past*, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1946)
2. H. T. Vos, *Archaeology of Bible Lands* (Moody, 1977)
3. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures* (Holman, 1972)
4. K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1966)
5. John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Zondervan, 1989)

E. Geography

1. C. F. Pfeiffer and H. F. Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands* (Moody, 1967)

2. Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Moody, 1985)
3. Thomas V. Brisco ed., *Holman Bible Atlas* (Broadman and Holman, 1998)

X. Theologies

A. Old Testament

1. A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Clark, 1904)
2. Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Harper & Row, 1958)
3. Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Zondervan, 1978)
4. Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (IVP, 1998)

B. New Testament

1. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (InterVarsity, 1981)
2. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1974)
3. Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology* (Broadman, 1962)
4. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 2 (Harper & Row, 1978)

C. Entire Bible

1. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1948)
2. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1939)
3. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 1940)
4. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 1998)

D. Doctrine—historically developed

1. L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Baker, 1975)
2. Justo L. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Abingdon, 1970)

XI. Apologetics

- A. Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1976)
- B. Bernard Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1962)
- C. J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (MacMillan, 1953)
- D. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (MacMillan, 1978)
- E. Colin Brown, ed., *History, Criticism and Faith* (InterVarsity, 1976)
- F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions* (Zondervan, 1972)

- G. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (IVP, 1996)

XII. Bible Difficulties

- A. F. F. Bruce, *Questions and Answers*
- B. Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Zondervan, 1982)
- C. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Victor, 1992)
- D. Walter C., Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce and Manfred F. Baruch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (IVP, 1996) and *More Hard Sayings of the Bible*

XIII. Textual Criticism

- A. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (Oxford, 1964)
- B. J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Eerdmans, 1964)
- C. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (United Bible Societies.)

XIV. Lexicons

- A. Old Testament (Hebrew)
1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Clarendon Press, 1951)
 2. Bruce Einspahr, *Index to Brown, Driver and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*
 3. Benjamin Davidson, *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (MacDonald)
 4. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols.
- B. New Testament (Greek)
1. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (University of Chicago Press, 1979)
 2. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 2 vols. (United Bible Societies, 1989)

3. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Eerdmans, 1974)
4. William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1993)

XV. At this point I would like to list the authors who have helped me the most in my pilgrimage of faith (Bob's favorite authors).

- A. F. F. Bruce
- B. Gordon Fee
- C. John H. Walton
- D. D. Brent Sandy
- E. R. K. Harrison
- F. George Eldon Ladd
- G. Frank Stagg
- H. Roland deVaux
- I. Alfred Edersheim
- J. Bernard Ramm

I highly commend the books by these brothers!

XVI. Available web sites to buy out of print, used, and discounted books

- A. www.Christianbooks.com
- B. www.Half.com
- C. www.Overstock.com
- D. www.Alibris.com
- E. www.Amazon.com
- F. www.BakerBooksRetain.com
- G. www.ChristianUsedBooks.net

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

I do not particularly care for statements of faith or creeds. I prefer to affirm the Bible itself. However, I realize that a statement of faith will provide those who are unfamiliar with me a way to evaluate my doctrinal perspective. In our day of so much theological error and deception, the following brief summary of my theology is offered.

1. The Bible, both the Old and New Testament, is the inspired, infallible, authoritative, eternal Word of God. It is the self-revelation of God recorded by men under supernatural leadership. It is our only source of clear truth about God and His purposes. It is also the only source of faith and practice for His church.

2. There is only one eternal, creator, redeemer God. He is the creator of all things, visible and invisible. He has revealed Himself as loving and caring although He is also fair and just. He has revealed Himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Spirit; truly separate and yet the same in essence.

3. God is actively in control of His world. There is both an eternal plan for His creation that is unalterable and an individually focused one that allows human free will. Nothing happens without God's knowledge and permission, yet He allows individual choices both among angels and humans. Jesus is the Father's Elect Man and all are potentially elect in Him. God's foreknowledge of events does not reduce humans to a determined pre-written script. All of us are responsible for our thoughts and deeds.

4. Mankind, though created in God's image and free from sin, chose to rebel against God. Although tempted by a supernatural agent, Adam and Eve were responsible for their willful self-centeredness. Their rebellion has affected humanity and creation. We are all in need of God's mercy and grace both for our corporate condition in Adam and our individual volitional rebellion.

5. God has provided a means of forgiveness and restoration for fallen humanity. Jesus Christ, God's unique son, became a man, lived a sinless life, and by means of his substitutionary death, paid the penalty for mankind's sin. He is the only way to restoration and fellowship with God. There is no other means of salvation except through faith in His finished work.

6. Each of us must personally receive God's offer of forgiveness and restoration in Jesus. This is accomplished by means of volitional trust in God's promises through Jesus and a willful turning from known sin.

7. All of us are fully forgiven and restored based upon our trust in Christ and repentance from sin. However, the evidence for this new relationship is seen in a changed, and changing, life. The goal of God for humanity is not only heaven someday, but Christlikeness now. Those who are truly redeemed, though occasionally sinning, will continue in faith and repentance throughout their lives.

8. The Holy Spirit is "the other Jesus." He is present in the world to lead the lost to Christ and develop Christlikeness in the saved. The gifts of the Spirit are given at salvation. They are the life and ministry of Jesus divided among His body, the Church. The gifts which are basically the attitudes and motives of Jesus need to be motivated by the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit is active in our day as He was in the biblical times.

9. The Father has made the resurrected Jesus Christ the Judge of all things. He will return to earth to judge all mankind. Those who have trusted Jesus and whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will receive their eternal glorified bodies at His return. They will be with Him forever. However, those who have refused to respond to God's truth will be separated eternally from the joys of fellowship with the Triune God. They will be condemned along with the Devil and his angels.

This is surely not complete or thorough but I hope it will give you the theological flavor of my heart. I like the statement:

"In essentials—unity, In peripherals—freedom, In all things—love."

A Poem

It cannot mean what it never meant
I've etched that on my brain.

And when I study Scripture
I echo that refrain.

I've studied hermeneutics and exegesis too,
So, as a consequence of this
I've somewhat changed my view.
I've learned some nomenclature
too lengthy to define

like cultural relativity and textual design.

There is so much I want to know,
How to ferret out the truth.

I hope someday that I'll become a
Bible-reading sleuth.

A new respect has taken me, for God's own holy word
inspiring me to know the truth, to hear as it was heard.

But I know I must remember,
I stepped through an open door,
and never can return again to where I was before.

Pat Bergeron

11/27/

A GUIDE TO GOOD BIBLE READING: A PERSONAL SEARCH FOR VERIFIABLE TRUTH

Can we know truth? Where is it found? Can we logically verify it? Is there an ultimate authority? Are there absolutes which can guide our lives, our world? Is there meaning to life? Why are we here? Where are we going? These questions—questions that all rational people contemplate—have haunted the human intellect since the beginning of time (Eccl. 1:13-18; 3:9-11). I can remember my personal search for an integrating center for my life. I became a believer in Christ at a young age, based primarily on the witness of significant others in my family. As I grew to adulthood, questions about myself and my world also grew. Simple cultural and religious clichés did not bring meaning to the experiences I read about or encountered. It was a time of confusion, searching, longing, and often a feeling of hopelessness in the face of the insensitive, hard world in which I lived.

Many claimed to have answers to these ultimate questions, but after research and reflection I found that their answers were based upon (1) personal philosophies, (2) ancient myths, (3) personal experiences, or (4) psychological projections. I needed some degree of verification, some evidence, some rationality on which to base my world-view, my integrating center, my reason to live.

I found these in my study of the Bible. I began to search for evidence of its trustworthiness, which I found in (1) the historical reliability of the Bible as confirmed by archaeology, (2) the accuracy of the prophecies of the Old Testament, (3) the unity of the Bible message over the sixteen hundred years of its production, and (4) the personal testimonies of people whose lives had been permanently changed by contact with the Bible. Christianity, as a unified system of faith and belief, has the ability to deal with complex questions of human life. Not only did this provide a rational framework, but the experiential aspect of biblical faith brought me emotional joy and stability.

I thought that I had found the integrating center for my life—Christ, as understood through the Scriptures. It was a heady experience, an emotional release. However, I can still remember the shock and pain when it began to dawn on me how many different interpretations of this book were advocated, sometimes even within the same churches and schools of thought. Affirming the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible was not the end, but only the beginning. How do I verify or reject the varied and conflicting interpretations of the many difficult passages in Scripture by those who were claiming its authority and trustworthiness?

This task became my life's goal and pilgrimage of faith. I knew that my faith in Christ had (1) brought me great peace and joy. My mind longed for some absolutes in the midst of the relativity of my culture (post-modernity); (2) the dogmatism of conflicting religious systems (world religions); and (3) denominational arrogance. In my search for valid approaches to the interpretation of ancient literature, I was surprised to discover my own historical, cultural, denominational and experiential biases. I had often read the Bible simply to reinforce my own views. I used it as a source of dogma to attack others while reaffirming my own insecurities and inadequacies. How painful this realization was to me!

Although I can never be totally objective, I can become a better reader of the Bible. I can limit my biases by identifying them and acknowledging their presence. I am not yet free of them, but I have confronted my own weaknesses. The interpreter is often the worst enemy of good Bible reading!

Let me list some of the presuppositions I bring to my study of the Bible so that you, the reader, may examine them along with me:

I. Presuppositions

- A. I believe the Bible is the sole inspired self-revelation of the one true God. Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of the intent of the original divine author (the Spirit) through a human writer in a specific historical setting.
- B. I believe the Bible was written for the common person—for all people! God accommodated Himself to speak to us clearly within a historical and cultural context. God does not hide truth—He wants us to understand! Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of its day, not ours. The Bible should not mean to us what it never meant to those who first read or heard it. It is understandable by the average human mind and uses normal human communication forms and techniques.
- C. I believe the Bible has a unified message and purpose. It does not contradict itself, though it does contain difficult and paradoxical passages. Thus, the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself.
- D. I believe that every passage (excluding prophecies) has one and only one meaning based on the intent of the original, inspired author. Although we can never be absolutely certain we know the original author's intent, many indicators point in its direction:
 - 1. the genre (literary type) chosen to express the message
 - 2. the historical setting and/or specific occasion that elicited the writing
 - 3. the literary context of the entire book as well as each literary unit
 - 4. the textual design (outline) of the literary units as they relate to the whole message
 - 5. the specific grammatical features employed to communicate the message
 - 6. the words chosen to present the message
 - 7. parallel passages

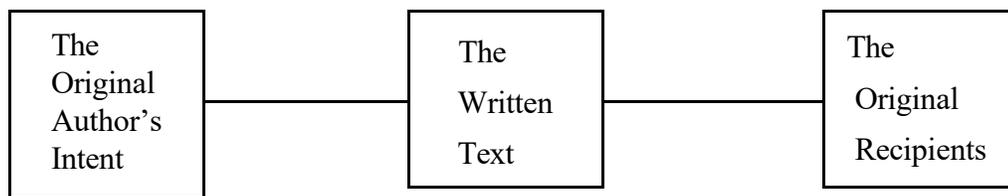
The study of each of these areas becomes the object of our study of a passage. Before I explain my methodology for good Bible reading, let me delineate some of the inappropriate methods being used today that have caused so much diversity of interpretation, and that consequently should be avoided:

II. Inappropriate Methods

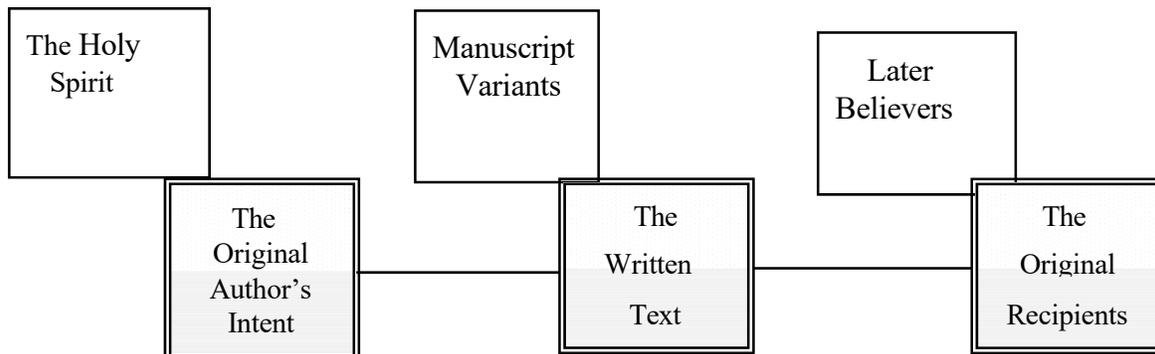
- A. Ignoring the literary context of the books of the Bible and using every sentence, clause, or even individual words as statements of truth unrelated to the author's intent or the larger context. This is often called "proof-texting."

- B. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by substituting a supposed historical setting that has little or no support from the text itself.
- C. Ignoring the historical setting of the books and reading it as the morning hometown newspaper written primarily to modern individual Christians.
- D. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by allegorizing the text into a philosophical/theological message totally unrelated to the first hearers and the original author's intent.
- E. Ignoring the original message by substituting one's own system of theology, pet doctrine, or contemporary issue unrelated to the original author's purpose and stated message. This phenomenon often follows the initial reading of the Bible as a means of establishing a speaker's authority. This is often referred to as "reader response" ("what-the-text-means-to-me" interpretation).

At least three related components may be found in all written human communication:



In the past, different reading techniques have focused on one of the three components. But to truly affirm the unique inspiration of the Bible, a modified diagram is more appropriate:



In truth all three components must be included in the interpretive process. For the purpose of verification, my interpretation focuses on the first two components: the original author and the text. I am probably reacting to the abuses I have observed (1) allegorizing or spiritualizing texts and (2) "reader response" interpretation (what-it-means-to-me). Abuse may occur at each stage. We must always check our motives, biases, techniques, and applications. But how do we check them if there are no boundaries to interpretations, no limits, no criteria? This is where authorial intent and textual structure provide me with some criteria for limiting the scope of possible valid interpretations.

In light of these inappropriate reading techniques, what are some possible approaches to good Bible reading and interpretation which offer a degree of verification and consistency?

III. Possible Approaches to Good Bible Reading

At this point I am not discussing the unique techniques of interpreting specific genres but general hermeneutical principles valid for all types of biblical texts. A good book for genre-specific approaches is *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, published by Zondervan.

My methodology focuses initially on the reader allowing the Holy Spirit to illumine the Bible through four personal reading cycles. This makes the Spirit, the text and the reader primary, not secondary. This also protects the reader from being unduly influenced by commentators. I have heard it said: “The Bible throws a lot of light on commentaries.” This is not meant to be a depreciating comment about study aids, but rather a plea for an appropriate timing for their use.

We must be able to support our interpretations from the text itself. Three areas provide at least limited verification:

1. the original author’s
 - a. historical setting
 - b. literary context
2. the original author’s choice of
 - a. grammatical structures (syntax)
 - b. contemporary work usage
 - c. genre
3. our understanding of appropriate
 - a. relevant parallel passages
 - b. relationship between doctrines (paradox)

We need to be able to provide the reasons and logic behind our interpretations. The Bible is our only source for faith and practice. Sadly, Christians often disagree about what it teaches or affirms. It is self-defeating to claim inspiration for the Bible and then for believers not to be able to agree on what it teaches and requires!

The four reading cycles are designed to provide the following interpretive insights:

- A. The first reading cycle
 1. Read the book in a single sitting. Read it again in a different translation, hopefully from a different translation theory
 - a. word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
 - b. dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
 - c. paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
 2. Look for the central purpose of the entire writing. Identify its theme.

3. Isolate (if possible) a literary unit, a chapter, a paragraph or a sentence which clearly expresses this central purpose or theme.
 4. Identify the predominant literary genre
 - a. Old Testament
 - (1) Hebrew narrative
 - (2) Hebrew poetry (wisdom literature, psalm)
 - (3) Hebrew prophecy (prose, poetry)
 - (4) Law codes
 - b. New Testament
 - (1) Narratives (Gospels, Acts)
 - (2) Parables (Gospels)
 - (3) Letters/epistles
 - (4) Apocalyptic literature
- B. The second reading cycle
1. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify major topics or subjects.
 2. Outline the major topics and briefly state their contents in a simple statement.
 3. Check your purpose statement and broad outline with study aids.
- C. The third reading cycle
1. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify the historical setting and specific occasion for the writing from the Bible book itself.
 2. List the historical items that are mentioned in the Bible book
 - a. the author
 - b. the date
 - c. the recipients
 - d. the specific reason for writing
 - e. aspects of the cultural setting that relate to the purpose of the writing
 - f. references to historical people and events
 3. Expand your outline to paragraph level for that part of the biblical book you are interpreting. Always identify and outline the literary unit. This may be several chapters or paragraphs. This enables you to follow the original author's logic and textual design.
 4. Check your historical setting by using study aids.
- D. The fourth reading cycle
1. Read the specific literary unit again in several translations
 - a. word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
 - b. dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
 - c. paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
 2. Look for literary or grammatical structures
 - a. repeated phrases, Eph. 1:6,12,13
 - b. repeated grammatical structures, Rom. 8:31
 - c. contrasting concepts

3. List the following items
 - a. significant terms
 - b. unusual terms
 - c. important grammatical structures
 - d. particularly difficult words, clauses, and sentences
4. Look for relevant parallel passages
 - a. look for the clearest teaching passage on your subject using
 - (1) “systematic theology” books
 - (2) reference Bibles
 - (3) concordances
 - b. Look for a possible paradoxical pair within your subject. Many biblical truths are presented in dialectical pairs; many denominational conflicts come from proof-texting half of a biblical tension. All of the Bible is inspired, and we must seek out its complete message in order to provide a Scriptural balance to our interpretation.
 - c. Look for parallels within the same book, same author or same genre; the Bible is its own best interpreter because it has one author, the Spirit.
5. Use study aids to check your observations of historical setting and occasion
 - a. study Bibles
 - b. Bible encyclopedias, handbooks and dictionaries
 - c. Bible introductions
 - d. Bible commentaries (at this point in your study, allow the believing community, past and present, to aid and correct your personal study.)

IV. Application of Bible interpretation

At this point we turn to application. You have taken the time to understand the text in its original setting; now you must apply it to your life, your culture. I define biblical authority as “understanding what the original biblical author was saying to his day and applying that truth to our day.”

Application must follow interpretation of the original author’s intent both in time and logic. We cannot apply a Bible passage to our own day until we know what it was saying to its day! A Bible passage should not mean what it never meant!

Your detailed outline, to paragraph level (reading cycle #3), will be your guide. Application should be made at paragraph level, not word level. Words have meaning only in context; clauses have meaning only in context; sentences have meaning only in context. The only inspired person involved in the interpretive process is the original author. We only follow his lead by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But illumination is not inspiration. To say “thus saith the Lord,” we must abide by the original author’s intent. Application must relate specifically to the general intent of the whole writing, the specific literary unit and paragraph level thought development.

Do not let the issues of our day interpret the Bible; let the Bible speak! This may require us to draw principles from the text. This is valid if the text supports a principle. Unfortunately, many times our principles are just that, “our” principles—not the text’s principles.

In applying the Bible, it is important to remember that (except in prophecy) one and only one meaning is valid for a particular Bible text. That meaning is related to the intent of the original author as he addressed a crisis or need in his day. Many possible applications may be derived from this one meaning. The application will be based on the recipients’ needs but must be related to the original author’s meaning.

V. The Spiritual Aspect of Interpretation

So far I have discussed the logical and textual process involved in interpretation and application. Now let me discuss briefly the spiritual aspect of interpretation. The following checklist has been helpful for me:

- A. Pray for the Spirit’s help (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-2:16).
- B. Pray for personal forgiveness and cleansing from known sin (cf. 1 John 1:9).
- C. Pray for a greater desire to know God (cf. Ps. 19:7-14; 42:1ff.; 119:1ff).
- D. Apply any new insight immediately to your own life.
- E. Remain humble and teachable.

It is so hard to keep the balance between the logical process and the spiritual leadership of the Holy Spirit. The following quotes have helped me balance the two:

- A. from James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting*, pp. 17-18:

“The illumination comes to the minds of God’s people—not just to the spiritual elite. There is no guru class in biblical Christianity, no illuminati, no people through whom all proper interpretation must come. And so, while the Holy Spirit gives special gifts of wisdom, knowledge and spiritual discernment, He does not assign these gifted Christians to be the only authoritative interpreters of His Word. It is up to each of His people to learn, to judge and to discern by reference to the Bible which stands as the authority even to those to whom God has given special abilities. To summarize, the assumption I am making throughout the entire book is that the Bible is God’s true revelation to all humanity, that it is our ultimate authority on all matters about which it speaks, that it is not a total mystery but can be adequately understood by ordinary people in every culture.”

- B. on Kierkegaard, found in Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 75:

According to Kierkegaard the grammatical, lexical, and historical study of the Bible was necessary but preliminary to the true reading of the Bible. “To read the Bible *as God’s word* one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or

professionally is not to read the Bible as God's Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God."

C. H. H. Rowley in *The Relevance of the Bible*, p. 19:

"No merely intellectual understanding of the Bible, however complete, can possess all its treasures. It does not despise such understanding, for it is essential to a complete understanding. But it must lead to a spiritual understanding of the spiritual treasures of this book if it is to be complete. And for that spiritual understanding something more than intellectual alertness is necessary. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the Bible student needs an attitude of spiritual receptivity, an eagerness to find God that he may yield himself to Him, if he is to pass beyond his scientific study unto the richer inheritance of this greatest of all books."

VI. This Commentary's Method

The *Study Guide Commentary* is designed to aid your interpretive procedures in the following ways:

- A. A brief historical outline introduces each book. After you have done "reading cycle #3" check this information.
- B. Contextual insights are found at the beginning of each chapter. This will help you see how the literary unit is structured.
- C. At the beginning of each chapter or major literary unit the paragraph divisions and their descriptive captions are provided from several modern translations:
 1. The United Bible Society Greek text, fourth edition revised (UBS⁴)
 2. The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update (NASB)
 3. The New King James Version (NKJV)
 4. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
 5. Today's English Version (TEV)
 6. The Jerusalem Bible (JB)

Paragraph divisions are not inspired. They must be ascertained from the context. By comparing several modern translations from differing translation theories and theological perspectives, we are able to analyze the supposed structure of the original author's thought. Each paragraph has one major truth. This has been called "the topic sentence" or "the central idea of the text." This unifying thought is the key to proper historical, grammatical interpretation. One should never interpret, preach or teach on less than a paragraph! Also remember that each paragraph is related to its surrounding paragraphs. This is why a paragraph level outline of the entire book is so important. We must be able to follow the logical flow of the subject being addressed by the original inspired author.

- D. Bob's notes follow a verse-by-verse approach to interpretation. This forces us to follow the original author's thought. The notes provide information from several areas:
 1. literary context

2. historical, cultural insights
 3. grammatical information
 4. word studies
 5. relevant parallel passages
- E. At certain points in the commentary, the printed text of the New American Standard Version (1995 update) will be supplemented by the translations of several other modern versions:
1. The New King James Version (NKJV), which follows the textual manuscripts of the “Textus Receptus.”
 2. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is a word-for-word revision from the National Council of Churches of the Revised Standard Version.
 3. The Today’s English Version (TEV), which is a dynamic equivalent translation from the American Bible Society.
 4. The Jerusalem Bible (JB), which is an English translation based on a French Catholic dynamic equivalent translation.
- F. For those who do not read Greek, comparing English translations can help in identifying problems in the text:
1. manuscript variations
 2. alternate word meanings
 3. grammatically difficult texts and structure
 4. ambiguous texts
- Although the English translations cannot solve these problems, they do target them as places for deeper and more thorough study.
- G. At the close of each chapter relevant discussion questions are provided which attempt to target the major interpretive issues of that chapter.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS OFTEN USED IN HISTORICAL, TEXTUAL, AND LEXICAL STUDIES

Adoptionism. This was one of the early views of Jesus' relation to deity. It basically asserted that Jesus was a normal human in every way and was adopted in a special sense by God at his baptism (cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11) or at His resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4). Jesus lived such an exemplary life that God, at some point, (baptism, resurrection) adopted Him as His "son" (cf. Rom. 1:4; Phi. 2:9). This was an early church and eighth century minority view. Instead of God becoming a man (the Incarnation) it reverses this and now man becomes God!

It is difficult to verbalize how Jesus, God the Son, pre-existent deity, was rewarded or extolled for an exemplary life. If He was already God, how could He be rewarded? If He had pre-existent divine glory how could He be honored more? Although it is hard for us to comprehend, the Father somehow honored Jesus in a special sense for His perfect fulfillment of the Father's will.

Alexandrian School. This method of biblical interpretation was developed in Alexandria, Egypt in the second century A.D. It uses the basic interpretive principles of Philo, who was a follower of Plato. It is often called the allegorical method. It held sway in the church until the time of the Reformation. Its most able proponents were Origen and Augustine. See Moises Silva, *Has The Church Misread The Bible?* (Academic, 1987)

Alexandrinus. This fifth-century Greek manuscript from Alexandria, Egypt includes the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and most of the New Testament. It is one of our major witnesses to the entire Greek New Testament (except parts of Matthew, John, and II Corinthians). When this manuscript, which is designated "A," and the manuscript designated "B" (Vaticanus) agree on a reading, it is considered to be original by most scholars in most instances.

Allegory. This is a type of biblical interpretation which originally developed within Alexandrian Judaism. It was popularized by Philo of Alexandria. Its basic thrust is the desire to make the Scripture relevant to one's culture or philosophical system by ignoring the Bible's historical setting and/or literary context. It seeks a hidden or spiritual meaning behind every text of Scripture. It must be admitted that Jesus, in Matthew 13, and Paul, in Galatians 4, used allegory to communicate truth. This, however, was in the form of typology, not strictly allegory.

Analytical lexicon. This is a type of research tool which allows one to identify every Greek form in the New Testament. It is a compilation, in Greek alphabetical order, of forms and basic definitions. In combination with an interlinear translation, it allows non-Greek reading believers to analyze New Testament Greek grammatical and syntactic forms.

Analogy of Scripture. This is the phrase used to describe the view that all of the Bible is inspired by God and is, therefore, not contradictory but complementary. This presuppositional affirmation is the basis for the use of parallel passages in interpreting a biblical text.

Ambiguity. This refers to the uncertainty that results in a written document when there are two or more possible meanings or when two or more things are being referred to at the same time. It is possible that John uses purposeful ambiguity (double entendres).

Anthropomorphic. Meaning "having characteristics associated with human beings," this term is used to describe our religious language about God. It comes from the Greek term for mankind. It means that we speak about God as if He were a man. God is described in physical, sociological, and

psychological terms which relate to human beings (cf. Gen. 3:8; I Kgs. 22:19-23). This, of course, is only an analogy. However, there are no categories or terms other than human ones for us to use. Therefore, our knowledge of God, though true, is limited.

Antiochian School. This method of biblical interpretation was developed in Antioch, Syria in the third century A.D. as a reaction to the allegorical method of Alexandria, Egypt. Its basic thrust was to focus on the historical meaning of the Bible. It interpreted the Bible as normal, human literature. This school became involved in the controversy over whether Christ had two natures (Nestorianism) or one nature (fully God and fully man). It was labeled heretical by the Roman Catholic Church and relocated to Persia but the school had little significance. Its basic hermeneutical principles later became interpretive principles of the Classical Protestant Reformers (Luther and Calvin).

Antithetical. This is one of three descriptive terms used to denote the relationship between lines of Hebrew poetry. It relates to lines of poetry which are opposite in meaning (cf. Prov. 10:1, 15:1).

Apocalyptic literature. This was predominantly, possibly even uniquely, a Jewish genre. It was a cryptic type of writing used in times of invasion and occupation of the Jews by foreign world powers. It assumes that a personal, redemptive God created and controls world events, and that Israel is of special interest and care to Him. This literature promises ultimate victory through God's special effort.

It is highly symbolic and fanciful with many cryptic terms. It often expressed truth in colors, numbers, visions, dreams, angelic mediation, secret code words and often a sharp dualism between good and evil.

Some examples of this genre are (1) in the OT, Ezekiel (chapters 36-48), Daniel (chapters 7-12), Zechariah; and (2) in the NT, Matt.24; Mark 13; II Thess. 2 and Revelation.

Apologist (Apologetics). This is from the Greek root for "legal defense." This is a specific discipline within theology which seeks to give evidence and rational arguments for the Christian faith.

A priori. This is basically synonymous with the term "presupposition." It involves reasoning from previously accepted definitions, principles or positions which are assumed to be true. It is that which is accepted without examination or analysis.

Arianism. Arius was a presbyter in the church at Alexandria Egypt in the third and early fourth century. He affirmed that Jesus was pre-existent but not divine (not of the same essence as the Father), possibly following Proverbs 8:22-31. He was challenged by the bishop of Alexandria, who started (A.D. 318) a controversy which lasted many years. Arianism became the official creed of the Eastern Church. The Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, condemned Arius and asserted the full equality and deity of the Son.

Aristotle. He was one of the philosophers of ancient Greece, a pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. His influence, even today, reaches into many areas of modern studies. This is because he emphasized knowledge through observation and classification. This is one of the tenets of the scientific method.

Autographs. This is the name given to the original writings of the Bible. These original, handwritten manuscripts have all been lost. Only copies of copies remain. This is the source of many of the textual variants in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and ancient versions.

Bezae. This is a Greek and Latin manuscript of the sixth century A.D. It is designated by "D." It contains the Gospels and Acts and some of the General Epistles. It is characterized by numerous

scribal additions. It forms the basis for the “Textus Receptus,” the major Greek manuscript tradition behind the King James Version.

Bias. This is the term used to describe a strong predisposition toward an object or point of view. It is the mindset in which impartiality is impossible regarding a particular object or point of view. It is a prejudiced position.

Biblical Authority. This term is used in a very specialized sense. It is defined as understanding what the original author said to his day and applying this truth to our day. Biblical authority is usually defined as viewing the Bible itself as our only authoritative guide. However, in light of current, improper interpretations, I have limited the concept to the Bible as interpreted by the tenets of the historical-grammatical method.

Canon. This is a term used to describe writings which are believed to be uniquely inspired. It is used regarding both the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Christocentric. This is a term used to describe the centrality of Jesus. I use it in connection with the concept that Jesus is Lord of all the Bible. The Old Testament points toward Him and He is its fulfillment and goal (cf. Matt. 5:17-48).

Commentary. This is a specialized type of research book. It gives the general background of a biblical book. It then tries to explain the meaning of each section of the book. Some focus on application, while others deal with the text in a more technical way. These books are helpful, but should be used after one has done his own preliminary study. The commentator’s interpretations should never be accepted uncritically. Comparing several commentaries from different theological perspectives is usually helpful.

Concordance. This is a type of research tool for Bible study. It lists every occurrence of every word in the Old and New Testaments. It helps in several ways: (1) determining the Hebrew or Greek word which lies behind any particular English word; (2) comparing passages where the same Hebrew or Greek word was used; (3) showing where two different Hebrew or Greek terms are translated by the same English word; (4) showing the frequency of the use of certain words in certain books or authors; (5) helping one find a passage in the Bible (cf. Walter Clark’s *How to Use New Testament Greek Study Aids*, pp. 54-55).

Dead Sea Scrolls. This refers to a series of ancient texts written in Hebrew and Aramaic which were found near the Dead Sea in 1947. They were the religious libraries of sectarian Judaism of the first century. The pressure of Roman occupation and the zealot wars of the 60's caused them to conceal the scrolls in hermetically sealed pottery jars in caves or holes. They have helped us understand the historical setting of first century Palestine and have confirmed the Masoretic Text as being very accurate, at least as far back as the early B.C. era. They are designated by the abbreviation “DSS.”

Deductive. This method of logic or reasoning moves from general principles to specific applications by means of reason. It is opposite from inductive reasoning, which reflects the scientific method by moving from observed specifics to general conclusions (theories).

Dialectical. This is the method of reasoning whereby that which seems contradictory or paradoxical is held together in a tension, seeking a unified answer which includes both sides of the paradox. Many biblical doctrines have dialectical pairs, predestination—free will; security—perseverance; faith—works; decision—discipleship; Christian freedom—Christian responsibility.

Diaspora. This is the technical Greek term used by Palestinian Jews to describe other Jews who live outside the geographical boundaries of the Promised Land.

Dynamic equivalent. This is a theory of Bible translation. Bible translation can be viewed as a continuum from “word to word” correspondence, where an English word must be supplied for every Hebrew or Greek word, to a “paraphrase” where only the thought is translated with less regard to the original wording or phrasing. In between these two theories is “the dynamic equivalent” which attempts to take the original text seriously, but translates it in modern grammatical forms and idioms. A really good discussion of these various theories of translations is found in Fee and Stuart’s *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 35 and in Robert Bratcher’s Introduction to the TEV.

Eclectic. This term is used in connection with textual criticism. It refers to the practice of choosing readings from different Greek manuscripts in order to arrive at a text which is supposed to be close to the original autographs. It rejects the view that any one family of Greek manuscripts captures the originals.

Eisegesis. This is the opposite of exegesis. If exegesis is a “leading out” of the original author’s intent, this term implies a “leading in” of a foreign idea or opinion.

Etymology. This is an aspect of word study that tries to ascertain the original meaning of a word. From this root meaning, specialized usages are more easily identified. In interpretation, etymology is not the main focus, rather the contemporary meaning and usage of a word.

Exegesis. This is the technical term for the practice of interpreting a specific passage. It means “to lead out” (of the text) implying that our purpose is to understand the original author’s intent in light of historical setting, literary context, syntax and contemporary word meaning.

Genre. This is a French term that denotes different types of literature. The thrust of the term is the division of literary forms into categories which share common characteristics: historical narrative, poetry, proverb, apocalyptic and legislation.

Gnosticism. Most of our knowledge of this heresy comes from the gnostic writings of the second century. However, the incipient ideas were present in the first century (and before).

Some stated tenets of Valentian and Cerinthian Gnosticism of the second century are: (1) matter and spirit were co-eternal (an ontological dualism). Matter is evil, spirit is good. God, who is spirit, cannot be directly involved with molding evil matter; (2) there are emanations (*eons* or angelic levels) between God and matter. The last or lowest one was YHWH of the OT, who formed the universe (*kosmos*); (3) Jesus was an emanation like YHWH but higher on the scale, closer to the true God. Some put Him as the highest but still less than God and certainly not incarnate Deity (cf. John 1:14). Since matter is evil, Jesus could not have a human body and still be Divine. He was a spiritual phantom (cf. I John 1:1-3; 4:1-6); and (4) salvation was obtained through faith in Jesus plus special knowledge, which is only known by special persons. Knowledge (passwords) was needed to pass through heavenly spheres. Jewish legalism was also required to reach God.

The gnostic false teachers advocated two opposite ethical systems: (1) for some, lifestyle was totally unrelated to salvation. For them, salvation and spirituality were encapsulated into secret knowledge (passwords) through the angelic spheres (*eons*); or (2) for others, lifestyle was crucial to salvation. They emphasized an ascetic lifestyle as evidence of true spirituality.

Hermeneutics. This is the technical term for the principles which guide exegesis. It is both a set of specific guidelines and an art/gift. Biblical, or sacred, hermeneutics is usually divided into two

categories: general principles and special principles. These relate to the different types of literature found in the Bible. Each different type (genre) has its own unique guidelines but also shares some common assumptions and procedures of interpretation.

Higher Criticism. This is the procedure of biblical interpretation which focuses on the historical setting and literary structure of a particular biblical book.

Idiom. This word is used for the phrases found in different cultures which have specialized meaning not connected to the usual meaning of the individual terms. Some modern examples are: “that was awfully good,” or “you just kill me.” The Bible also contains these types of phrases.

Illumination. This is the name given to the concept that God has spoken to mankind. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation—God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration—He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for mankind; and (3) illumination—He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure.

Inductive. This is a method of logic or reasoning which moves from the particulars to the whole. It is the empirical method of modern science. This is basically the approach of Aristotle.

Interlinear. This is a type of research tool which allows those who do not read a biblical language to be able to analyze its meaning and structure. It places the English translation on a word for word level immediately under the original biblical language. This tool, combined with an “analytical lexicon,” will give the forms and basic definitions of Hebrew and Greek.

Inspiration. This is the concept that God has spoken to mankind by guiding the biblical authors to accurately and clearly record His revelation. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation—God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration—He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for mankind; and (3) illumination—He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure

Language of description. This is used in connection with the idioms in which the Old Testament is written. It speaks of our world in terms of the way things appear to the five senses. It is not a scientific description, nor was it meant to be.

Legalism. This attitude is characterized by an over-emphasis on rules or ritual. It tends to rely on the human performance of regulations as a means of acceptance by God. It tends to depreciate relationship and elevates performance, both of which are important aspects of the covenantal relationship between a holy God and sinful humanity.

Literal. This is another name for the textually-focused and historical method of hermeneutics from Antioch. It means that interpretation involves the normal and obvious meaning of human language, although it still recognizes the presence of figurative language.

Literary genre. This refers to the distinct forms that human communication can take, such as poetry or historical narrative. Each type of literature has its own special hermeneutical procedures in addition to the general principles for all written literature.

Literary unit. This refers to the major thought divisions of a biblical book. It can be made up of a few verses, paragraphs or chapters. It is a self-contained unit with a central subject.

Lower criticism. See “textual criticism.”

Manuscript. This term relates to the different copies of the Greek New Testament. Usually they are divided into the different types by (1) material on which they are written (papyrus, leather), or (2) the form of the writing itself (all capitals or running script). It is abbreviated by “MS” (singular) or “MSS” (plural).

Masoretic Text. This refers to the ninth century A.D. Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament produced by generations of Jewish scholars which contain vowel points and other textual notes. It forms the basic text for our English Old Testament. Its text has been historically confirmed by the Hebrew MSS, especially Isaiah, known from the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is abbreviated by “MT.”

Metonymy. This is a figure of speech in which the name of one thing is used to represent something else associated with it. As an example, “the kettle is boiling” actually means “the water within the kettle is boiling.”

Muratorian Fragments. This is a list of the canonical books of the New Testament. It was written in Rome before A.D. 200. It gives the same twenty-seven books as the Protestant NT. This clearly shows the local churches in different parts of the Roman Empire had “practically” set the canon before the major church councils of the fourth century.

Natural revelation. This is one category of God’s self-disclosure to man. It involves the natural order (Rom. 1:19-20) and the moral consciousness (Rom. 2:14-15). It is spoken of in Ps. 19:1-6 and Rom. 1-2. It is distinct from special revelation, which is God’s specific self-disclosure in the Bible and supremely in Jesus of Nazareth.

This theological category is being re-emphasized by the “old earth” movement among Christian scientists (e.g., the writings of Hugh Ross). They use this category to assert that all truth is God’s truth. Nature is an open door to knowledge about God; it is different from special revelation (the Bible). It allows modern science the freedom to research the natural order. In my opinion it is a wonderful new opportunity to witness to the modern scientific western world.

Nestorianism. Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople in the fifth century. He was trained in Antioch of Syria and affirmed that Jesus had two natures, one fully human and one fully divine. This view deviated from the orthodox one nature view of Alexandria. Nestorius’ main concern was the title “mother of God,” given to Mary. Nestorius was opposed by Cyril of Alexandria and, by implication, his own Antiochian training. Antioch was the headquarters of the historical-grammatical-textual approach to biblical interpretation, while Alexandria was the headquarters of the four-fold (allegorical) school of interpretation. Nestorius was ultimately removed from office and exiled.

Original author. This refers to the actual authors/writers of Scripture.

Papyri. This is a type of writing material from Egypt. It is made from river reeds. It is the material upon which our oldest copies of the Greek New Testament are written.

Parallel passages. They are part of the concept that all of the Bible is God-given and, therefore, is its own best interpreter and balancer of paradoxical truths. This is also helpful when one is attempting to interpret an unclear or ambiguous passage. They also help one find the clearest passage on a given subject as well as all other Scriptural aspects of a given subject.

Paraphrase. This is the name of a theory of Bible translation. Bible translation can be viewed as a continuum from “word to word” correspondence, where an English word must be supplied for every Hebrew or Greek word to a “paraphrase” where only the thought is translated with less regard to the original wording or phrasing. In between these two theories is “the dynamic equivalent,” which attempts to take serious the original text but translates it in modern grammatical forms and idioms. A really good discussion of these various theories of translations is found in Fee and Stuart’s *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 35.

Paragraph. This is the basic interpretive literary unit in prose. It contains one central thought and its development. If we stay with its major thrust we will not major on minors or miss the original author’s intent.

Parochialism. This relates to biases which are locked into a local theological/cultural setting. It does not recognize the transcultural nature of biblical truth or its application.

Paradox. This refers to those truths which seem to be contradictory, yet both are true, although in tension with each other. They frame truth by presenting it from opposite sides. Much biblical truth is presented in paradoxical (or dialectical) pairs. Biblical truths are not isolated stars, but are constellations made up of the pattern of stars.

Plato. He was one of the philosophers of ancient Greece. His philosophy greatly influenced the early church through the scholars of Alexandria, Egypt, and later, Augustine. He posited that everything on earth was illusionary and a mere copy of a spiritual archetype. Theologians later equated Plato’s “forms/ideas” with the spiritual realm.

Presupposition. This refers to our preconceived understanding of a matter. Often we form opinions or judgments about issues before we approach the Scriptures themselves. This predisposition is also known as a bias, an *a priori* position, an assumption or a preunderstanding.

Proof-texting. This is the practice of interpreting Scripture by quoting a verse without regard for its immediate context or larger context in its literary unit. This removes the verses from the original author’s intent and usually involves the attempt to prove a personal opinion while asserting biblical authority.

Rabbinical Judaism. This stage of the life of the Jewish people began in Babylonian Exile (586-538 B.C.). As the influence of the Priests and the Temple was removed, local synagogues became the focus of Jewish life. These local centers of Jewish culture, fellowship, worship and Bible study became the focus of the national religious life. In Jesus’ day this “religion of the scribes” was parallel to that of the priests. At the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the scribal form, dominated by the Pharisees, controlled the direction of Jewish religious life. It is characterized by a practical, legalistic interpretation of the Torah as explained in the oral tradition (Talmud).

Revelation. This is the name given to the concept that God has spoken to mankind. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation—God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration—He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for mankind; and (3) illumination—He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure.

Semantic field. This refers to the total range of meanings associated with a word. It is basically the different connotations a word has in different contexts.

Septuagint. This is the name given to the Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Tradition says that it was written in seventy days by seventy Jewish scholars for the library of Alexandria, Egypt. The traditional date is around 250 B.C. (in reality it possibly took over one hundred years to complete). This translation is significant because (1) it gives us an ancient text to compare with the Masoretic Hebrew text; (2) it shows us the state of Jewish interpretation in the third and second century B.C.; (3) it gives us the Jewish Messianic understanding before the rejection of Jesus. Its abbreviation is “LXX.”

Sinaiticus. This is a Greek manuscript of the fourth century A.D. It was found by the German scholar, Tischendorf, at St. Catherine’s monastery on Jebel Musa, the traditional site of Mt. Sinai. This manuscript is designated by the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet called “*aleph*” [א]. It contains both the Old and the entire New Testaments. It is one of our most ancient uncial MSS.

Spiritualizing. This term is synonymous with allegorizing in the sense that it removes the historical and literary context of a passage and interprets it on the basis of other criteria.

Synonymous. This refers to terms with exact or very similar meanings (although in reality no two words have a complete semantic overlap). They are so closely related that they can replace each other in a sentence without loss of meaning. It is also used to designate one of the three forms of Hebrew poetic parallelism. In this sense it refers to two lines of poetry that express the same truth (cf. Ps. 103:3).

Syntax. This is a Greek term which refers to the structure of a sentence. It relates to the ways parts of a sentence are put together to make a complete thought.

Synthetical. This is one of the three terms that relates to types of Hebrew poetry. This term speaks of lines of poetry which build on one another in a cumulative sense, sometimes called “climatic” (cf. Ps. 19:7-9).

Systematic theology. This is a stage of interpretation which tries to relate the truths of the Bible in a unified and rational manner. It is a logical, rather than mere historical, presentation of Christian theology by categories (God, man, sin, salvation, etc.).

Talmud. This is the title for the codification of the Jewish Oral Tradition. The Jews believe it was given orally by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In reality it appears to be the collective wisdom of the Jewish teachers through the years. There are two different written versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian and the shorter, unfinished Palestinian.

Textual criticism. This is the study of the manuscripts of the Bible. Textual criticism is necessary because no originals exist and the copies differ from each other. It attempts to explain the variations and arrive (as close as possible) to the original wording of the autographs of the Old and New Testaments. It is often called “lower criticism.”

Textus Receptus. This designation developed into Elzevir’s edition of the Greek NT in A.D. 1633. Basically it is a form of the Greek NT that was produced from a few late Greek manuscripts and Latin versions of Erasmus (1510-1535), Stephanus (1546-1559) and Elzevir (1624-1678). In *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 27, A. T. Robertson says “the Byzantine text is practically the Textus Receptus.” The Byzantine text is the least valuable of the three families of early Greek manuscripts (Western, Alexandrian and Byzantine). It contains the accumulation errors of centuries of hand-copied texts. However, A.T. Robertson also says “the Textus Receptus has preserved for us a substantially accurate text” (p. 21). This Greek manuscript

tradition (especially Erasmus' third edition of 1522) forms the basis of the King James Version of 1611 A.D.

Torah. This is the Hebrew term for "teaching." It came to be the official title for the writings of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). It is, for the Jews, the most authoritative division of the Hebrew canon.

Typological. This is a specialized type of interpretation. Usually it involves New Testament truth found in Old Testament passages by means of an analogical symbol. This category of hermeneutics was a major element of the Alexandrian method. Because of the abuse of this type of interpretation, one should limit its use to specific examples recorded in the New Testament.

Vaticanus. This is the Greek manuscript of the fourth century A.D. It was found in the Vatican's library. It originally contained all the Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament. However, some parts were lost (Genesis, Psalms, Hebrews, the Pastorals, Philemon and Revelation). It is a very helpful manuscript in determining the original wording of the autographs. It is designated by a capital "B."

Vulgate. This is the name of Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible. It became the basic or "common" translation for the Roman Catholic Church. It was done in the 380's A.D.

Wisdom literature. This was a genre of literature common in the ancient near east (and modern world). It basically was an attempt to instruct a new generation on guidelines for successful living through poetry, proverb, or essay. It was addressed more to the individual than to corporate society. It did not use allusions to history, but was based on life experiences and observation. In the Bible, Job through Song of Songs assumed the presence and worship of YHWH, but this religious world view is not explicit in every human experience every time.

As a genre it stated general truths. However, this genre cannot be used in every specific situation. These are general statements that do not always apply to every individual situation.

These sages dared to ask the hard questions of life. Often they challenged traditional religious views (Job and Ecclesiastes). They form a balance and tension to the easy answers about life's tragedies.

World picture and worldview. These are companion terms. They are both philosophical concepts related to creation. The term "world picture" refers to "the how" of creation while "worldview" relates to "the Who." These terms are relevant to the interpretation that Gen. 1-2 deals primarily with the Who, not the how, of creation.

YHWH. This is the Covenant name for God in the Old Testament. It is defined in Exod. 3:14. It is the CAUSATIVE form of the Hebrew term "to be." The Jews were afraid to pronounce the name, lest they take it in vain; therefore, they substituted the Hebrew term *Adonai*, "lord." This is how this covenant name is translated in English.

SAMPLE WORK SHEET ON ROMANS 1-3

I. First Reading

- A. The overarching purpose: How is man right with God, both initially and ongoing?
- B. The key theme: 1:16-17
- C. The literary genre: letter

II. Second Reading

A. The major literary units

- 1. 1:1-17
- 2. 1:18-3:21
- 3. 4:1-5:21
- 4. 6:1-8:39
- 1. 9:1-11:36
- 2. 12:1-15:37
- 3. 16:1-27

B. Summary of the major literary units

- 1. Introduction and theme, 1:1-17
- 2. The lostness of all men, 1:18-3:21
- 3. Justification is a gift, 4:1-5:21
- 4. Justification is a lifestyle, 6:1-8:39
- 5. The Jews' relationship to justification, 9:1-11:36
- 6. How to live out justification in daily life, 12:1-15:37
- 7. Closing greetings and warnings, 16:1-27

III. Third Reading

A. Internal information concerning the historical setting

- 1. Author
 - a. Paul, 1:1
 - b. Bond servant of Christ Jesus, 1:1
 - c. An Apostle, 1:1, 5
 - d. To Gentiles, 1:5, 14
- 2. Date
 - a. After Paul's conversion and call, 1:1.
 - b. After time of the start of the church in Rome and its influence to grow, 1:8.
- 3. Recipients
 - a. Saints, 1:7
 - b. At Rome, 1:7
- 4. Occasion
 - a. Their faith is well known, 1:8.
 - b. Paul prays often for them, 1:9-10.
 - c. Paul wants to personally meet them, 1:11.

- d. Paul wants to impart spiritual gift to them, 1:11, 15.
 - e. Their meeting would encourage both of them, 1:12
 - f. Paul prevented from coming, 1:13.
5. Historical Setting
- a. Written to the church in the capital of the Roman Empire.
 - b. Apparently Paul had never been there, 1:1-13.
 - c. Apparently the Roman Empire, and particularly Rome itself, was very immoral and idolatrous, 1:11ff.
 - (1) Idols, 1:21-23
 - (2) Homosexuality, 1:26-27
 - (3) Depraved mind, 1:28-31
 - d. Apparently there was a large Jewish population in Rome, 2:17-2:31; 9-11 (possibly a growing tension between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.)

B. Various Paragraph Divisions

ASV (<u>literal</u>)	Jerusalem Bible (<u>idiomatic</u>)	Williams (<u>idiomatic</u>)
1st unit, 1:1-17	1st unit, 1:1-17	1st unit, 1:1-17
1:1-7	1:1-2	1:1-7
1:8-15	1:3-7	1:8-15
1:16-17	1:8-15	
	2nd unit, 1:16-3:31	2nd unit
2nd unit, 1:18-3:31	1:16-17	1:16-23
1:18-23	1:18-25	
1:24-25		3rd unit
1:26-27	1:26-27	1:24-32
1:28-32	1:28-32	
2:1-16	2:1-11	4th unit
2:17-29	2:12-16	2:1-16
3:1-8	2:17-24	2:1-11
3:9-18	2:25-29	2:12-26
3:19-20	3:1-8	
3:21-30	3:9-18	5th unit
3:31	3:19-20	2:17-29
	3:21-26	2:17-24
	3:27-31	2:25-29
		6th unit
		3:1-18
		3:1-8
		3:9-18
		7th unit
		3:19-31
		3:19-20
		3:21-26
		3:27-31

C. Content Outline with Summaries

1. Introduction and theme, 1:1-17
 - a. Introduction of author, 1:1-2
 - b. Introduction of recipients, 1:3-7
 - c. Introductory prayer, 1:8-15
 - d. The theme, 1:16-17
2. The lostness of all men, 1:18-3:21
 - a. Lostness of pagans seen in their acts, 1:18-32
 - b. Lostness of Jews seen in their acts, 2:1-11
 - c. Their national hope, 2:12-3:8
 - (1) Their Law will not deliver them, 2:12-24
 - (2) Their circumcision will not deliver them, 2:25-29
 - (3) Their heritage will not deliver them, 3:1-8
 - d. The lostness of all men, 3:9-20
 - e. The hope of all men, 3:21-31

IV. Fourth Reading (sample, 1:1-3:21, focal text only)

A. Specialized list

1. (Although this sample is limited to 1:1-3:21 a good example of specialized lists is found in the term “therefore,” 2:1; 5:1; 8:1; 12:1, which is used as a way of summarizing the flow of Paul’s thought.)
2. Use of “gospel”
 - a. 1:1, set apart for the gospel of God
 - b. 2:9, the gospel of His Son
 - c. 1:15, to preach the gospel
 - d. 1:16, I am not ashamed of the gospel
 - e. 2:16, according to my gospel
[From this list and context much about the gospel itself can be ascertained.]
3. References to God’s wrath and judgment
 - a. 1:18, wrath of God
 - b. 1:24, 26, 28, God gave them over
 - c. 2:1, the judgment of God falls upon those who practice such things
 - d. 2:3, the judgment of God
 - e. 2:5-6, (both verses)
 - f. 2:12, will perish
 - g. 2:16, the day. . .God will judge the secrets of men
 - h. 3:6, God judges the world

B. Key Words or Phrases

1. 1:1, apostle
2. 1:1, gospel of God
3. 1:4, Son of God
4. 1:5, grace. . .faith
5. 1:6, the called
6. 1:7, saints
7. 1:11, spiritual gift. . .some fruit (v. 13)

8. 1:16, salvation
9. 1:17, righteousness
10. 1:18, wrath of God. . . judgment of God (2:2)
11. 2:4, repentance
12. 2:7, immortality, eternal life
13. 2:12, the Law
14. 2:15, conscience
15. 3:4, justified
16. 3:24, redemption
17. 3:25, propitiation

C. Difficult Passages

1. Textual or translational
 - 1:4, “Spirit of holiness” or “spirit of holiness”
2. Is the proper translation of Hab. 2:4 found in Rom. 1:1-7?
3. Historical
 - 2:21-23, “you who preach that . . .” (when, how and where did the Jews do these things?)
4. Theological
 - a. 1:4, “. . . who was declared with power to be the Son of God. . .” (or was Jesus born divine?)
 - b. 2:14-15 (2:27), “Gentiles who do not have the law do instinctively the things of the law, are a law to themselves. . .” (What about those who never heard the law but perform some of it?)
 - c. 3:1, “What advantage has the Jew?”

D. Significant Parallels

1. Same book
 - 1:18-3:21 is one literary unit
2. Same author
 - The book of Galatians expounds the same doctrinal truths.
3. Same period - no direct parallels.
4. Same Testament - no direct parallels.
5. Entire Bible - Paul uses Hab. 1:4. (He will major on Old Testament characters in chapter 4.)

E. Theological Uniqueness

1. Natural revelation
 - a. In creation, 1:18-23
 - b. In inner moral consciousness, 2:14-16
2. All humankind is lost

SAMPLE WORK SHEET ON TITUS (a whole book)

I. First Reading

- A. The overarching purpose of this biblical book is:
While in the process of establishing local churches with their elders, the continuing need for orthodoxy and orthopraxy is emphasized.
- B. The key theme
 - 1. Establishing local churches and elders, 1:5.
 - 2. Emphasizing the need for:
 - a. orthodoxy – 1:9-11, 14; 2:1
 - b. orthopraxy – 1:16; 3:8
- C. The literary genre: letter
 - 1. Opening 1:1-4
 - 2. Closing 3:12-15

II. Second Reading

- A. The major literary units or content divisions:
 - 1. 1:14
 - 2. 1:5-9
 - 3. 1:10-16
 - 4. 2:1-10a
 - 5. 2:10b-15
 - 6. 3:1-11
 - 7. 3:12-15
- B. Summary of the themes of the major literary units or content divisions.
 - 1. Traditional Christian introduction to the letter, 1:1-4
 - 2. Guidelines for elders, 1:5-9.
 - 3. Guidelines for determining false teachings, 1:10-16
 - 4. Guidelines for believers in general, 2:1-10a.
 - 5. Theological basis for the guidelines, 2:10b-15
 - 6. Guidelines for those who could cause problems, 3:1-11
 - 7. Traditional Christian close to the letter, 3:12-15

III. Third Reading

- A. Internal information concerning the historical setting of the book
 - 1. Author
 - a. Paul, 1:1
 - b. Bond-servant of God, 1:1
 - c. Apostle of Jesus Christ, 1:1
 - 2. Date
 - a. Written to Titus, 1:4
 - (1) He is not mentioned in Acts at all
 - (2) He was apparently converted and recruited on one of Paul's missionary journeys, Gal. 2:1.
 - (3) He was an uncircumcised Gentile, Gal. 2:3.

- (4) He became Paul's trouble shooter, 2 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 4:10; Titus 1:4.
- b. Paul left him in Crete, 1:5
- (1) Because the travel itinerary of the Pastoral Epistles does not fit into the chronology of Acts, this is probably Paul's fourth missionary journey.
- (2) It is assumed that Paul was released from prison after the close of the book of Acts. However, he was rearrested and killed under Nero who died in A.D. 68.
3. Recipient: Paul's faithful co-worker, Titus, but also to be read to the local congregations.
4. Occasion: Continuing the ministry of establishing local churches on the Island of Crete.
- a. Appointing elders, 1:5
- b. Refuting false teachers, 1:9-11, 14-16; 3:9-11
- c. Encouraging the faithful

B. Various paragraph divisions

1. Paragraph divisions

<u>Literal</u>		<u>Dynamic Equivalent</u>		
NASB	NRSV	Jer. Bible*	NIV*	Williams*
1st Unit 1:1-4	1st Unit 1:1-3 1:4	1st Unit 1:1-4	1st Unit 1:1-4 1:5-9 1:10-16	1st Unit 1:1-4
2nd Unit 1:5-9 1:10-16	2nd Unit 1:5-9 1:10-16	2nd Unit 1:5-9	2nd Unit 1:5-9 1:10-16	
3rd Unit 2:1-14 2:15	3rd Unit 2:1-2 2:3-5 2:6-8 2:9-10 2:11-14 2:15	3rd Unit 1:10-14 1:15-16 4th Unit 2:1-10	3rd Unit 2:1-2 2:3-5 2:6-8 2:9-10 2:11-14 2:15	2nd Unit 2:1-10 2:11-14 2:15
4th Unit 3:1-11	4th Unit 3:1-11	5th Unit 2:11-14 2:15 6th Unit 3:1-3 3:4-8a 7th Unit 3:8b-11 8th Unit 3:12-14 3:15	4th Unit 3:1-2 3:3-8 3:9-11 5th Unit 3:12-14 3:15 3:12-14 3:15	3rd Unit 3:1-2 3:3-7 3:8-11 3:12 3:13-14 3:15 3:12-14 3:15

2. Various translations content summaries.

a. Jerusalem Bible

- (1) 1st Unit, “address,” 1:1-4
- (2) 2nd Unit, “the appointment of elders,” 1:5-9
- (3) 3rd Unit, “opposing false teachers,” 1:10-14, 15, 16
- (4) 4th Unit, “some specific moral instructions,” 2:1-10
- (5) 5th Unit, “the basis of the Christian moral life,” 2:11-14
- (6) 6th Unit, “general instructions for believers,” 3:1-3, 4-8a
- (7) 7th Unit, “personal advise to Titus,” 3:8b-11
- (8) 8th Unit, “practical recommendations, farewells and good wishes,” 3:12-14, 15

b. New International Version

- (1) 1st Unit, salutation, 1:1-4
- (2) 2nd Unit, “Titus’ task on Crete,” 1:5-9, 10-16
- (3) 3rd Unit, “what must be taught to various groups,” 2:1-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-10, 11-14, 15
- (4) 4th Unit, “doing what is good,” 3:1-2, 3-8, 9-11
- (5) 5th Unit, “final remarks,” 3:12-14, 15

c. Williams Translation

- (1) 1st Unit, “God’s people distinguished by actions,” 1:1-4, 5-9, 10-16
- (2) 2nd Unit, “God’s people called to righteousness,” 2:1-10, 11-14, 15
- (3) 3rd Unit, “believers are to do good,” 3:1-2, 3-7, 8-11, 12, 13-14, 15

C. Summaries of paragraph divisions

1. Traditional Christian introduction to the letter, 1:1-4

a. From whom, 1:1a

- (1) Paul
- (2) A slave of God
- (3) An apostle of Jesus Christ

b. Why, 1:1b-3

- (1) To stimulate faith
- (2) To lead them to full knowledge
 - (a) In hope of eternal life which God promised
 - (b) At the proper time God made known
 - (c) By the message entrusted to Paul by God’s command

c. To whom, 1:4a

- (1) To Titus

- (2) My genuine child in the common faith
- d. Prayer, 1:4b
 - (1) Spiritual blessing
 - (2) Peace
 - (3) From
 - (a) God our Father
 - (b) Christ Jesus our Savior
- 2. Guide for elders, 1:5-9
 - a. Above reproach, 1:6, 7
 - b. One wife
 - c. Believing children
 - d. Not accused of reckless living
 - e. Not accused of disobedience
 - f. Not stubborn
 - g. Not quick-tempered
 - h. Not addicted to strong drink
 - i. Not pugnacious
 - j. Not addicted to dishonest gain
 - k. Hospitable
 - l. Lover of goodness
 - m. Sensible
 - n. Upright
 - o. Pure life
 - p. Self-controlled
 - q. Continue to cling to the trustworthy message
 - r. Competent to encourage others with wholesome teaching
 - s. Convict those who oppose him (2:15)
- 3. Guidelines for determining false teaching, 1:10-16
 - a. Insubordinate
 - b. Mere talkers with nothing to say
 - c. Deceivers of their own minds
 - d. Jewish elements
 - (1) Circumcision, 1:10
 - (2) Jewish myths, 1:14
 - (3) Pedigrees, 3:9
 - (4) Wrangles about the law, 3:9

- e. Upset whole families' teaching what they ought not
 - f. For the sake of dishonest gain
 - g. Their minds and consciences are impure
 - h. Their actions disowns Him
 - i. Detestable
 - j. Disobedient
 - k. Useless for anything good
4. Guidelines for believers, 2:1-10a, 12
- a. For older men, 2:2
 - (1) Temperate
 - (2) Serious
 - (3) Sensible
 - (4) Healthy in faith
 - (5) Healthy in love
 - (6) Steadfast
 - b. For older women, 2:3
 - (1) Reverent in deportment
 - (2) Not slanderers
 - (3) Not slaves to heavy drinking
 - (4) Teachers of what is right
 - (5) Trainers of younger women
 - c. For younger women, 2:4-5
 - (1) Be affectionate wives
 - (2) Be affectionate mothers
 - (3) Serious
 - (4) Pure
 - (5) Homekeepers
 - (6) Kind
 - (7) Subordinate to their husbands
 - d. For younger men, 2:6-8
 - (1) Sensible
 - (2) Set a worthy example of doing good
 - (3) Sincere
 - (4) Serious in your teaching
 - (5) Wholesome message
 - (6) Unobjectionable

- e. Believing slaves, 2:9-10
 - (1) Practice perfect submission to their masters
 - (2) Stop resisting them
 - (3) Stop stealing from them
- 5. Theological basis for the guidelines, 2:10b-15; 3:4-7
 - a. To adorn, in everything they do, the teaching of God our Savior, 2:10b.
 - b. The grace of God has appeared to all mankind, 2:11.
 - c. Waiting for the blessed hope (the second coming), 2:13
 - d. Jesus purchased a people to reveal God, 2:14
 - e. Goodness and loving-kindness of God has been revealed, 3:4
 - f. God saved us not based on our deeds, 3:5.
 - g. God saved us based on His mercy, 3:5.
 - (1) Through a bath of regeneration
 - (2) Renewal of the Holy Spirit
 - (3) Both given through Christ
 - (4) We have right standing with God
 - (5) We are heirs of eternal life
- 6. Guidelines for those who could cause problems, 3:1-11
 - a. Be subject to those in authority, 3:1-2.
 - (1) Ready for any good enterprise
 - (2) Stop abusing anyone
 - (3) Be peaceable
 - (4) Showing perfect gentleness to everyone
 - b. Be gentle toward all mankind because, 3:3-8
 - (1) Believers were once:
 - (a) Without understanding
 - (b) Disobedient
 - (c) Misled
 - (d) Habitual slaves to all sorts of passion
 - (e) Spending our lives in malice
 - (f) Spending our lives in envy
 - c. Beware of, 3:9-11
 - (1) Foolish controversies
 - (2) Pedigrees
 - (3) Strife
 - (4) Wrangles about the law

- (5) A man who is factious
 - (a) crooked
 - (b) sinful
 - (c) self-condemned
- 7. Traditional Christian closing to the letter, 3:12-15
 - a. Titus' replacement is coming, 3:12
 - (1) Artemas (or)
 - (2) Tychicus
 - b. Titus come and meet me at Nicopolis, 3:12
 - c. Encourage the believers to help, 3:13-14
 - (1) Zenos (and)
 - (2) Apollos
 - d. Final greetings and close, 3:15

D. List applicable application points: With this detailed outline on the far left of a page(s) write in possible application truths for every major literary unit and every paragraph division. State the application truth in one short declarative sentence. This outline will become the points of your sermon.

IV. Fourth Reading

- A. Significant parallels (other Pastoral Epistles)
 - 1. 1 Timothy (esp. chapter 3:1-13)
 - 2. 2 Timothy
- B. Specialized lists
 - 1. Use of the title "Savior"
 - a. God our Savior, 1:3; 2:10; 3:4
 - b. Christ our Savior, 1:4; 2:13; 3:6
 - 2. Doctrinal truths of the Gospel used as basis for our Christ-like lifestyle: (cf. III., c.5.)
 - a. 2:10b-14
 - b. 3:4-7
 - 3. List of qualifications for elders, 1:7-9 (cf. III., c.2. compare 1 Timothy 3:1ff)
 - 4. List of characteristics of false teachers: (cf. IV., c.3.)
 - a. 1:10-16
 - b. 3:9-11
- C. Difficult passages
 - 1. Textual – Does the phrase in 1:6b refer to the elder or his children?
 - a. Elder – NASB and NRSV
 - b. Children of elder – NIV and Williams

2. Historical – Is there any biblical or historical evidence for a fourth missionary journey?
 - a. Biblical
 - (1) Paul wanted to go to Spain, Rom. 15:24, 28
 - (2) Paul’s travel itinerary in the Pastoral Epistles does not fit his travel itinerary of the book of Acts.
 - b. Historical
 - (1) Eusebius in his book, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2:22:2-3 implies that Paul was released from prison after the close of Acts.
 - (2) Other early church traditions that Paul took the Gospel to the far west of the Mediterranean Sea
 - (a) Clement of Rome
 - (b) Muratorian Fragment
3. Theological – is the doctrine of baptismal regeneration supported from 3:5?
4. Verses that cause confusion – elders not total abstainers, but “not addicted to much wine,” 1:7. The same thing expressed for older women, 2:3.

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Brief Definitions of Hebrew Verbal Forms which Impact Exegesis

I. Brief Historical Development of Hebrew

Hebrew is part of the Shemitic (Semitic) family of southwest Asian languages. The name (given by modern scholars) comes from Noah's son, Shem (cf. Gen. 5:32; 6:10). Shem's descendants are listed in Gen. 10:21-31 as Arabs, Hebrews, Syrians, Arameans, and Assyrians. In reality some Semitic languages are used by nations listed in Ham's line (cf. Gen. 10:6-14), Canaan, Phoenicia, and Ethiopia.

Hebrew is part of the northwest group of these Semitic languages. Modern scholars have samples of this ancient language group from

- A. Amorite (Mari Tablets from 18th century B.C. in Akkadian)
- B. Canaanite (Ras SHAMRA Tablets from 15th century B.C. in Ugaritic)
- C. Canaanite (Amarna Letters from 14th century B.C. in Canaanite Akkadian)
- D. Phoenician (Hebrew uses Phoenician alphabet)
- E. Moabite (Mesha stone, 840 B.C.)
- F. Aramaic (official language of the Persian Empire used in Gen. 31:47 [2 words]; Jer. 10:11; Dan. 2:4b-6; 7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26 and spoken by Jews in the first century A.D. in Palestine)

The Hebrew language is called "the lip of Canaan" in Isa. 19:18. It was first called "Hebrew" in the prologue of Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Ben Sirach) about 180 b.c. (and some other early places, cf. Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 4, pp. 205ff). It is most closely related to Moabite and the language used at Ugarit. Examples of ancient Hebrew found outside the Bible are

- 1. the Gezer calendar, 925 B.C. (a school boy's writing)
- 2. the Siloam Inscription, 705 B.C. (tunnel writings)
- 3. Samaritan Ostraca, 770 B.C. (tax records on broken pottery)
- 4. Lachish letters, 587 B.C. (war communications)
- 5. Maccabean coins and seals
- 6. some Dead Sea Scroll texts
- 7. numerous inscriptions (cf. "Languages [Hebrew]," ABD 4:203ff)

It, like all Semitic languages, is characterized by words made up of three consonants (triconsonantal root). It is an inflexed language. The three-root consonants carry the basic word meaning, while prefixed, suffixed, or internal additions show the syntactical function (later vowels, cf. Sue Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew*, pp. 46-49).

Hebrew vocabulary demonstrates a difference between prose and poetry. Word meanings are connected to folk etymologies (not linguistic origins). Word plays and sound plays are very common (paronomasia).

II. Aspects of Predication

A. VERBS

The normal expected word order is VERB, PRONOUN, SUBJECT (with modifiers), OBJECT (with modifiers). The basic non-flagged VERB is the *Qal* PERFECT, MASCULINE, SINGULAR FORM. It is how Hebrew and Aramaic lexicons are arranged.

VERBS are inflected to show

1. number — SINGULAR, PLURAL, DUAL
2. gender — MASCULINE AND FEMININE (no NEUTER)
3. mood — INDICATIVE, SUBJUNCTIVE, IMPERATIVE (relation of the action to reality)
4. tense (aspect)
 - a. PERFECT, which denotes completion, in the sense of the beginning, continuing, and concluding of an action. Usually this form was used of past action, the thing has occurred. J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, says

"The single whole described by a perfect is also considered as certain. An imperfect may picture a state as possible or desired or expected, but a perfect sees it as actual, real, and sure" (p. 36).

S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*, describes it this way:

"The perfect is employed to indicate actions the accomplishment of which lies indeed in the future, but is regarded as dependent upon such an unalterable determination of the will that it may be spoken of as having actually taken place: thus a resolution, promise, or decree, especially a Divine one, is frequently announced in the perfect tense" (p. 17, e.g., the prophetic perfect).

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition*, defines this VERBAL FORM as one which

"views a situation from the outside, as a whole. As such it expresses a simple fact, whether it be an action or state (including state of being or mind). When used of actions, it often views the action as complete from the rhetorical standpoint of the speaker or narrator (whether it is or is not complete in fact or reality is not the point). The perfect can pertain to an action/state in the past, present or future. As noted above, time frame, which influences how one

translates the perfect into a tense-oriented language like English, must be determined from the context" (p. 86).

- b. IMPERFECT, which denotes an action in progress (incomplete, repetitive, continual, or contingent), often movement toward a goal. Usually this form was used of present and future action.

J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, says

"All imperfects represent incomplete states. They are either repeated or developing or contingent. In other words, partially developed, or partially assured. In all cases they are partial in some sense, i.e., incomplete" (p. 55).

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition*, says

"It is difficult to reduce the essence of the imperfect to a single concept, for it encompasses both aspect and mood. Sometimes the imperfect is used in an indicative manner and makes an objective statement. At other times it views an action more subjectively, as hypothetical, contingent, possible, and so on" (p. 89).

- c. The added *waw*, which links the VERB to the action of the previous VERB(S)
 - d. IMPERATIVE, which is based on the volition of the speaker and potential action by the hearer
 - e. in ancient Hebrew only the larger context can determine the authorial-intended time orientations
- B. The seven major inflected forms and their basic meaning. In reality these forms work in conjunction with each other in a context and must not be isolated.
1. *Qal (Kal)*, the most common and basic of all the forms. It denotes simple action or a state of being. There is no causation or specification implied.
 2. *Niphal*, the second most common form. It is usually PASSIVE, but this form also functions as RECIPROCAL and REFLEXIVE. It also has no causation or specification implied.
 3. *Piel*, this form is ACTIVE and expresses the bringing about of an action into a state of being. The basic meaning of the *Qal* stem is developed or extended into a state of being.
 4. *Pual*, this is the PASSIVE counterpart to the *Piel*. It is often expressed by a PARTICIPLE.
 5. *Hithpael*, which is the reflexive or RECIPROCAL stem. It expresses iterative or durative action to the *Piel* stem. The rare PASSIVE form is called *Hothpael*.
 6. *Hiphil*, the ACTIVE form of the CAUSATIVE stem in contrast to *Piel*. It can have a permissive aspect, but usually refers to the cause of an event. Ernst Jenni, a German Hebrew grammarian, believed that the *Piel* denoted something coming into a state of being, while *Hiphil* showed how it happened.
 7. *Hophal*, the PASSIVE counterpart to the *Hiphil*. These last two stems are the least used of the seven stems.

Much of this information comes from *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, by Bruce K. Walke and M. O'Connor, pp. 343-452.

Agency and causation chart. One key in understanding the Hebrew VERB system is to see it as a pattern of voice relationships. Some stems are in contrast to other stems (i.e., *Qal* – *Niphal*; *Piel* – *Hiphil*)

The chart below tries to visualize the basic function of the VERB STEMS as to causation.

Voice/Subject agency	No Secondary Agency	An Active Secondary Agency	A Passive Secondary Agency
Active	<i>Qal</i>	<i>Hiphil</i>	<i>Piel</i>
Middle Passive	<i>Niphal</i>	<i>Hophal</i>	<i>Pual</i>
Reflexive/Reciprocal	<i>Niphal</i>	<i>Hiphil</i>	<i>Hithpael</i>

This chart is taken from the excellent discussion of the VERBAL system in light of new Akkadian research (cf. Bruce K. Waltke, M. O'Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 354-359).

R. H. Kennett, *A Short Account of the Hebrew Tenses*, has provided a needed warning.

"I have commonly found in teaching, that a student's chief difficulty in the Hebrew verbs is to grasp the meaning which they conveyed to the minds of the Hebrews themselves; that is to say, there is a tendency to assign as equivalents to each of the Hebrew Tenses a certain number of Latin or English forms by which that particular Tense may commonly be translated. The result is a failure to perceive many of these fine shades of meaning, which give such life and vigor to the language of the Old Testament.

The difficulty in the use of the Hebrew verbs lies solely in the point of view, so absolutely different from our own, from which the Hebrews regarded an action; the time, which with us is the first consideration, as the very word, 'tense' shows, being to them a matter of secondary importance. It is, therefore, essential that a student should clearly grasp, not so much the Latin or English forms which may be used in translating each of the Hebrew Tenses, but rather the aspect of each action, as it presented itself to a Hebrew's mind.

The name 'tenses' as applied to Hebrew verbs is misleading. The so-called Hebrew 'tenses' do not express the time but merely the state of an action. Indeed were it not for the confusion that would arise through the application of the term 'state' to both nouns and verbs, 'states' would be a far better designation than 'tenses.' It must always be borne in mind that it is impossible to translate a Hebrew verb into English without employing a limitation (of time), which is entirely absent in the Hebrew. The ancient Hebrews never thought of an action as past, present, or future, but simply as perfect, i.e., complete, or imperfect, i.e., as in course of development. When we say that a certain Hebrew tense corresponds to a Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future in English, we do not mean that the Hebrews thought of it as Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future, but merely that it must be so translated in English. The time of an action the Hebrews did not attempt to express by any verbal form" (preface and p. 1).

For a second good warning, Sue Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew*, reminds us,

"There is no way of knowing whether modern scholars' reconstruction of semantic fields and sense relations in an ancient dead language are merely a reflection of their own intuition, or their own native language, or whether those fields existed in Classical Hebrew" (p. 128).

C. MOODS (MODES)

1. It happened, is happening (INDICATIVE), usually uses PERFECT TENSE or PARTICIPLES (all PARTICIPLES are INDICATIVE).

2. It will happen, could happen (SUBJUNCTIVE)

a. uses a marked IMPERFECT TENSE

(1) COHORTATIVE (added h), FIRST PERSON IMPERFECT form which normally expresses a wish, a request, or self-encouragement (i.e., actions willed by the speaker)

(2) JUSSIVE (internal changes), THIRD PERSON IMPERFECT (can be SECOND PERSON in NEGATED SENTENCES) which normally expresses a request, a permission, an admonition, or advice

b. uses a PERFECT TENSE with *lu* or *lule*

These constructions are similar to SECOND CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES in Koine Greek. A false statement (*protasis*) results in a false conclusion (*apodosis*).

c. uses an IMPERFECT TENSE and *lu*

Context and *lu*, as well as a future orientation, mark this SUBJUNCTIVE usage. Some examples from J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament* are Gen. 13:16; Deut. 1:12; 1 Kgs. 13:8; Ps. 24:3; Isa. 1:18 (cf. pp. 76-77).

D. *Waw* – Conversive/consecutive/relative. This uniquely Hebrew (Canaanite) syntactical feature has caused great confusion through the years. It is used in a variety of ways often based on genre. The reason for the confusion is that early scholars were European and tried to interpret in light of their own native languages. When this proved difficult they blamed the problem on Hebrew being a "supposed" ancient, archaic language. European languages are TENSE (time) based VERBS. Some of the variety and grammatical implications were specified by the letter *waw* being added to the PERFECT or IMPERFECT VERB STEMS. This altered the way the action was viewed.

1. In historical narrative the VERBS are linked together in a chain with a standard pattern.
2. The *waw* prefix showed a specific relationship with the previous VERB(S).
3. The larger context is always the key to understanding the VERB chain. Semitic VERBS cannot be analyzed in isolation.

J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, notes the distinctive of Hebrew in its use of the *waw* before PERFECTS and IMPERFECTS (pp. 52-53). As the basic idea of the PERFECT is past, the addition of *waw* often projects it into a future time aspect. This is also true of the IMPERFECT whose basic idea is PRESENT or FUTURE; the addition of *waw* places it into the PAST. It is this unusual time shift which explains the *waw*'s addition, not a change in the basic meaning of the tense itself. The *waw* PERFECTS work well with prophecy, while the *waw* IMPERFECTS work well with narratives (pp. 54, 68).

Watts continues his definition

"As a fundamental distinction between *waw* conjunctive and *waw* consecutive, the following interpretations are offered:

1. *Waw* conjunctive appears always to indicate a parallel.
2. *Waw* consecutive appears always to indicate a sequence. It is the only form of *waw* used with consecutive imperfects. The relation between the imperfects linked by it may be temporal sequence, logical consequence, logical cause, or logical contrast. In all cases there is a sequence" (p. 103).

E. INFINITIVE – There are two kinds of INFINITIVES

1. INFINITIVE ABSOLUTES, which are "strong, independent, striking expressions used for dramatic effect. . .as a SUBJECT, it often has no written VERB, the VERB 'to be' being understood, of course, but the word standing dramatically alone" J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*" (p. 92).
2. INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT, which are "related grammatically to the sentence by PREPOSITIONS, POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS, and the construct relationship" (p. 91).

J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, describes the construct state as:

"When two (or more) words are so closely united that together they constitute one compound idea, the dependent word (or words) is (are) said to be in the construct state" (p. 44).

F. INTERROGATIVES

1. They always appear first in the sentence.
2. Interpretive significance
 - a. *ha* - does not expect a response
 - b. *halo'* - the author expects a "yes" answer

NEGATIVES

1. They always appear before the words they negate.
2. Most common negation is *lo'*.
3. The term *'al* has a contingent connotation and is used with COHORTATIVES and JUSSIVES.
4. The term *lebhilti*, meaning "in order that. . .not," is used with INFINITIVES.
5. The term *'en* is used with PARTICIPLES.

G. CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

1. There are four kinds of CONDITIONAL SENTENCES which basically are paralleled in Koine Greek.
 - a. something assumed to be happening or thought of as fulfilled (FIRST CLASS in Greek)
 - b. something contrary to fact whose fulfillment is impossible (SECOND CLASS)
 - c. something which is possible or even probable (THIRD CLASS)
 - d. something which is less probable; therefore, the fulfillment is dubious (FOURTH CLASS)
2. grammatical markers
 - a. the "assumed to be true" or "real" condition always uses an INDICATIVE PERFECT or PARTICIPLE and usually the *protasis* is introduced by
 - (1) *'im*
 - (2) *ki* (or *'asher*)

(3) *hin* or *hinneh*

- b. the "contrary to fact" condition always uses a PERFECT ASPECT VERB or a PARTICIPLE with the introductory PARTICIPLE *lu* or *lule*
- c. the "more probable" condition always used IMPERFECT VERB or PARTICIPLES in the *protasis*, usually *'im* or *ki* are used as introductory PARTICLES
- d. the "less probable" condition uses IMPERFECT SUBJUNCTIVES in the *protasis* and always uses *'im* as an introductory PARTICLE

Brief Definitions of Greek Grammatical Forms Which Impact Exegesis

Koine Greek, often called Hellenistic Greek, was the common language of the Mediterranean world beginning with Alexander the Great's (336-323 B.C.) conquest and lasting about eight hundred years (300 B.C.-A.D. 500). It was not just a simplified, classical Greek, but in many ways a newer form of Greek that became the second language of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean world.

The Greek of the New Testament was unique in some ways because its users, except Luke and the author of Hebrews, probably used Aramaic as their primary language. Therefore, their writing was influenced by the idioms and structural forms of Aramaic. Also, they read and quoted the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) which was also written in Koine Greek. But the Septuagint was also written by Jewish scholars whose mother tongue was not Greek.

This serves as a reminder that we cannot push the New Testament into a tight grammatical structure. It is unique and yet has much in common with (1) the Septuagint; (2) Jewish writings such as those of Josephus; and (3) the papyri found in Egypt. How then do we approach a grammatical analysis of the New Testament?

The grammatical features of Koine Greek and New Testament Koine Greek are fluid. In many ways it was a time of simplification of grammar. Context will be our major guide. Words only have meaning in a larger context, therefore, grammatical structure can only be understood in light of (1) a particular author's style; and (2) a particular context. No conclusive definitions of Greek forms and structures are possible.

Koine Greek was primarily a verbal language. Often the key to interpretation is the type and form of the VERBALS. In most main clauses the VERB will occur first, showing its preeminence. In analyzing the Greek VERB three pieces of information must be noted: (1) the basic emphasis of the TENSE, VOICE and MOOD (accidence or morphology); (2) the basic meaning of the particular VERB (lexicography); and (3) the flow of the context (syntax).

I. TENSE

A. Tense or aspect involves the relationship of the VERBS to completed action or incomplete action. This is often called "PERFECTIVE" and "IMPERFECTIVE."

1. PERFECTIVE TENSES focus on the occurrence of an action. No further information is given except that something happened! Its start, continuation or culmination is not addressed.
2. IMPERFECTIVE TENSES focus on the continuing process of an action. It can be described in terms of linear action, durative action, progressive action, etc.

B. Tenses can be categorized by how the author sees the action as progressing

1. It occurred =AORIST

2. It occurred and the results abide = PERFECT
3. It was occurring in the past and the results were abiding, but not now = PLUPERFECT
4. It is occurring = PRESENT
5. It was occurring = IMPERFECT
6. It will occur = FUTURE

A concrete example of how these TENSES help in interpretation would be the term "save." It was used in several different tenses to show both its process and culmination:

1. AORIST – "saved" (cf. Rom. 8:24)
2. PERFECT – "have been saved and the result continues" (cf. Eph. 2:5,8)
3. PRESENT – "being saved" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2)
4. FUTURE – "shall be saved" (cf. Rom. 5:9, 10; 10:9)

C. In focusing on VERB TENSES, interpreters look for the reason the original author chose to express himself in a certain TENSE. The standard "no frills" tense was the AORIST. It was the regular "unspecific," "unmarked," or "unflagged" VERB form. It can be used in a wide variety of ways which the context must specify. It simply was stating that something occurred. The past time aspect is only intended in the INDICATIVE MOOD. If any other TENSE was used, something more specific was being emphasized. But what?

1. PERFECT TENSE. This speaks of a completed action with abiding results. In some ways it was a combination of the AORIST and PRESENT TENSES. Usually the focus is on the abiding results or the completion of an act (example: Eph. 2:5 & 8, "you have been and continue to be saved").
2. PLUPERFECT TENSE. This was like the PERFECT except the abiding results have ceased. Example: John 18:16 "Peter was standing at the door outside."
3. PRESENT TENSE. This speaks of an incomplete or imperfect action. The focus is usually on the continuation of the event. Example: 1 John 3:6 & 9, "Everyone abiding in Him does not continue sinning." "Everyone having been begotten of God does not continue to commit sin."
4. IMPERFECT TENSE. In this tense the relationship to the PRESENT TENSE is analogous to the relationship between the PERFECT and the PLUPERFECT. The IMPERFECT speaks of incomplete action that was occurring but has now ceased

or the beginning of an action in the past. Example: Matt. 3:5, "then all Jerusalem were continuing to go out to him" or "then all Jerusalem began to go out to him."

5. FUTURE TENSE. This speaks of an action that was usually projected into a future time frame. It focused on the potential for an occurrence rather than an actual occurrence. It often speaks of the certainty of the event. Example: Matt. 5:4-9, "Blessed are . . .they will . . ."

II. VOICE

- A. VOICE describes the relationship between the action of the VERB and its SUBJECT.
- B. ACTIVE VOICE was the normal, expected, unemphasized way to assert that the SUBJECT was performing the action of the VERB.
- C. The PASSIVE VOICE means that the SUBJECT was receiving the action of the VERB produced by an outside agent. The outside agent producing the action was indicated in the Greek NT by the following PREPOSITIONS and cases:
 1. a personal direct agent by *hupo* with the ABLATIVE CASE (cf. Matt.1:22; Acts 22:30).
 2. a personal intermediate agent by *dia* with the ABLATIVE CASE (cf. Matt. 1:22).
 3. an impersonal agent usually by *en* with the INSTRUMENTAL CASE.
 4. sometimes either a personal or impersonal agent by the INSTRUMENTAL CASE alone.
- D. The MIDDLE VOICE means that the subject produces the action of the VERB and is also directly involved in the action of the VERB. It is often called the voice of heightened personal interest. This construction emphasized the subject of the clause or sentence in some way. This construction is not found in English. It has a wide possibility of meanings and translations in Greek. Some examples of the form are:
 1. REFLEXIVE – the direct action of the subject on itself. Example: Matt. 27:5 "hanged himself."
 2. INTENSIVE – the subject produces the action for itself. Example: 2 Cor. 11:14 "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."
 3. RECIPROCAL – the interplay of two subjects. Example: Matt. 26:4 "they counseled with one another."

III. MOOD (or "MODE")

- A. There are four MOODS in Koine Greek. They indicate the relation of the VERB to reality, at least within the author's own mind. The MOODS are divided into two broad categories: that which indicated reality (INDICATIVE) and that which indicated potentiality (SUBJUNCTIVE, IMPERATIVE and OPTATIVE).
- B. The INDICATIVE MOOD was the normal mood for expressing action that had occurred or was occurring, at least in the author's mind. It was the only Greek MOOD that expressed a definite time, and even here this aspect was secondary.
- C. The SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD expressed probable future action. Something had not yet happened, but the chances were likely that it would. It had much in common with the FUTURE INDICATIVE. The difference was that the SUBJUNCTIVE expresses some degree of doubt. In English this is often expressed by the terms "could," "would," "may," or "might."
- D. The OPTATIVE MOOD expressed a wish which was theoretically possible. It was considered one step further from reality than the SUBJUNCTIVE. The OPTATIVE expressed possibility under certain conditions. The OPTATIVE was rare in the New Testament. Its most frequent usage is Paul's famous phrase, "May it never be" (KJV, "God forbid"), used fifteen times (cf. Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17; 3:21; 6:14).
- E. The IMPERATIVE MOOD emphasized a command which was possible, but the emphasis was on the intent of the speaker. It asserted only volitional possibility and was conditioned on the choices of another. There was a special use of the IMPERATIVE in prayers and 3rd person requests. These commands were found only in the PRESENT and AORIST TENSES in the NT.
- F. Some grammars categorize PARTICIPLES as another type of MOOD. They are very common in the Greek NT, usually defined as VERBAL ADJECTIVES. They are translated in conjunction with the main VERB to which they relate. A wide variety was possible in translating PARTICIPLES. It is best to consult several English translations. *The Bible in Twenty Six Translations* published by Baker is a great help here.
- G. The AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE was the normal or "unmarked" way to record an occurrence. Any other TENSE, VOICE, or MOOD had some specific interpretive significance that the original author wanted to communicate.

IV. For the person not familiar with Greek the following study aids will provide the needed information:

- A. Friberg, Barbara and Timothy. *Analytical Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.

- B. Marshall, Alfred. *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- C. Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- D. Summers, Ray. *Essentials of New Testament Greek*. Nashville: Broadman, 1950.
- E. Academically accredited Koine Greek correspondence courses are available through Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, IL.

V. NOUNS

- A. Syntactically, NOUNS are classified by CASE. CASE was that inflected form of a NOUN that showed its relationship to the VERB and other parts of the sentence. In Koine Greek many of the CASE functions were indicated by PREPOSITIONS. Since the CASE form was able to identify several different relationships, the PREPOSITIONS developed to give clearer separation to these possible functions.
- B. Greek CASE is categorized in the following eight ways:
 1. The NOMINATIVE CASE was used for naming and it usually was the SUBJECT of the sentence or clause. It was also used for PREDICATE NOUNS and ADJECTIVES with the linking VERBS "to be" or "become."
 2. The GENITIVE CASE was used for description and usually assigned an attribute or quality to the word to which it was related. It answered the question, "What kind?" It was often expressed by the use of the English PREPOSITION "of."
 3. The ABLATIVE CASE used the same inflected form as the GENITIVE, but it was used to describe separation. It usually denoted separation from a point in time, space, source, origin or degree. It was often expressed by the use of the English PREPOSITION "from."
 4. The DATIVE CASE was used to describe personal interest. This could denote a positive or negative aspect. Often this was the INDIRECT OBJECT. It was often expressed by the English PREPOSITION "to."
 5. The LOCATIVE CASE was the same inflected form as the DATIVE, but it described position or location in space, time or logical limits. It was often expressed by the English PREPOSITIONS "in, on, at, among, during, by, upon, and beside."
 6. The INSTRUMENTAL CASE was the same inflected form as the DATIVE and LOCATIVE cases. It expressed means or association. It was often expressed by the English PREPOSITIONS, "by" or "with."

7. The ACCUSATIVE CASE was used to describe the conclusion of an action. It expressed limitation. Its main use was the DIRECT OBJECT. It answered the question, "How far?" or "To what extent?"
8. The VOCATIVE CASE was used for direct address.

VI. CONJUNCTIONS AND CONNECTORS

A. Greek is a very precise language because it has so many connectives. They connect thoughts (CLAUSES, SENTENCES, and PARAGRAPHS). They are so common that their absence (asyndeton) is often exegetically significant. As a matter of fact, these CONJUNCTIONS and CONNECTORS show the direction of the author's thought. They often are crucial in determining what exactly he is trying to communicate.

B. Here is a list of some of the CONJUNCTIONS and CONNECTORS and their meanings (this information has been gleaned mostly from H. E. Dana and Julius K. Mantey's *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*).

1. Time connectors

- a. *epei, epeidē, hopote, hōs, hote, hotan* (subj.) – "when"
- b. *heōs* – "while"
- c. *hotan, epan* (SUBJ.) – "whenever"
- d. *heōs, achri, mechri* (subj.) – "until"
- e. *priv* (INFIN.) – "before"
- f. *hōs* – "since," "when," "as"

2. Logical CONNECTORS

a. Purpose

(1) *hina* (SUBJ.), *hopōs* (SUBJ.), *hōs* – "in order that," "that"

(2) *hōste* (ARTICULAR ACCUSATIVE INFINITIVE) – "that"

(3) *pros* (ARTICULAR ACCUSATIVE INFINITIVE) or *eis* (ARTICULAR ACCUSATIVE INFINITIVE) – "that"

b. Result (there is a close association between the grammatical forms of purpose and result)

- (1) *hōste* (INFINITIVE, this is the most common) – "in order that," "thus"
 - (2) *hiva* (SUBJ.) – "so that"
 - (3) *ara* – "so"
- c. Causal or reason
- (1) *gar* (cause/effect or reason/conclusion) – "for," "because"
 - (2) *dioti, hotiy* – "because"
 - (3) *epei, epeidē, hōs* – "since"
 - (4) *dia* (with ACCUSATIVE) and (with ARTICULAR INFIN.) – "because"
- d. Inferential
- (1) *ara, poinun, hōste* – "therefore"
 - (2) *dio* (strongest inferential CONJUNCTION) – "on which account," "wherefore," "therefore"
 - (3) *oun* – "therefore," "so," "then," "consequently"
 - (4) *toinoun* – "accordingly"
- e. Adversative or contrast
- (1) *alla* (strong ADVERSATIVE) – "but," "except"
 - (2) *de* – "but," "however," "yet," "on the other hand"
 - (3) *kai* – "but"
 - (4) *mentoi, oun* – "however"
 - (5) *plēn* – "never-the-less" (mostly in Luke)
 - (6) *oun* – "however"
- f. Comparison
- (1) *hōs, kathōs* (introduce COMPARATIVE CLAUSES)

(2) *kata* (in compounds, *katho*, *kathoti*, *kathōsper*, *kathaper*)

(3) *hosos* (in Hebrews)

(4) *ē* – "than"

g. Continuative or series

(1) *de* – "and," "now"

(2) *kai* – "and"

(3) *tei* – "and"

(4) *hina*, *oun* – "that"

(5) *oun* – "then" (in John)

3. Emphatic usages

a. *alla* – "certainty," "yea," "in fact"

b. *ara* – "indeed," "certainly," "really"

c. *gar* – "but really," "certainly," "indeed"

d. *de* – "indeed"

e. *ean* – "even"

f. *kai* – "even," "indeed," "really"

g. *mentoi* – "indeed"

h. *oun* – "really," "by all means"

VII. CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

- A. A **CONDITIONAL SENTENCE** is one that contains one or more conditional clauses. This grammatical structure aids interpretation because it provides the conditions, reasons or causes why the action of the main **VERB** does or does not occur. There were four types of **CONDITIONAL SENTENCES**. They move from that which was assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his purpose to that which was only a wish.
- B. The **FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE** expressed action or being which was assumed to be true from the writer's perspective or for his purposes even though it was expressed with an "if." In several contexts it could be translated "since" (cf.

Matt. 4:3; Rom. 8:31). However, this does not mean to imply that all FIRST CLASSES are true to reality. Often they were used to make a point in an argument or to highlight a fallacy (cf. Matt. 12:27).

This context (i.e., 1 Cor. 15:12-19) clearly shows the different ways a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE can be used.

1. Verse 12 is the normal usage of affirming the truth of a statement for the author's purpose.
 2. Verses 13,14,15,16,17,18 function in a similar way to a SECOND CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE. These do not relate to reality but to false assertions (cf. v. 12).
- C. The SECOND CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE is often called "contrary to fact." It states something that was untrue to reality to make a point. Examples:
1. "If He were really a prophet which He is not, He would know who and of what character the woman is who is clinging to Him, but He does not" (Luke 7:39)
 2. "If you really believed Moses, which you do not, you would believe me, which you do not" (John 5:46)
 3. "If I were still trying to be pleasing to men, which I am not, I would not be a slave of Christ at all, which I am" (Gal. 1:10)
- D. The THIRD CLASS speaks of possible future action. It often assumes the probability of that action. It usually implies a contingency. The action of the main VERB is contingent on the action in the "if" clause. Examples from 1 John: 1:6-10; 2:4,6,9,15,20,21,24,29; 3:21; 4:20; 5:14,16.
- E. The FOURTH CLASS is the farthest removed from possibility. It is rare in the NT. As a matter of fact, there is no complete FOURTH CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE in which both parts of the condition fit the definition.
1. An example of a partial FOURTH CLASS is the opening clause in 1 Pet. 3:14.
 2. An example of a partial FOURTH CLASS in the concluding clause is Acts 8:31.
 3. Another example is 1 Cor. 14:10; 15:37

VIII. PROHIBITIONS

- A. The PRESENT IMPERATIVE with MĒ PARTICLE often (but not exclusively) has the emphasis of stopping an act already in process. Some examples:
1. "stop storing up your riches on earth. . ." (Matt. 6:19)

2. "stop worrying about your life. . ." (Matt. 6:25)
 3. "stop offering to sin the parts of your bodies as instruments of wrongdoing. . ." (Rom. 6:13)
 4. "you must stop offending the Holy Spirit of God. . ." (Eph. 4:30)
 5. "stop getting drunk on wine. . ." (Eph. 5:18)
- B. The AORIST SUBJUNCTIVE with MĒ PARTICLE has the emphasis of "do not even begin or start an act." Some examples:
1. "Do not even begin to suppose that. . ." (Matt. 5:17)
 2. "never start to worry. . ." (Matt. 6:31)
 3. "you must never be ashamed. . ." (2 Tim. 1:8).
- C. The DOUBLE NEGATIVE with the SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD is a very emphatic negation. "Never, no never" or "not under any circumstance." Some examples: "he will never, no never experience death" (John 8:51); "I will never, no, never. . ." (1 Cor. 8:13).

IX. THE ARTICLE

- A. In Koine Greek the DEFINITE ARTICLE "the" had a use similar to English. Its basic function was that of "a pointer," a way to draw attention to a word, name or phrase. The use varies from author to author in the New Testament. The DEFINITE ARTICLE could also function
1. as a contrasting device like a demonstrative PRONOUN;
 2. as a sign to refer to a previously introduced SUBJECT or person;
 3. as a way to identify the SUBJECT in a sentence with a linking VERB. Examples: "God is Spirit" (John 4:24); "God is light" (1 John 1:5); "God is love" (4:8,16).
- B. Koine Greek did not have an INDEFINITE ARTICLE like the English "a" or "an." The absence of the DEFINITE ARTICLE could mean
1. a focus on the characteristics or quality of something
 2. a focus on the category of something
- C. The NT authors varied widely as to how the ARTICLE was employed.

- X. WAYS OF SHOWING EMPHASIS IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT
- A. The techniques for showing emphasis vary from author to author in the New Testament. The most consistent and formal writers were Luke and the author of Hebrews.
- B. We have stated earlier that the AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE was standard and unmarked for emphasis, but any other TENSE, VOICE, or MOOD had interpretive significance. This is not to imply that the AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE was not often used in a significant grammatical sense. (Example: Rom. 6:10 [twice]).
- C. Word order in Koine Greek
1. Koine Greek was an inflected language which was not dependent, like English, on word order. Therefore, the author could vary the normal expected order to show
 - a. what the author wanted to emphasize to the reader
 - b. what the author thought would be surprising to the reader
 - c. what the author felt deeply about
 2. The normal word order in Greek is still an unsettled issue. However, the supposed normal order is:
 - a. for linking VERBS
 - (1) VERB
 - (2) SUBJECT
 - (3) COMPLEMENT
 - b. for TRANSITIVE VERBS
 - (1) VERB
 - (2) SUBJECT
 - (3) OBJECT
 - (4) INDIRECT OBJECT
 - (5) PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

- c. for NOUN PHRASES
 - (1) NOUN
 - (2) MODIFIER
 - (3) PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

3. Word order can be an extremely important exegetical point. Examples:

- a. "right hand they gave to me and Barnabas of fellowship." The phrase "right hand of fellowship" is split and fronted to show its significance (Gal. 2:9).
- b. "with Christ" was placed first. His death was central (Gal. 2:20).
- c. "It was bit by bit and in many different ways" (Heb. 1:1) was placed first. It was how God revealed Himself that was being contrasted, not the fact of revelation.

D. Usually some degree of emphasis was shown by

- 1. The repetition of the PRONOUN which was already present in the VERB'S inflected form. Example: "I, myself, will surely be with you. . ." (Matt. 28:20).
- 2. The absence of an expected CONJUNCTION, or other connecting device between words, phrases, clauses or sentences. This is called an asyndeton ("not bound"). The connecting device was expected, so its absence would draw attention. Examples:
 - a. The Beatitudes, Matt. 5:3ff (emphasized the list)
 - b. John 14:1 (new topic)
 - c. Romans 9:1 (new section)
 - d. 2 Cor. 12:20 (emphasize the list)
- 3. The repetition of words or phrases present in a given context. Examples: "to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:6, 12 & 14). This phrase was used to show the work of each person of the Trinity.
- 4. The use of an idiom or word (sound) play between terms
 - a. euphemisms – substitute words for taboo subjects, like "sleep" for death (John 11:11-14) or "feet" for male genitalia (Ruth 3:7-8; 1 Sam. 24:3).

- b. circumlocutions – substitute words for God's name, like "Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 3:2) or "a voice from heaven" (Matt. 3:17).
- c. FIGURES OF SPEECH
 - (1) impossible exaggerations (Matt. 3:9; 5:29-30; 19:24)
 - (2) mild over statements (Matt. 3:5; Acts 2:36)
 - (3) personifications (1 Cor. 15:55)
 - (4) irony (Gal. 5:12)
 - (5) poetic passages (Phil. 2:6-11)
 - (6) sound plays between words
 - (a) "church"
 - (i) "church" (Eph. 3:21)
 - (ii) "calling" (Eph. 4:1,4)
 - (iii) "called" (Eph. 4:1,4)
 - (b) "free"
 - (i) "free woman" (Gal. 4:31)
 - (ii) "freedom" (Gal. 5:1)
 - (iii) "free" (Gal. 5:1)
- d. idiomatic language – language which is usually cultural and language specific:
 - (1) figurative use of "food" (John 4:31-34)
 - (2) figurative use of "Temple" (John 2:19; Matt. 26:61)
 - (3) Hebrew idiom of comparison, "hate" (Gen. 29:31; Deut. 21:15; Luke 14:26; John 12:25; Rom. 9:13)
 - (4) "All" versus "many." Compare Isa. 53:6 ("all") with 53:11 & 12 ("many"). The terms are synonymous as Rom. 5:18 and 19 show.

5. The use of a full linguistic phrase instead of a single word. Example: "The Lord Jesus Christ."
 6. The special use of *autos*
 - a. when with the ARTICLE (attributive position) it was translated "same."
 - b. when without the ARTICLE (predicate position) it was translated as an INTENSIVE REFLEXIVE PRONOUN—"himself," "herself," or "itself."
- E. The non-Greek reading Bible student can identify emphasis in several ways:
1. The use of an analytical lexicon and interlinear Greek/English text.
 2. The comparison of English translations, particularly from the differing theories of translations. Example: comparing a "word-for-word" translation (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV) with a "dynamic equivalent" (Williams, NIV, NEB, REB, JB, NJB, TEV). A good help here would be *The Bible in Twenty-Six Translations*, published by Baker.
 3. The use of *The Emphasized Bible* by Joseph Bryant Rotherham (Kregel, 1994).
 4. The use of a very literal translation
 - a. *The American Standard Version* of 1901
 - b. *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible* by Robert Young (Guardian Press, 1976).

The study of grammar is tedious but necessary for proper interpretation. These brief definitions, comments and examples are meant to encourage and equip non-Greek reading persons to use the grammatical notes provided in this volume. Surely these definitions are oversimplified. They should not be used in a dogmatic, inflexible manner, but as stepping stones toward a greater understanding of New Testament syntax. Hopefully these definitions will also enable readers to understand the comments of other study aids such as technical commentaries on the New Testament.

We must be able to verify our interpretation based on items of information found in the texts of the Bible. Grammar is one of the most helpful of these items; other items would include historical setting, literary context, contemporary word usage, and parallel passages.