

*Hermeneutics—Principles of  
Biblical Interpretation*

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# Principles of Biblical Interpretation—Table of Contents

## Introduction

### I. The Analogy of Faith

8

#### A. The Analogy of Faith Illustrated

#### B. The Value and Authority of the Analogy of Faith

1. The number of Biblical texts in which the same doctrine can be found
2. How closely the different passages agree with one another
3. The perspicuity (clearness) of the passage
4. The number of places the analogy is found in the Bible  
(or the distribution of the passages)

#### C. Four Additional Rules for Employing the Analogy of Faith

1. A doctrine that is clearly supported by the analogy of faith cannot be contradicted by a contrary and obscure passage
2. A passage that is neither supported nor contradicted by the analogy of faith may serve as the positive foundation for a doctrine, provided it is clear in its teaching. Yet the doctrine so established will not have the same force as one that is founded on the analogy of faith
3. When a doctrine is supported by an obscure passage of Scripture only, and finds no support in the analogy of faith, it can only be accepted with great reserve
4. In cases where the analogy of Scripture leads to the establishment of two doctrines that appear contradictory, both doctrines should be accepted as Scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves into a higher unity. Think of the doctrines of predestination and free will, of total depravity and human responsibility

### II. The Context

26

#### A. The Immediate Context

##### 1. The Passage Before and After the Passage Under Consideration

- a. Ignoring chapter divisions
- b. The immediate context within the same chapter

##### 2. The Immediate Context of the Author's Argument or Ethical Instruction

- a. Understand how the passage under consideration fits into the whole picture of what the author is saying
- b. Determine the contribution of the passage in question to the flow of the author's thought
- c. Understand the author's perspective
- d. Determine whether the passage in question is prescribing principles of moral truth or merely describing what happened at a particular time in Biblical history?
- e. Determine the "teaching focus" of the passage in question and to distinguish it from that part of the passage which is only "incidental detail."
- f. Determine the audience of the author

#### B. The Context of the Book in which the Passage is Found

1. Who wrote the book?

2. To whom did the author write the book?
3. What was the purpose of the author in writing the book?
  - a. Be alert to the author's "explicit statement [of purpose] or his repetition of certain phrases."

#### Excursus into John's purpose for writing his gospel 56

- b. The reader must pay close attention to the ethical instruction of the writer.
- c. We must pay attention to what is omitted and what receives the focus of the author.

#### C. Parallel Statements and Concepts...

1. ...in different books by the same author
2. ...within the same book
3. ...in books by different authors
  - a. The Centurion's Servant—Matthew 8: 5-13 and Luke 7: 1-10
  - b. The Transfiguration—Matthew 17: 1-13, Mark 9: 2-13; and Luke 9: 28-36
  - c. The Feeding of the Five Thousand—Matthew 14: 13-21 Mark 6: 31-44; Luke 9: 12-17; and John 6: 1-14)

#### D. Historical-Cultural Context

1. The general historical situation of the writer and his audience
2. The knowledge of cultural practices or customs which govern certain actions
3. The spiritual condition of the audience

### III. Special Literary Methods 95

#### A. Parallelisms

1. Synonymous parallelism
2. Antithetic parallelism

#### B. Similes and Metaphors

#### C. Allegories

#### D. Parables

1. The Importance of the Parables
2. The Purpose of the Parables
3. The Elements of a Parable
  - a. The earthly element
  - b. The spiritual element
  - c. The analogical element
  - d. The interpretive element
4. Rules for Interpreting Parables
  - a. Parables must be understood in relationship to the doctrine of Christ and the kingdom of God.
  - b. Parables must be understood in their cultural setting or context.
  - c. Parables must be interpreted according to certain exegetical rules.
    - (1) Determine the one central truth which the parable intends to teach.
    - (2) Second, determine whether Jesus Himself provides an

interpretation of the parable.

- (3) Third, study the context of the parable to determine whether the context provides clues for interpreting the parable.

#### IV. Types and Symbols 125

##### A. Essentials of a Type

1. There must be some notable point of resemblance or analogy between the two.
2. There must be evidence that the type was designed and appointed by God to represent the thing typified.
3. The type must prefigure something in the future.

##### B. Classes of Types

1. Typical Persons
2. Typical Institutions
3. Typical Offices
4. Typical Events

#### V. Interpreting Prophecy 130

##### A. The Institution of Prophecy

##### B. The Function of the Prophet

1. As the priest represented man before God, the prophet represented God before man.
2. The prophets guarded the theocracy (the kingdom of God)—that is, they applied the Law of Moses to the contemporary situation of Israel.
3. The prophets wrote the history of the theocracy

##### C. Periods of Prophetic Activity

1. From the prophet Samuel (1050 B.C. [?]) to the time of the writing prophets of the eighth century (750 B.C.).
2. From the eighth century (about 750 B.C.) to the end of OT history (about 425 B.C.).

##### D. Characteristics of Prophecy

1. Prophecy has an organic character that is progressively realized in history.
2. Prophecy must be understood in its historical setting.
3. It is difficult to determine the time-frame between the prophecy and its fulfillment.
4. Prophecies are often conditional.
5. Symbolic language is common in prophetic literature, but it is not used throughout the prophecies.
6. Biblical prophecy uses forms, terms, and events which would have been familiar to the audiences of their day.
7. Occasionally, the prophets transcended (moved beyond) the limitations of their times and cultures to speak in ways characteristic of the new covenant in the future.
8. Sometimes the prophets communicate their message through the use of actions and not just words.

### E. Rules for the Interpretation of Prophecy

1. The words of the prophets should be taken in their usual literal sense, unless the context or the manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicate that they have a symbolical meaning.
2. In studying the figurative descriptions that are found in the prophets, the interpreter should make it his aim to discover the fundamental idea expressed.
3. In the interpretation of the symbolical actions of the prophets, the interpreter must proceed on the assumption of their reality, i.e. [that is] of their occurrence in actual life, unless the connection clearly proves the contrary.
4. The fulfillment of some of the most important prophecies is germinant, i.e. [that is], they are fulfilled by installments, each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow.
5. Prophecies should be read in light of their fulfillment, for this will often reveal depths that would otherwise have escaped the attention.

### F. Additional Principles of Interpreting Prophecy

1. Determine whether the prophecy is cited in the OT or NT as fulfilled.
2. Find out what prophetic passages parallel each other.
3. Determine whether the prophecy is predictive or whether it deals with moral, ethical or theological truth.
4. Observe carefully how the NT writers use the OT scriptures
  - a. Sometimes the NT writers use the OT to prove a point.
  - b. Sometimes the NT writers use the OT to clarify or illustrate their teaching.
  - c. The NT writers recognize a clear continuity between Israel and the church.

## VI. Interpreting the Psalms

147

### A. The Character of the Psalms

### B. Strategy for Interpreting the Psalms

1. Study the historical setting of each psalm.
2. Understand the theology of the psalms
3. Pay attention to the grouping of the psalms
4. Pay attention to the collections within the psalms
5. Notice the different genres of the psalms
  - a. The Hymn
  - b. The Lament
    - (1) Three Kinds of Lament
      - (a) The psalmist may be troubled by his own thoughts and actions.
      - (b) The psalmist may complain about the actions of others against him (the “enemies”).
      - (c) The psalmist may be frustrated by God himself.

(2) Elements of a Lament

- c. Thanksgiving psalms
- d. Psalms of trust or confidence
- e. Psalms of remembrance
- f. Wisdom psalms
- g. Kingship psalms
- h. The imprecatory psalm
- i. Combination of categories

VII. Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes

162

- A. Proverbs
- B. Job
- C. Ecclesiastes

## *Hermeneutics: Principles of Interpretation*

### *Lesson One*

#### *Introduction*

There is an old joke about a man who attempted each day to take a verse of Scripture and apply it to his daily life. Rather than systematically working through a book of the Bible, he would close his eyes and randomly pick a verse of Scripture each day. This seemed to work very well for him until he randomly picked Matthew 27:5, “And he [Judas] threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.” Somewhat shaken, he then randomly let the Bible fall on another verse, John 13: 27b, “Whatever you do, do quickly.” That day the man closed his Bible for good and never picked it up again.

This story can teach us something. It can be dangerous to apply Scriptures which we do not understand in their Biblical context. “Flipping and dipping” through the Bible is not a sound method of Biblical interpretation, and we can get little benefit from it. Well-known and recognized principles of interpretation are available to us which will help us grasp the meaning of the Scriptures in their historical and cultural context.

#### **The Necessity of Hermeneutics**

Since the Reformation, evangelical theologians have stressed the liberty and the duty of all Christians to study the Bible for themselves. In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation and afterwards, the Reformers insisted that the interpretation of the Bible is not the exclusive domain of the church, and the church does not have the right to dictate the meaning of Scripture to the individual. As part of the Counter Reformation, the Council of Trent maintained the following opinion of the private interpretation of Scripture:

To check unbridled spirits it [the Council] decrees that no one, relying on his own judgment shall in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which Holy Mother Church **to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense** and interpretation has held or holds or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published (Quoted in *Knowing Scripture*, R. C. Sproul, p.35; emphasis mine).

Thus, the meaning of the Bible is to be determined by none other than the duly appointed leaders of the “Holy Mother Church.” This of course ruled out the possibility of any other interpretation, however convincing this interpretation might be. The Roman Catholic Church was convinced that if the Scriptures were placed into the hands of untrained church members, all kinds of errors would be produced and would spread to thousands of church members, errors which could lead to everlasting damnation. Ironically, the very thing the church hierarchy said it wished to prevent became a reality. Errors cropped up in the doctrine of the church which the church members were powerless to oppose.

The Reformers, and many who preceded the Reformation, had a very opposite opinion from the Roman Catholic hierarchy. While they recognized the potential for error and its harmfulness, they also recognized the potential for good which far outweighed the bad. With the Bible in the language of the common Christian, every Christian could read it for himself and could benefit from the Word of God. The Bible, it was maintained, was not written merely for priests and theologians, but for

farmers, carpenters, mothers, and children, ordinary people who could understand the ordinary sense of its meaning. A biblically literate church would also be able to challenge an ecclesiastical hierarchy which strayed from the old paths of biblical orthodoxy. The protestant reformers believed in the priesthood of all believers who are obligated to study the Scriptures for themselves.

However, as with many biblical doctrines, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers can be misinterpreted and misapplied.

## Two Errors to Be Avoided

### 1. One misinterpretation is that there is no need for gifted leaders in the church.

Biblically, this error can be easily refuted. Just as God had given Israel priests who studied the OT Scriptures and taught the congregation the Law of God, God has given the church **pastors and teachers** for the building up of the saints for their work of service (Eph.4:11-13). The priesthood of believers does not mean (and did not mean to the Reformers) that God has equipped every Christian equally to interpret the meaning of the Bible or to apply it properly. It means that each Christian has a part to play in the functional ministry of the church and to function properly each Christian should be enlightened with biblical truth.

Modern evangelicalism has often distorted the meaning of the right to private interpretation to mean that every Christian has equal competency in this endeavor. The result has been a lack of appreciation of those who have spent considerable time studying the Bible under the instruction of others who in turn learned from other godly, educated men. Generation after generation this theory of equal competency has led to the belief that the believer can start from the beginning—like reinventing the wheel—in his understanding of the Bible while ignoring centuries of historical theology. But God never intended for us to forget the lessons of the past or to ignore those He has given to teach us, but to go beyond the lessons of the past in our quest to understand the Bible. Just as God gives insight to us today, He has given insight to men in times past which has been committed to writing. To ignore the learning of the past is a critical mistake and a manifestation of our modern arrogance which claims that if knowledge is 100 years old, it must be outdated. If such thinking were consistently applied to the field of science, we would still be reinventing the wheel or crossing the oceans in ships rather than airplanes.

### 2. Another error is a vague subjectivism in biblical interpretation.

The question which often arises in Bible studies is, “What does this text mean to you?” Someone answers this question, followed by the answer of someone else whose answer is clearly in contrast with the first interpretation. No one seems to care that the two answers are contradictory to one another. The important thing is that the Scriptures have “spoken” to both people in their subjective experience. Each Christian has his own private meaning which comforts him.

It doesn't take long to figure out that based on the above principle of “a meaning for me and a meaning for you”, the objective sense of Scripture is not possible. It can mean two contradictory things at the same time; therefore, it means nothing. In the final analysis, it really does not matter what the Scripture means to me or to you. What is important is what the Scripture *means*—that is, what it means objectively whether or not you or I are “moved” by it emotionally. Another way of putting it is: What did the Scripture mean to the original writer? As Henry Virkler puts it, “...*the meaning of a text is the author's intended meaning, rather than the meanings we may wish to ascribe to his words.*” (*Hermeneutics*, p.76, emphasis his). The singular meaning of a text is to be assumed even in light of the fact that the Bible is a human-divine book. That is, it was written by humans



under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The human author may not have understood the full implications of his writings. For example, Moses, who wrote Genesis, could not have known that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22) was a type or picture of God's willingness to sacrifice Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. But to say that all Scripture has a double meaning, the meaning of the human author and the meaning of the divine author (God), opens the door to all kinds of speculative interpretation. I once heard a sermon on David's three mighty men (2 Sam. 23: 9), whom the preacher identified as the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. This allegorical method of interpretation was made popular by Origen in the second century. Based on this method, one can only imagine the wild interpretations which have little resemblance to the author's intended meaning.

On the other hand, we should not be too hasty in forbidding interpretations which use OT texts in illustrating established doctrines. For example, in Galatians 4:21-31, Paul likens Hagar and Sarah to two covenants, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The first is the mother to all who would wish to be saved by keeping the law. The other is the mother of all who would wish to be saved by grace. When Moses wrote the Pentateuch (first five books of the OT), he did not write the history of Hagar and Sarah as an allegory but as an historical narrative, yet Paul sees in this story an allegory to distinguish the Old and the New Covenant and the spiritual offspring of each. The spiritual children of Hagar are in bondage to the law while the spiritual children of Sarah are living in the freedom of the gospel. The apostle Paul was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he wrote, and we are obliged to believe that the Holy Spirit provided him with further insight into the story of these two women which could not have been intended by Moses. We will spend more time with this important subject later.

### **One Meaning but Many Applications**

The singular meaning of a text of Scripture (the intended meaning of the author) does not imply that a text can have only one application. Since the divine author of the Bible is God, the applications of a text can be numerous. Hundreds of sermons can be preached from any text of the Bible without violating the intended meaning of the original author. For example, the text of Matt. 5:5, **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”**, can have many applications. The general meaning is that the new, restored earth will one day belong completely to Christians as God's covenant people. Therefore, knowing this, we can make the following applications and many others: We should be patient when wronged by others; we should not live for material possessions; we should not attempt to dominate others who are weaker than we are; we should understand that true greatness in the sight of God has more to do with humility of heart than power and the reputation for achievement. We could learn many different lessons from this text which has only one meaning.

#### **I. The Analogy of Faith**

One of the most helpful principles of interpretation is the analogy of faith—Scripture interprets Scripture. Although the Bible has many human authors, it has only one divine author, the Holy Spirit, who inspired each human author. God is always consistent with Himself; therefore, it follows that no text of Scripture may be interpreted in such a way which is inconsistent with any other text of Scripture. Of course, we are making several assumptions with this principle. We are assuming that God is consistent in everything He says. We are assuming that the Holy Spirit inspired each writer of Scripture so that the human author only wrote what God wanted him to write. We are also assuming that the Bible is a miraculous book. All of these assumptions are

questioned by many scholars living today, but they are assumptions based on the testimony of the Bible itself.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (2 Tim. 3:16 NASB)

"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Num. 23:19 NASB)

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation,<sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Pet. 1:20-21 NASB)

One has to make a decision whether he will depend on the authority of the Bible or the authority of human beings who attempt to determine the trustworthiness of Bible. The other options are different religions which must be examined alongside the Christian faith. No other religion or holy book comes close to clarity of the Bible in describing man's fallen condition and its remedy.

Even when we are interpreting non-sacred writings and come to two different passages which seem to contradict one another, unless we can demonstrate their inconsistency, we should give the author the benefit of the doubt. How much more should we give Biblical writers the benefit of the doubt when we interpret Scripture. If we sense an inconsistency between two passages, the problem is not with the Bible but with our understanding of the Bible.

The analogy of the faith implies that the broader context of any passage of Scripture is the whole Bible. The word "context" in the English language literally means "woven together". Therefore, we believe that the Bible has been woven together in such a way that every text of Scripture relates in some way to every other text of Scripture.

By understanding one text, group of texts, or book, we are able to use those texts or book to understand other parts of the Bible, especially those which use similar wording or concepts. If we are generally familiar with the whole Bible, then we will be able to see how the entire Bible fits together into a meaningful whole, and this will facilitate the interpretation of many more passages. Thus, understanding particular texts facilitates our understanding of the whole Bible, and general familiarity with the whole Bible facilitates our understanding of particular texts.

No system of theology is flawless because such systems are formulated by men and not by God. God gave us the Bible in various forms of writing (genre) including stories, letters, prophecies, and poems. He did not give us the Bible as a textbook of systematic theology, although systematic theology is important because it summarizes the doctrines of the Bible. The purpose of God in giving us the Bible was the communication of His plan of salvation and the application of that saving work to the lives of believers. It is therefore inconceivable that God would give us a Bible from which we could not develop systematic, coherent, and logically consistent doctrines on the nature of God, the work of Christ, man's purpose, etc. The goal of all instruction in the Bible is ethical holiness so that God's people can reflect His own perfections. If the Bible is inconsistent with itself, it is unlikely that we could be expected to live lives of ethical purity and purpose which glorifies God. Indeed, if one surveys the history of doctrinal errors and heresies throughout the age of the church, he will find that wherever one finds doctrinal error, he also finds immorality in one form or another. (See Romans 6, which is Paul's response to those who were misinterpreting the grace of God in the gospel.) Our Christian practice may sometimes be better than our knowledge, but most often, our practice will be lagging far behind our knowledge. Thus, if our knowledge is

deficient, our practice will be deficient in proportion to our ignorance. The Bible says, “**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge**” (Hosea 4:6).

### A. The Analogy of Faith Illustrated

It would probably be helpful at this point to illustrate the importance of this principle of hermeneutics: scripture interprets scripture. In Romans 3 and 4 Paul defends the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is stated explicitly in 3:28 and 4: 5-6.

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from **works** of the Law. (Rom. 3:28 NASB)

But to the one who does not **work**, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: (Rom. 4:5-6 NASB)

His reference to **work** is a reference to the obedience of the Law or a righteousness based on works and not faith, for he says in vv.13-14,

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; (Rom. 4:13-14 NASB)

He is even more pointed in Galatians when he says,

"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." (Gal. 2:21 NASB)

Again, we could substitute the word “work” for Law in this verse so that it reads, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through [*works*], then Christ died needlessly.” In other words, if it were possible to earn our way to heaven through works or through keeping the Law, then it would not have been necessary for Christ to die on a cross. Salvation through works makes the cross null and void or unnecessary. Paul says the same thing in Rom. 11:6.

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise **grace is no longer grace**.

As far as the basis of our salvation is concerned, grace and works are like oil and water. They don’t mix. If our salvation is based upon unearned favor, it cannot be based upon earned merit. These are two different things. Just as soon as we add works to grace we no longer have a salvation which is based on grace through faith. It is now a salvation based on our performance. The deciding issue is no longer what Christ has done for us, but what we have done to secure our salvation.

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, (Rom. 4:4-5 NASB)

However, in the Christian life, grace and works mix very well because grace spurs us to works of obedience and gratitude. God has work for us to do.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;<sup>9</sup> not

as a result of works, so that no one may boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10 NASB)

This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. (Tit. 3:8 NASB)

We see, then, that by the analogy of faith—interpreting Scripture with Scripture—we can come to an understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in the work of Christ alone. So far, we have examined only the writings of the Apostle Paul. Let's examine Peter's writing as well who is incorrectly labeled as the first Roman Catholic pope.

Peter writes,

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen<sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood:** May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, (1 Pet. 1: 1-4 NASB)

Here we see that our salvation begins with God's **foreknowledge**. This is not knowledge about something or someone, as if God knows that we will believe in Christ and therefore responds to our foreseen faith by showing mercy to us. This would make repentance and faith a saving work; thus making salvation the consequence of merit. It would not be salvation **according to His great mercy**.

Moreover, salvation is **by the sanctifying work of the Spirit**. Progressive sanctification is the work of God's Spirit which also involves the response of the believer to the Spirit's work. Through the Spirit the Christian grows in grace and the knowledge of what salvation really means—salvation from the power of sin in his life and its consequence, death. However, it is more likely that Peter is talking about definitive sanctification, the work of the Spirit in setting apart the believer at the moment of conversion to be God's special possession with the end goal of being conformed to the moral image of Jesus Christ.

Note also that God the Father **caused us to be born again**, and that our being born again is for the purpose of obtaining **an inheritance** which is **reserved** for us **in heaven**. We did not cause ourselves to be born again by repenting and believing, something we will see later.

We will also look later at the doctrine of eternal security—better stated as the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Question: should we have confidence in the fact that our salvation is secure and will not be taken away from us—by God, or the devil, even by the remaining sin in our lives? Peter says here that our inheritance is **reserved** for us in a safe place, **heaven**. The only possible meaning of **reserved** is that it is secure. But how can we be confident in this inheritance? Is it up to us to keep performing in the Christian life to ensure our salvation? Does initial salvation depend on God, but continuing salvation depend on you? God has done His part; must you now do your part to secure your safe passage to heaven?

The Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent says, "Yes" to this question.

Canon XII. If any one shall say, that justifying faith is nought [*nothing*] else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified; let him be anathema.

In this anathema, the RCC says that “justifying faith” must be more than “confidence in the divine mercy” which “remits sins for Christ’s sake”. Moreover, if anyone says that it is through “this confidence alone by which we are justified”, he is to be anathematized.

Canon XIV. If any one shall say, that man is absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself to be absolved and justified; or that no one is truly justified save he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are perfected; let him be anathema.

In other words, it takes more than faith for justification and absolution (pardon or forgiveness) to be “perfected”. Something else must be added to complete justification.

Canon XV. If any one shall say, that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinated; let him be anathema.

Canon XVI. If any one shall say, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance unto the end, unless that he have learnt this by a special revelation; let him be anathema. (All quotations copied from the heritagebiblechurch.com website. Emphasis mine.)

Thus, there is no eternal security for the Roman Catholic. He will not know if he is among the saved (“predestinated”) or whether he will persevere or continue in the Christian life until he dies. The result of this reasoning is that there is no salvation in heaven **reserved** for you because you may not make it to the end. But Peter says otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; <sup>8</sup> and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:1-9 NASB)

Peter says that we are **protected**, not by the power of our *works* or the quantity of our *faith*, but **by the power of God through faith**. Here in one sentence is the dynamic between the sovereign work of God and the responsibility of the believer. The believer must exercise faith, but even in the exercise of faith, God’s power is at work in the believer’s life producing faith. The Apostle Paul speaks in similar terms.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out** your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** (Phil. 2:12-13 NASB)

Paul is not telling us to **work for** our salvation. This would contradict what he says in other epistles. Notice again that Paul says in Romans 4: 5 that **faith**, not works, **is credited as righteousness**.

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.<sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the **ungodly**, his faith is credited as righteousness, (Rom. 4:4-5 NASB)

Notice Paul says that **his faith**, not his works, **is credited as righteousness**. In Phil. 2: 12, He is telling us to manifest or demonstrate God's saving grace in our lives by means of good works. The reason (the explanatory **for**) we can do this is that God is working **in** us both in producing the **will** to obey and the sanctifying energy to **work for His good pleasure**. The willing and the doing are energized by God through His Spirit. As John Murray says,

God's working in us is not interrupted because we work, nor our working stopped because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. All this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is well-pleasing to him. We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we have also the incentive to our willing and working. What the apostle is urging is the necessity of working out our own salvation, and the encouragement he supplies is the assurance that it is God himself who works in us. The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that **all the energizing grace and power is of God** (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 148-149).

Returning to 1 Pet. 1: 1-9, what does Peter say is the **outcome of your faith**?

<sup>8</sup> and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,<sup>9</sup> obtaining as the outcome of your **faith the salvation of your souls**. (1 Pet. 1:1-9 NASB)

Answer: **the salvation of your souls**. He does not say that salvation is the outcome of your works. But someone may reason: maybe faith itself is our work. Faith is the sinner's merit by which he is saved. It is his faith offered to God as a saving work. Let's examine this question according to the analogy of faith, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.

### Is Faith Our Work or God's Work?

We have already seen that Peter says that God **caused us to be born again**. Where have we heard the words, **born again** before? Of course, John 3, and Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. But before he records this conversation, John says,

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.<sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,<sup>13</sup> who were **born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God**. (Jn. 1:11-13 NASB)

Christians are **born** of the Spirit not by physical birth (**not of blood**), not by **the will** (or sexual desire) of the **flesh**, and not by **the will** of the husband (*aner*). Spiritual birth is entirely different from physical birth, subject only to the will **of God**. This text is John's introduction to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup> **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."**<sup>7</sup> "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'<sup>8</sup> **"The wind blows where it wishes** and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:3-8 NASB)

Jesus is alluding to Ezekiel 36 and God's promise to faithless Israel that He will give Israel a new heart and a new spirit. This was a well-known passage, and Nicodemus should have recognized it at once.

"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land."<sup>25</sup> "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.<sup>26</sup> "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.<sup>27</sup> "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:24-27 NASB)

Jesus is making the analogy between physical birth and spiritual birth. Those who are born only once in the **flesh** cannot **see** (i.e. comprehend) or **enter** the kingdom of God. A second birth of the **Spirit** is required according to the will of God. Moreover, this birth of the Spirit cannot be controlled by human effort. **The wind** (in the Greek and Hebrew languages, the same word as Spirit—*pneuma* and *ruach*)—**blows** wherever it **wishes** to blow, unpredicted and uncontrolled by man. Thus, the working of the Holy Spirit in re-birth or regeneration is sovereign and free. Thus, we are back to Peter's words that God has **caused us to be born again** because of His mercy and not anything that we did. Moreover, the analogy Jesus uses indicates human passivity in being born again. When we are born in the flesh, we played no part either in the conception, the development of our bodies in the womb, or in the birth. As soon as we were born, we cried. But our cry did not cause our birth. The cry was the response to being born. Analogously, repentance and faith did not cause us to be born again. They were the response or consequence of being born again. We simply responded to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts by repenting of our sins and believing in Christ.

Everything said so far has been an illustration of the principle of the **analogy of faith**. By comparing one passage of Scripture to other passages of Scripture—some by the same author and others by different authors—we can piece together biblical truth on any essential doctrine. This is the process of doing systematic theology—systematizing what the bible teaches about truths, in this case, regeneration and justification.

Can we find teaching in the Pauline epistles similar to John's gospel indicating that faith is not a meritorious work on our part, but the result of being born again of the Spirit? Yes.

And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins,<sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.<sup>3</sup> Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.<sup>4</sup> **But God**, being rich in **mercy**, because of His great love with which He loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved),<sup>6</sup> and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,<sup>7</sup> so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.<sup>8</sup> **For by grace you have been saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;<sup>9</sup> not as a result of

**works**, so that no one may boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:1-10 NASB)

In this passage, Paul says that all of us at one point were spiritually **dead**. As a result of our spiritual deadness, we **walked** or lived in the **lusts of our flesh**, indulging sinful desires. We therefore see the connection between Paul and Jesus in speaking of the necessity of **rebirth** by means of the sovereign operation of the Spirit. In the same way that entering once more into the mother's womb is impossible for a human to do, it is likewise impossible for someone who is dead to make himself alive again. Moreover, as physically dead men are not capable of doing anything **physical**, spiritually dead men are not capable of doing anything **spiritual**—namely, repenting and believing. They must be **made alive** before they are able to do so. Therefore, we see that something must happen to the sinner **before** repentance and faith that leads to justification. One must be **born again** (John's gospel) or **made alive** (Paul) before he is able to **see** or **enter** God's kingdom. Note also that in Ephesians 2: 10 Paul uses the phrase, **created in Christ Jesus**. The word, **created**, is the same word used by Paul elsewhere in his epistles.

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a **new creation** [*kaine ktisis*]. (Gal. 6:15 NASB)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a **new creature** [*kaine ktisis*]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Cor. 5:17 NASB)

Paul recognizes that when anyone comes to Christ, he becomes a **new creation** or a **new creature** in Christ Jesus. (Notice that the Greek words are the same in both verses). Therefore, by examining a series of different texts by **different authors**, we understand that faith is not **our work**. Faith is **the work of God**.

Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe** in Him whom He has sent." (Jn. 6:28-29 NASB)

Faith is our **response** to God's **previous work** in our hearts known as **regeneration**. Regeneration (being reborn) must precede faith and repentance. Indeed, if salvation were by the works of the law or by the "**work**" of **human-generated faith** rather than purely the work of God, Christians would have reason for boasting. As it is, all grounds for boasting are **excluded**.

For **if** Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, **but not before God**. (Rom. 4:2 NASB)

Where then is **boasting**? **It is excluded**. By what kind of law? Of works? No, **but by a law** [*or principle*] **of faith**.<sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith **apart from works of the Law**. (Rom. 3:27-28 NASB)

### The Old Testament—Ezekiel 3

Can we find an **analogy** in the OT to confirm the need for regeneration before faith? Indeed, we can.

<sup>1</sup>The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the **Spirit** [*ruach*] of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; **and it was full of bones**.<sup>2</sup> He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, **they were very**



**dry.** <sup>3</sup> He said to me, "Son of man, **can these bones live?**" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." <sup>4</sup> Again He said to me, "**Prophecy over these bones** and say to them, 'O dry bones, **hear [shama] the word of the LORD.**' <sup>5</sup> "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath [ruach] to enter you that you may come to life.' <sup>6</sup> 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put **breath [ruach]** in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup> And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no **breath [ruach]** in them. <sup>9</sup> Then He said to me, "**Prophecy to the breath [ruach]**, prophecy, son of man, and say to the **breath [ruach]**, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four **winds [ruach]**, O **breath [ruach]**, and **breathe [naphach; Gen. 2: 7]** on these slain, that they come to life."'" <sup>10</sup> So I **prophesied** as He commanded me, and the **breath [ruach]** came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. <sup>11</sup> Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' <sup>12</sup> "Therefore **prophecy** and say to them, '**Thus says the Lord GOD,** "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. <sup>14</sup> "I will put My Spirit [ruach] within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, **have spoken** and done it," declares the LORD.'" (Ezek. 37:1-14 NASB)

The question God had for Ezekiel was, "**Can these bones live?**" The bones were **very dry**, indicating that the bodies had been **dead** for a long time. Ezekiel prophesied to Judah from 593 BC to 571 BC (*BibleWorks Timeline*), just before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC and for 16 more years to the exiles in Babylon. Throughout their long history, Israel and Judah had been spiritually dead with only a small remnant following the Lord. Their dead bones had dried up. The reason Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) had been taken into exile is idolatry and persistent violation of covenant law. The reason Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) had been taken into exile is idolatry and persistent violation of covenant law.

Ezekiel is commanded to **prophecy** over these **dead bones**, to preach to them. Why preach to dead people? Precisely because God will use the power of His preached word to make the dead live again.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together [suzóopoiéo]** with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (Eph. 2:4-5 NASB)

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He **made you alive together [suzóopoiéo]** with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (Col. 2:13 NASB)

When Ezekiel preached, the bones came together and were covered with **sinews, flesh, and skin**. However, v. 8 says, **but there was no breath [ruach] in them**. Without the breath of life, the human body is a corpse, and without the Holy Spirit, the physical human being is a spiritual corpse unable to respond to God's word. Then Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy to the **breath [ruach]**. The words **breath, spirit, and winds** are the same Hebrew word, *ruach*, producing a play on words within the passage. The **breath** and **winds** represent God's sovereign, energizing **Spirit** coming in answer to the preached word of God and giving spiritual life to lifeless **bones** just as God **breathed [naphach; the same word found in 37: 9]** life into Adam's lifeless body **the breath of life**. Likewise, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the **wind [pneuma, Gk.] blows where it wishes** because the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled by man. When the **breath** comes into these lifeless corpses, it is like dead

bodies coming out of their **graves**. The story is a narrative of what Peter says in his epistle, that **God caused us to be born again** (1 Pet. 1: 3).

## The Epistle of James

So far, so good, but then we come to the Epistle of James in which he forthrightly argues that faith without works will not save anyone, even going so far as saying that **Abraham our father was justified by works**.

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? **Can that faith save him?** <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? <sup>17</sup> **Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.** <sup>18</sup> But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. <sup>20</sup> But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, **that faith without works is useless?** <sup>21</sup> **Was not Abraham our father justified by works** when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> **You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.** (Jas. 2:14-24 NASB)

We can understand why Martin Luther was skeptical of the epistle of James and called it "a right strawy epistle", alluding to Paul's metaphor in 1 Cor. 3: 12. Here we have a potentially confusing text in which both Paul and James use the example of Abraham to prove two apparently contradictory points. I say "apparently" because the two authors do not contradict one another. How could they? They are both inspired by the same Holy Spirit. Paul uses Abraham to prove that we are saved by faith **apart** from the works of the Law.

For **if Abraham was justified by works**, he has something to boast about, **but not before God.** <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." <sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup> But to the one **who does not work**, but **believes** in Him who justifies the ungodly, his **faith** is credited as righteousness, (Rom. 4:2-5 NASB)

James, on the other hand, uses Abraham to prove that he was **justified by works, and not by faith alone** (v.24). Who is right, Paul or James? Since we believe that God's word is never inconsistent with itself, we know that this is not the right question. Paul and James are both correct. Our task is to find out how these two passages can be harmonized.

James actually begins his argument in chapter 2 with comments made earlier in chapter 1.

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves **doers of the word**, and **not merely hearers** who **delude** themselves. (Jas. 1:21-22 NASB)

Clearly, James believed that those who merely listen to the bible preached and go their merry way unchanged without being **doers of the word**—like so many professing Christians throughout the world—only **delude themselves**. They deceive themselves into believing that they are Christians but are not. James continues.

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and **yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.**<sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: **to visit orphans and widows** in their distress, *and to keep oneself unstained by the world.* (Jas. 1:26-27 NASB)

After instructing his readers to be **doers of the word and not merely hearers**, James gives an example of both kinds of people. The **hearer-only** is the person who does not **bridle** or control his tongue. He speaks abusively and thoughtlessly without thinking of how his words hurt people—because he doesn't care. He then gives an example of **doers** of the word who **visit orphans and widows in their distress**. This person is concerned about those who are living in financial distress. The “visitation” James has in view cannot simply mean that the **doer** sympathizes with the orphan and widow by giving them empty promises that God will care for them and that “everything will be okay”—**be warmed and filled** (v. 16)—without giving them essential food and clothing. This is clear from the immediate context of 2: 15-16 where James basically ridicules the imaginary interlocutor (the imaginary person engaged in dialogue with James in chapter 2) for having no **works** to prove his faith.

The immediate context of 2: 1-13 is also important in determining James' meaning in vv. 14-26.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ **with an attitude of personal favoritism.**<sup>2</sup> For if a man comes into your assembly **with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes**, and there also comes in **a poor man in dirty clothes**,<sup>3</sup> and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,”<sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?<sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?<sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?<sup>7</sup> Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?<sup>8</sup> If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, **“YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,”** you are doing well.<sup>9</sup> **But if you show partiality, you are committing sin** *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors.<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.<sup>11</sup> For He who said, **“DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,”** also said, **“DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.”** Now if you do not commit adultery, **but do commit murder**, you have become a **transgressor of the law.**<sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty.<sup>13</sup> For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:1-13 NASB)

In the scene James paints with vivid color, the **rich** man comes into the congregation dressed nicely and sporting gold jewelry while the **poor man** comes dressed in rags. The antagonist (opponent) in the story is addressed in the second person singular, **you**. James is speaking personally to this particular congregation and everyone in it whom he apparently knows is guilty of the very thing he is describing. They favor the rich over the poor. How many of us do that?! But by deferring to the rich man with special favors and treating the poor man with contempt, the antagonist (**you**) commits **murder**. James says that **you** are doing well if you don't **commit adultery**, but if **you...do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law**. Murder? How did murder get inserted into the conversation? James is implying that their humiliation of the poor man is a form of murder.

By pairing one's contempt for poor people with murder, James is following the biblical tradition of Moses, followed by a long Rabbinical tradition, of developing case laws which illustrate the summary of God's law found in the Ten Commandments (see examples of case laws in Ex. 21—24). Jesus does the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount.

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'<sup>22</sup> **"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court;** and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. (Matt. 5:21-22 NASB)

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';<sup>28</sup> but I say to you that **everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.** (Matt. 5:27-28 NASB)

Jesus illustrates the commandment against murder with the example of uncontrolled anger against one's brother which is a milder form of murder. Likewise, lusting for a woman—sexual desire for one's wife is not lust—is a milder form of adultery because in your heart and mind, you have consummated the act. I use the word "milder" because actual, physical murder is an aggravation of anger which is much worse than anger, and physical adultery is an aggravated form of lust (mental adultery) that is much worse than lust. The sin of murder compounds and amplifies the sin of anger, and physical adultery compounds and amplifies the sin of lust. Anger was not punished with death in the OT, murder was; and lust was not punished in the OT, but adultery was punished with death. Yet, all unforgiven sins, Jesus says, are subject to the final judgment of hell.

The reader is warned later that theological knowledge alone is not the same thing as having saving faith.

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. (Jas. 2:19 NASB)

The devil and his demonic force also **believe** many theological doctrines concerning the being and attributes of God, but this does not make them Christian. They believe the facts about God, but they do not put their trust in Christ for salvation. As Moo says,

"It is a good thing to possess an accurate theology, but it is unsatisfactory unless that good theology also possesses us." The warning applies especially to people like me who study and teach theology day in and day out. C.S. Lewis is said to have warned new Christians about going into the ministry for fear that constant contact with "holy things" would render them commonplace. Those of us in ministry must beware the danger that our theology—accurate and well stated as it might be—degenerate likewise into a verbal exercise. (quoted in Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, p. 130, citing C.L. Mitton, *The Epistle of James*, p. 110).

One key to understanding James is in the word **perfected** in v. 22. **As a result of works, faith was perfected.** The word for **perfected** can be translated "completed". By offering his son Isaac on the altar, Abraham's faith was completed or brought to its intended goal. The goal of faith is **obedience** (1 Pet. 1: 2), and Paul speaks of **obedience** in the same breath as being intertwined and inseparable from faith.

through whom [*Christ*] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, (Rom. 1:5 NASB)

If Abraham had refused to sacrifice his son, it would have implied that his faith in the promises of God in Gen. 15 was not a genuine faith. In Genesis 15, God promised him that his descendants through Isaac would be as the stars of the heaven in number. The text says that Abraham believed this promise and that his **faith** in this promise **was reckoned to him as righteousness**. Later, his willingness to sacrifice Isaac proved that his faith was not an empty faith, but a living faith

producing obedience. Heb. 11:19 informs us that when Abraham raised the knife to kill Isaac, he was believing that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill His promise.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; <sup>18</sup> it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."<sup>19</sup> **He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead**, from which he also received him back as a type. (Heb. 11:17-19 NASB)

Though often inconsistent, a person will habitually act according to what he really believes. If I were to say to you, "The roof of this building is going to collapse in thirty seconds!", none of you would move from his seat for one simple reason, you wouldn't believe me. If you did believe me you would be scrambling to get out of the building! Many false Christians say they believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in the gospel, and in the reality of hell for disobedient sinners; but they certainly don't live as if they believed the message of the bible. They lie to others; they commit fornication and adultery; they steal; they slander their neighbors. Their disobedient lives prove that they really do not believe that the bible is true and that God will punish disobedience. Abraham proved by his obedience that he truly believed God's promises.

The question is not whether works need to be added to faith to secure our salvation. This would be a clear contradiction of Romans 3: 28; 11: 16, and many other texts which we have already covered.

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith **apart** from works of the Law. (Rom. 3: 28 NASB)

But if it is by grace, **it is no longer on the basis of works**, otherwise grace is no longer grace. (Rom. 11:6 NASB)

The question is whether the faith which is without works is the same faith as that which is accompanied by works. James introduces the whole problem of faith without works in v.14 by saying, **Can that faith** [*a faith which is not accompanied by works*] **save him?** The answer is obvious. It cannot save him because it is not a genuine faith; it is not the same kind of faith which saved Abraham who demonstrated by his obedience that his faith was the real thing. Admittedly, the word, *that*, is not in the Greek text before **faith**. It reads, **the faith**, but some translations have rendered the article *that*, indicating that the translators have interpreted **the faith** in v. 14 as a certain kind of faith, the faith which will not save. James proceeds to use another example of the kind of faith that saves, the faith of **Rahab**.

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also **justified by works** when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (Jas. 2:25-26 NASB)

Like Abraham, Rahab proved that her faith in the God of Israel was a genuine faith. She put her life and the lives of her family on the line, trusting that God was sufficiently powerful to destroy Jericho. She changed her allegiance from the false gods of Jericho to the one and only true God of Israel. Had she refused to protect the Israelite spies, she and her family would have perished with all the others of Jericho, and she would not have become an ancestor of Christ (Matt. 1: 5).

Finally, we must ask the question whether the words **justified** (*dikaiōō*) and **faith** (*pistis*) are used by James in the same way as Paul uses them.

Was not Abraham our father justified [*dikaiōō*] by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? (Jas. 2:21 NASB)

You see that a man is justified [*dikaióō*] by works and not by faith [*pistis*] alone.<sup>25</sup> In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified [*dikaióō*] by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (Jas. 2:24-25 NASB)

because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified [*dikaióō*] in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20 NASB)

Therefore, having been justified [*dikaióō*] by faith [*pistis*], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Rom. 5:1 NASB)

nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified [*dikaióō*] by the works of the Law but through **faith** [*pistis*] in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified [*dikaióō*] by faith [*pistis*] in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified [*dikaióō*]. (Gal. 2:16 NASB)

This question introduces another hermeneutical principle concerning the use of particular words by the same author or by different authors, as in this case. Most scholars believe James was written earlier than Romans and Galatians (cf. Moo, *James*); therefore, he would not have been familiar with Paul's writings which were not existent. Moreover, while it is clear that Paul in Galatians is writing an argument against the legalism of those who believed one must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be justified, James has no such audience. Rather he is arguing against those who believed that obedience to the law was not necessary to verify the genuineness of one's faith, a heresy called antinomianism (anti-law). Paul also counters this heresy in Rom. 6 (see below).

Notice that the word **faith** (*pistis*) in Paul does not occur together with the word **alone** (*monos*) as it does in James (v. 24). What we find in Paul is that a man is **justified by faith apart from works of the law** (Rom. 3: 28). **Works of the law** in Paul are synonymous with works produced by the efforts of the **flesh devoid of faith** (Rom. 3: 20; 8: 8; Gal. 3: 10. Paul never said, however, that justifying faith is **alone**.

The addition of "alone" shows clearly that James refers to the bogus faith that he has been attacking throughout this paragraph: the faith that a person "claims" to have (v. 14); a faith that is in fact, "dead" (vv. 17 and 26) and "useless" (v. 20). This faith is by no means what Paul means by faith. He teaches that faith is a dynamic, powerful force, through which the believer is intimately united with Christ, his Lord. And since faith is in a Lord, the need for obedience is to follow from faith is part of the meaning of the word for Paul. He can therefore speak of "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1: 5) and say that it is "faith working through love" that matters in Christ (Gal. 5: 6). This is exactly the concept of faith that James is propagating in this paragraph. Once we understand "faith alone," then, as a neat summary of the bogus faith that James is criticizing, we can find no reason to expect that Paul would have any quarrel with the claim that "faith alone" does not justify.

...resolution of the tension [between James and Paul, D.M.] can come only when we recognize that James and Paul use "justify" to refer to different things. Paul refers to the initial declaration of a sinner's innocence before God; James to the ultimate verdict of innocence pronounced over a person at the last judgment. If a sinner can get into relationship with God only by faith (Paul), the ultimate validation of that relationship takes into account the works that true faith must inevitably produce (James). As Calvin puts it, "...as Paul contends that we are justified apart from the help of works, so James does not allow those who lack good works to be reckoned righteous" (Moo, pp. 141-142, emphasis mine).

### **Other texts proving that faith without works is not genuine faith.**

Thus far, we have only attempted to sort out this apparent contradiction by looking at the passage in James. There are many other passages of Scripture which demonstrate that there is no contradiction at all. In Matt.7, for instance, we learn that it is not the man who merely **hears** Jesus' words who is **wise**, but the man who hears His words and **acts** upon them.

"Therefore everyone who **hears** these words of Mine **and acts on them**, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> "Everyone who **hears** these words of Mine and **does not act on them**, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." (Matt. 7:24-27 NASB)

Clearly, the hearing of the word of God must be combined with the doing of the word of God. We are reminded of James' warning about being **doers of the word**, and **not merely hearers** who **delude** themselves. We also remember that James was the earthly brother of Jesus who was converted only later after Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 7; Jn. 7: 4-5). In his epistle, James could be alluding to some of the warnings that Jesus had made in the sermon on the mount and at other times in his ministry.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus says that there are many who hear His words but are unproductive, but only those who hear His words and **bear fruit** will be saved.

"And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who **hears** the word and **understands** it; who indeed **bears fruit** and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." (Matt. 13:23 NASB)

In Matt.18:21-35, in the parable of the unforgiving servant, the slave who refused to forgive the debt of his fellow slave was condemned to punishment. Jesus explains the meaning of the parable in v.35, "**So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.**" It may appear that Jesus was teaching a salvation by works just as much as James appears to be in James 2, but such a conclusion would be mistaken. He was simply making the point that if we are forgiven of our sins, the grace of God's forgiveness produces in our own hearts the same forgiveness of others. One who is truly forgiven is a forgiving person, whereas one who is not forgiven is not a forgiving person. Faith without works is dead.

The goal of our being forgiven is obedience—in this case, the obedience of forgiveness. This is saying essentially the same thing as James when he says that Abraham's faith was **perfected** (brought to its proper goal or completion) when he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. Our faith is brought to its proper goal when we begin to exhibit the same behavior as our Lord Jesus Christ. Without a Christ-like behavior, our faith is an empty boast.

We come to the same conclusion when we study Matt.25:31-46. The separation of the **sheep** from the **goats** will not be done on the basis of simple profession of faith. The separation will be done on the basis of what a person does with his faith. Did he feed the hungry or did he exhibit calloused indifference? Did he give the thirsty something to drink, or not? Did he clothe the naked, or not? Did he visit the prisoner, or not? Here again, we see similarity between Jesus' teaching and that of his earthly brother James who gauged the genuineness of one's profession by his concern for the poor (James 2: 15-16). Empty words will not do, but only actions which proved him to be a man or woman of genuine faith. Is this not the clear teaching of our Lord in Matt.7:21 when He says, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does**

**the will of My Father who is in heaven”?** Jesus is not teaching salvation by works; He is simply saying the same thing as James, **“Faith without works is dead.”**

Notice how the story of the rich young ruler in Lk. 18: 21-30 is followed by the stories of blind Bartimaeus (Lk. 18: 35-43) and Zaccheus (Lk. 19: 1-10). Jesus challenged the rich ruler’s claim to being a law-keeper by giving him one more commandment to keep. He must sell all he has, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus. By rejecting this command, the ruler proved that he was guilty of breaking the first commandment, **You shall have no other gods before Me.** Despite his claim, he was a law-breaker, and Jesus was forcing him to recognize this fact. He was not in any sense telling the ruler that he could be saved by his works. This conclusion is supported by the story of blind Bartimaeus who is basically destitute and has nothing to offer Jesus. He did not ask Jesus what he must do to regain his sight, but begged for mercy (v. 39). In the end, his faith, not his works, made him well (v. 42).

Zaccheus, unlike the rich young ruler, was not anxious to cling to his riches when confronted with the majesty of Christ. Rather, he was anxious to make things right between him and those he had defrauded and to give to those who had need. Jesus never asked him to do this, but he volunteered to do it on his own initiative. Seeing the change of heart exhibited in his obedience to divine law, Jesus responded, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham”** (v. 9).

The resistant, unbelieving Jews also claimed to be sons of Abraham. Jesus denied their claim because their deeds proved otherwise.

"I speak the things which I have seen with *My Father*; **therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.**" <sup>39</sup> They answered and said to Him, "**Abraham is our father.**" Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham." <sup>40</sup> "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. <sup>41</sup> "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "**If God were your Father, you would love Me,** for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. (Jn. 8:38-42 NASB)

### **Paul’s teaching on the relationship between faith and works**

Thus far, we have seen how faith and works are related together in the mind of James and Jesus, but does Paul himself have anything to say about this relationship? We will discover that the entire chapter of Romans 6 is devoted to this subject. A question naturally arises in Rom. 6: 1 from the doctrine of justification by faith alone taught in chapter 5.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?”

In other words, does it even matter how we live if we are saved by faith alone? Can we not just live like the devil and ask God to forgive us later? Paul then begins to prove from v. 2 onward that it is impossible for a person who is truly justified to live a life which is dominated or controlled by sin. True Christians have been united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. When He died, we died with Him (vicariously or substitutionally); when He was buried, we were buried; and when He rose again, we rose again with Him **to walk in newness of life** (Rom. 6: 4). The Christian who has died to the old life is now **freed from sin as a way of life** (6: 7).



What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup> knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; <sup>7</sup> for he who has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, <sup>9</sup> knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. <sup>10</sup> For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. <sup>11</sup> Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, <sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Rom. 6:1-14 NASB)

Other Pauline passages could also be consulted to prove that **Paul, James, and Christ** were in full agreement with one another (See Gal. 2: 9; 5:16-25; Eph.2:8-10; Phil. 2: 12-13, to name only a few).

### **John's teaching on the relationship between faith and works**

This identical truth is also taught in John's epistles; namely, that a true believer cannot sin as a way of life. He does not teach that a true believer will never sin (1 Jn. 1: 8), but that he will not sin habitually as he did before being saved (1 Jn. 3: 6-9). In the Greek, the present tense of **sins** in 3: 6 indicates the continuous activity of sin. The verse could be translated, **No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning habitually**... The New American Standard Bible of 1977 and 1995 uses **practices sin** in vv. 8-9 to denote habitual sin. Of course, as Christians, we still sin every day, but our lives are more accurately characterized by righteousness and obedience than by sin, for in 3: 7 John says, **...the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He [Christ] is righteous** (cf. 1 Jn. 2: 3-6).

We can see then that James is not left all by himself in teaching that faith without works is dead and that obedience is not optional, but absolutely essential, in proving the genuineness of faith. We are certainly not saved by faith and works, as Paul so clearly maintains; but we are also not saved by a faith which doesn't work, a faith which produces no righteousness. Rather, we are saved by the kind of faith which produces good works and proves itself to be a genuine faith. The end-goal of faith is obedience.

Were it not for evidence from other scriptural authors and from Jesus Himself, James' epistle may have given the church far more difficulty. Instead, we can see from the analogy of the faith (Scripture interpreting Scripture) that he is in full agreement with the rest of Scripture, and this is one reason his epistle was recognized by the believing community to be authentic and inspired of God. This is the value of this first principle of hermeneutics, the analogy of faith, also known as systematic theology. By shifting too much weight to James, many have erroneously assumed that good works are the basis of our salvation. By shifting too much weight to some Pauline passages to the exclusion of others like Rom. 6, many have also erroneously assumed that our obedience to the truth is purely optional and unimportant. As I hope we can see from the above discussion, careful attention to the analogy of faith found in many texts written by different authors will bring balance to the discussion.

## B. The Value and Authority of the Analogy of Faith

Berkhof (*Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p.165), tells us that the analogy of faith found in the Bible will have differing degrees of “evidential value and authority.” Four factors will determine this value and authority.

### 1. The number of Biblical texts in which the same doctrine can be found

For example, in our study of the relationship between faith and works, we discovered that this doctrine is not limited to a few isolated texts of Scripture, but is well established in many texts. There are also many texts of Scripture which establish the doctrine of the Trinity beyond reasonable doubt. This does not imply that if we find a doctrine in only one text we can ignore it. Nothing in the Bible can be ignored. Yet, it is evident that Christians often disagree on what the Bible teaches, and if a doctrine can be well established from many texts, we will have a greater possibility of agreement.

### 2. How closely the different passages agree with one another

We have already illustrated this point in our discussion of James. Our examination of passages in Matthew, Luke, Romans, and 1 John indicate a close agreement among the authors that genuine faith finds its confirmation only in righteous living.

Using another example, in John 10:30, Jesus says, “**I and the Father are one.**” In John 14:9, in response to Philip’s request to show them the Father, Jesus says, “**He who has seen me has seen the Father.**” In Matt. 11: 27 we read,

“All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.”

These texts teach that there is a unity of being (essence) between the Father and the Son. Every attribute of God the Father is also true of God the Son and God the Spirit. The difference (diversity) among them is in their specific roles or function. In salvation, the Father sends the Son into the world to die for the sins of His people. The Son executes this plan by dying on the cross, and the Spirit applies the finished work of Christ on the cross to each individual believer.

Isaiah 46:10 says, “**My [God’s] purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.**” The fact of God’s providential rule over all creation and over the activity of men is repeated in Ephesians 1:11: “**...also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.**”

### 3. The perspicuity (clearness) of the passage

One example of using obscure passages to support a doctrine is found in the doctrine of an earthly millennial reign of Christ for 1000 years. This doctrine can only be supported by an appeal to Rev. 20:1-4, an apocalyptic passage, rich in symbolism, and interpreted very differently by gifted scholars. Revelation 20 is only one of four passages where a thousand years is mentioned in Scripture, the other three being 2 Pet.3:8, Ecclesiastes 6: 6, and Ps. 90: 4, none of which have anything to do with the millennial question.

But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. (2 Pet. 3:8 NASB)

"Even if the *other* man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?" (Eccl. 6:6 NASB)

For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or *as* a watch in the night. (Ps. 90:4 NASB)

One wonders how evangelical dispensationalists can be so sure about the necessity of a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth when only one obscure passage supports this belief. This is not to say that they are necessarily wrong, only that their doctrine is resting on a very shaky foundation. Thankfully, believers can disagree over the correct interpretation of Revelation 20 without sacrificing the integrity of any doctrine concerning salvation or the Christian life.

**Genesis 6: 1-2** has been used to prove that angels cohabited with humans to produce a special race of superhumans who roamed the earth at one time.

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them,<sup>2</sup> that **the sons of God** saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.<sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."<sup>4</sup> The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore *children* to them. Those were the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown. (Genesis 6:1-4 NASB)

The **sons of God**, it is claimed, are angels. Job 1: 6 and 2: 1 speak of angels as being **sons of God**, so it is argued that those in Genesis 6 must also be angels. But this overlooks a passage in Luke where Jesus specifically denies that angels have the ability to procreate.

Jesus said to them, "The sons of **this age** marry and are given in marriage,<sup>35</sup> but those who are considered worthy to attain to **that age and the resurrection from the dead**, neither marry nor are given in marriage;<sup>36</sup> for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. (Luke 20:34-36 NASB)

Angels do not marry, and by good and necessary inference, they also do not produce offspring. The sons of God in Genesis are therefore the men who were from the line of Seth, the godly line, who married unbelieving women from the line of Cain. The result was the mixing of believers with unbelievers in marriage resulting eventually in the dilution of godliness in the line of Seth. The term, **sons of God** is also used in the Bible for believers.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matt. 5:9 NASB)

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom. 8:14 NASB)

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (Rom. 8:19 NASB)

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26 NASB)

Considering the context, the passage shows us how the people of God descending from Seth eventually became apostate in their beliefs about God because of intermarriage with unbelievers. Genesis 5 is concerned with the line of Seth. The **sons of God** from Seth's line intermarry; and, finally, the whole earth becomes filled with violence demanding the retributive justice of God in the flood (Gen. 6: 5-6).

It is a hermeneutical stretch to assume that the sons of God were angels intermarrying with humans to produce superhumans, especially when we have no analogy anywhere else in the Bible of angelic procreation or sexual relations between angels and humans. However, we do have other texts which use the expression, **sons of God** as believers.

#### 4. The number of places the analogy is found in the Bible (or the distribution of the passages)

This is different from the first criterion of the number of texts. The issue here is whether the doctrine can be found in many different places in the Bible rather than in the same book of the Bible. It is also helpful if we can establish a doctrine using both the Old and the New Testaments—as we did with the doctrine of regeneration—rather than resting it only in one or the other. It is also helpful if we can find the same analogy (or doctrine) taught by several different authors rather than just one or two as we did with the doctrine of justification by faith and the importance of good works as verification of genuine faith.

As another example, we do not have to depend on our understanding of spiritual gifts on **1Cor.12** alone. We also have **Romans 12, Ephesians 4** and **1Pet.4:10**. Clearly, we have more light shed on this subject by Paul than by Peter, but he at least acknowledges their existence. Also, each of the Pauline passages gives us a different perspective on the spiritual gifts thus enlarging our understanding of the subject.

<sup>4</sup> Now there are **varieties of gifts**, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are **varieties of ministries**, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. <sup>7</sup> But **to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good**. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. <sup>12</sup> **For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ**. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup> **If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.** <sup>16</sup> **And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.** <sup>17</sup> **If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?** <sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> But now there are many members, but one body. <sup>21</sup> **And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."** <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; <sup>23</sup> and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, <sup>24</sup> whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. **But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,** <sup>25</sup> **so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.** <sup>26</sup> And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are

Christ's body, and individually members of it.<sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues.<sup>29</sup> All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they?<sup>30</sup> All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. (1 Cor. 12:4-31 NASB)

We can see from this text that Paul's burden is not in describing each gift of the Spirit in detail—however much we may have wanted him to—but in emphasizing the importance of recognizing the contribution of spiritual gifts to the well-being and unity of the body of Christ. There is a medical condition known as auto-immune disease in which a person's immune system attacks healthy cells or organs in the body. I once had auto-immune hepatitis in which my immune system was attacking my liver. I had to take a steroid called prednisone for two or three years to be cured. Untreated, I would have died of liver failure. The church is often like this. Rather than working together as a well-functioning body with every part contributing to the other, Christians are often attacking one another. Left unaddressed, this auto-immune disease will kill the local church and even a regional or nation-wide church.

For through the grace given to me **I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**<sup>4</sup> For just as we have many members in one body and **all the members do not have the same function,**<sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.<sup>6</sup> Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;<sup>7</sup> if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;<sup>8</sup> or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.<sup>9</sup> **Let love be without hypocrisy.** Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. (Rom. 12:3-9 NASB)

Paul's emphasis in Romans 12 seems to be on the humility with which all of us must view our different gifts. We should not **think more highly** of ourselves than we ought to, nor should we minimize our worth—as Paul clearly teaches in 1 Cor. 12: 15-25. Rather, we should approach the subject of service with **sound judgment**. Pastors of large churches have the temptation to think **too highly** of themselves because they are leading such a large group of people, thus minimizing the importance of other gifts and the people who have those gifts. As a result, everything going on in the church revolves around the pastor or pastoral staff. The church becomes staff-driven to the exclusion of the ministries which others could have done had they been encouraged to do so. Paul ends this section—as he does in 1 Cor. 12—with the admonition to **love**, explicitly, to love **without hypocrisy**. That is, use your spiritual gifts in serving one another not with an attitude of self-promotion but with genuine concern for the other.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift...And He gave some *as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;<sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.<sup>14</sup> As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;<sup>15</sup> but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4:7, 11-16 NASB)

Once more, we notice Paul's repetitive emphasis on the working **together** of **the whole body** which is equipped and **held together** by **each individual part** properly functioning with every other part. The church is not one huge eyeball, ear—or, for that matter, one big head, the pastor (?)

And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again **the head to the feet**, "**I have no need of you.**" (1 Cor. 12:21 NASB)

Since Christ is the head of His church (Eph. 1: 22), I wonder if Paul was alluding to **pastors** and **elders** in the church. The leaders of the church cannot say to the less visible members, "We don't need you. The church can function quite well without you." No, it can't. Peter warns against this tendency, and his warning gives church leaders a much-needed preventative against high-handed leadership or authoritarianism in the church

Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as *your fellow elder* and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, <sup>2</sup> **shepherd the flock of God among you**, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;<sup>3</sup> **nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.** <sup>4</sup> And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet. 5:1-4 NASB)

Paul's emphasis in Eph. 4 is upon the "equipping gifts" of the church for the purpose of service: **apostles** first, then **prophets**—both serving as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2: 20), then **evangelists, pastors, and teachers**. Since apostles were those who were witnesses of Christ's resurrection and had accompanied Christ since the time of John the Baptist (Acts 1: 21-22), there is no apostolic office today. Nor can the Roman Catholic Church claim that the pope is the apostolic successor to Peter since Christ did not appoint Peter or any other disciple as the leader of the church. Scripture alone must answer such questions, not church tradition. There also need be no **prophets** in the sense of those who received special revelation from Christ. We now have all we need in the completed biblical canon of the Bible (Rev. 22:18; cf. Deut. 4: 2). Tongues are no longer necessary since interpreted tongues were the same thing as prophecy or special revelation (1 Cor. 14).

What we do need still in the church are **evangelists, pastors, and teachers** to give fuller explanations and applications of divine special revelation as well as practical training in sharing the gospel. The specific purpose of these equipping gifts is summarized in Eph. 4: 12, **for the equipping of the saints for the work of service**, that is, the **service** of the **saints** who are equipped by the "equippers": apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Notice the little comma (,) at the end of **saints** in the KJV which is lacking in the NASB, NIV, ESB, and even the NKJ. There were no commas in the Greek text, nor even periods separating sentences. Punctuation was added much later. The comma following saints seems to imply that the equippers were given to the church not only to equip the saints but also for the work of service. In other words, the equippers performed the **work of service**. Modern translators, on the other hand, have properly removed the comma, promoting the interpretation that the equippers helped the saints perform their work of service. That this is the proper interpretation is clear from the immediate context in which Paul says that everyone in the church is doing his or her part in causing the **growth** of the body.

<sup>16</sup>being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Everyone—not just pastors, elders, and deacons—is doing his part in the church to cause the growth of the body both qualitatively and quantitatively **until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and**

**of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (v. 13).**

On the subject of spiritual gifts, we are not limited to the NT. We learn from the OT that different people were endowed by the Spirit to perform special work on the tabernacle and the garments of the priests (**Ex.31:1-5**).

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>"See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. <sup>3</sup>"**I have filled him with the Spirit of God** in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *kinds of* craftsmanship, <sup>4</sup>to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, <sup>5</sup>and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all *kinds of* craftsmanship. (Exod. 31:1-5 NASB)

This is the first mention of the enabling (**filling**) of the Spirit for the performance of a specific task, and the task has nothing to do with preaching but with building the tabernacle. This OT text lends an additional perspective to the subject of spiritual gifts. The believer may exercise his spiritual gift or gifts within the context of his other God-given abilities and interests. For example, carpentry is not a spiritual gift, but the believer may use his carpentry skills as the gift of service to train young men to work their way out of poverty or as a gift of service to a destitute family who cannot afford to pay carpenters. Any skill we have may be used of God as a spiritual gift of service.

Remember Berkhof's four criteria for developing a strong analogy.

- 1. The number of Biblical texts in which the same doctrine can be found**
- 2. How closely the different passages agree with one another**
- 3. The perspicuity (clearness) of the passage**
- 4. The number of places the analogy is found in the Bible (or the distribution of the passages)**

When we read Paul's reference to **baptism for the dead** in **1 Cor. 15: 29**, we realize that it is much too weak to formulate a doctrine. This is the only reference in Pauline literature to baptism for the dead (rule one). Moreover, since there is no elaboration or explanation of the practice, the text is not clear (rule 3), and there is no evidence from the text itself that Paul is actually approving the practice (rule 3). He only mentions it as an illustration of his argument that if there is no bodily resurrection from the dead, then there is no point in baptism for the dead. Further, there is nothing in other NT authors about the practice or in the OT about being circumcised for the dead (rule 4). We therefore have no reason to treat baptism for the dead as a continuing ordinance for the church.

### **C. Four Additional Rules for Employing the Analogy of Faith**

Berkhof also lays down four other rules which should be kept in mind when using the analogy of faith (p. 166). There will be some concepts here that are similar to what we have already covered.

- 1. A doctrine that is clearly supported by the analogy of faith cannot be contradicted by a contrary and obscure (unclear) passage.**

It is agreed by most Bible scholars that once a person is truly saved, he can never be lost. **Hebrews 6:4-8** appears to teach otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance,

since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.<sup>7</sup> For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;<sup>8</sup> but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (Heb. 6:4-8 NASB)

However, this passage is much less clear than texts teaching the perseverance of the saints.

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 1:6 NASB)

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?<sup>36</sup> Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."<sup>37</sup> But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39 NASB)

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;<sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.<sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. (Jn. 10:27-29 NASB)

Upon closer inspection, the immediate context of Hebrews 6 teaches that **better things** (than falling away from the faith) are expected of those who are truly saved.

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. (Heb. 6:9 NASB)

We might ask, **better** than what things? Answer: Better than the things mentioned in vv. 4-5:

- enlightened
- tasted of the heavenly gift
- have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.

As good as all of these things sound, they are inferior to the **better things** that characterize true believers (see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, "The Perseverance of the Saints", pp. 788-809). And what are these **better things**?

<sup>10</sup>For God is not unjust so as to forget **your work** and **the love which you have shown toward His name**, in **having ministered and in still ministering to the saints**.<sup>11</sup> And we desire that each one of you show the same **diligence** so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,<sup>12</sup> so that you will not be sluggish, but **imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises**. (Heb. 6:10-12 NASB)

The **better things** include:

- continuing **love** which produces continuing **ministry** to the saints
- present **diligence** in one's faith rather than **sluggishness**—i.e. the faithful use of the means of grace: prayer, study of the word, fellowship, submission to pastoral care and preaching
- **imitation** of those who are steadfast in the faith



Compared to the texts in Romans and Galatians clearly explaining justification by faith alone, James 2 is also somewhat obscure. Therefore, special effort has been expended earlier to explain the meaning of James 2: 21-26.

**2. A passage that is neither supported nor contradicted by the analogy of faith may serve as the positive foundation for a doctrine, provided it is clear in its teaching. Yet the doctrine so established will not have the same force as one that is founded on the analogy of faith.**

Berkhof is referring to those areas of Christian theology which can be supported by only one or a few texts of Scripture. He provides no examples of such teaching, but perhaps he is thinking of the millennial reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years seemingly taught in Rev. 20 as well as the rapture of the church before the tribulation in 1 Thess. 4—two separate but related doctrines.

**3. When a doctrine is supported by an obscure passage of Scripture only, and finds no support in the analogy of faith, it can only be accepted with great reserve.**

Berkhof mentions, as an example, the dispensational teaching of a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth supposedly found in Rev. 20:1-4.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the **abyss** and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup>And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and **bound** [*deo*] him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup>and he **threw** [*ballo*] him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, **so that he would not deceive the nations any longer**, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. <sup>4</sup>Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the **souls** of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:1-4 NASB)

As we have already said, we have no incontrovertible evidence of this “earthly” reign of Christ anywhere else in Scripture nor even in the passage cited. There is nothing in Rev. 20: 1-4 that says anything about Christ reigning on earth with the saints, only that they **reigned with Christ for a thousand years**. Where else in Scripture do we read anything else about Satan being bound? Here again we will use the analogy of faith (scripture interpreting scripture) with the word **bound** guiding us to various passages.

The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He **casts out** [*ekballo*] the demons by the ruler of the demons." <sup>23</sup> And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan **cast out** [*ekballo*] Satan?" <sup>24</sup> "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. (Mk. 3:22-25 NASB)

"If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!" <sup>27</sup> "But no one can enter the **strong** [*ischuros*] man's house and plunder his property unless he first **binds** [*deo*] **the strong man**, and then he will plunder his house. (Mk. 3:26-27 NASB)

"But if I **cast out** [*ekballo*] demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup> "Or how can anyone enter **the strong man's house** and carry off his property, unless he first **binds** [*deo*] the strong *man*? And then he will plunder his house. (Matt. 12:28-29 NASB)

We can see that the word, **cast out**, is directly associated with the word, **binds**. **Casting out** demons is essentially the activity of **binding** Satan, thus diminishing the effects of Satan's kingdom. The next question is: If Satan was **bound** during the ministry of Christ and afterwards through His resurrection, then what did Christ do with him?

<sup>1</sup>A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; <sup>2</sup>and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. <sup>3</sup>Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a **great red dragon** having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads *were* seven diadems. <sup>4</sup>And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. <sup>5</sup>And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. <sup>6</sup>Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. <sup>7</sup>And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, <sup>8</sup>and they were not strong [ischuo] enough, and there was **no longer a place found for them in heaven**. <sup>9</sup>And the great dragon **was thrown down [ballo]**, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was **thrown down to the earth**, and his angels were **thrown down** with him. <sup>10</sup>Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. (Rev. 12:1-10 NASB)

Next question: If Satan is **thrown down** to the earth and **bound**, in what sense is he bound?

<sup>3</sup>and he **threw** him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, **so that he would not deceive the nations any longer**, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. <sup>4</sup>Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. (Rev. 20: 3-4a)

<sup>9</sup>And the great dragon was thrown down [ballo], the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, **who deceives the whole world**; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev. 12:7-9 NASB)

Third Question: What is the significance of Satan's inability to deceive the nations?

Now there were some **Greeks [i.e. Gentiles]** among those who were going up to worship at the feast; <sup>21</sup>these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and *began to* ask him, saying, "**Sir, we wish to see Jesus.**" <sup>22</sup>Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>And Jesus answered them, saying, "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.** (Jn. 12:20-23 NASB)

"Now judgment is upon this world; **now** the ruler of this world will be **cast out [ekballo]**. <sup>32</sup>"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all men** to Myself." (Jn. 12:31-32 NASB)

Therefore, Satan will not be bound in the future; he has already been bound in the work of Christ on earth and in His bodily resurrection from the dead, symbolically portrayed in Revelation 12. But there is something else that Satan can no longer do because (1) Christ has risen from the dead and (2) Satan has been cast out of heaven as the result. From the book of Job we read,

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." <sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless

and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."<sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD, "**Does Job fear God for nothing?**"<sup>10</sup> "**Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side?** You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land."<sup>11</sup> "**But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.**" (Job 1:6-11 NASB)

How did Satan have access to the Lord's throne? We don't know, but he speaks with the Lord in person. After telling the Lord what he had been doing, God singles out Job as a **blameless and upright man**. In some sense, God exposes Job to Satanic attack by drawing attention to him. Satan accuses Job of being a mercenary believer. As long as Job gets paid well **on every side** and **his possessions increase in the land**, Job will be more than happy to worship God. But take all that away and he will **curse You [God] to Your face**. God takes Satan up on his bet and agrees to afflict Job to prove that Job is who God said he was, a blameless and upright man who would never curse God or renounce his faith in God. And he didn't. The point made for our purposes is to show that Satan has access before God for the purpose of accusing Job. But notice the next text from Romans.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to *become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;<sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?<sup>33</sup> **Who will bring a charge against God's elect?** God is the one who justifies;<sup>34</sup> **who is the one who condemns?** Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom. 8:28-34 NASB)

Paul asks the questions: **Who will bring a charge against God's elect...Who is the one who condemns?** Because believers have been justified through the atoning work of Christ, there can be no one **against us** with any authority to **condemn** us or even to accuse us. Because Christ has **died** for our sins and **was raised**—proving God's acceptance of His sacrifice—there are no grounds for Satan's accusations. Moreover, Christ now **intercedes for us** as our advocate before the same throne at which Satan accused us.

With the atoning death of Christ, something has changed. Satan no longer has access to the throne of God to condemn God's people. We live on the accomplished side of the death and resurrection of Christ. The OT saints, including Job, lived in hope of its accomplishment. Recall Rev. 12: 10 after Michael and his angels were able to overpower the dragon and his angels, throwing them down to heaven.

<sup>10</sup>Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, **for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.**" (Rev. 12:10 NASB)

The battle won by Michael and his angels in heaven against the dragon and his angels corresponds to the battle that Christ won on earth in His atoning death and resurrection. Paradoxically, by dying on a cross and rising again, Christ overcame Satan and his demonic host and **bound** them that they could no longer **deceive the nations**, allowing the world-wide propagation of the gospel through missionary endeavor. It is not coincidental that we have the story of the **Acts of the Apostles** immediately after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension not only in Jerusalem, but all Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the then-known world. But secondly, Satan is unable to **accuse the brethren** before the throne of God, having no grounds for his accusations.

"The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me." <sup>17</sup> The seventy returned with joy, saying, "**Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.**" <sup>18</sup> And He said to them, "**I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.**" <sup>19</sup> "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. <sup>20</sup> "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." (Lk. 10:16-20)

In this text, the disciples are casting out demons in the name of Jesus. Although the text does specifically use the verb *ekballo* (**cast out**), the idea of casting out demons is clearly implied. Jesus responds with words anticipating John's vision in Revelation 12, Satan being cast out of heaven to earth. "**I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.**"

And the great dragon was **thrown down**, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was **thrown down** to the earth, and his angels were **thrown down** with him. (Rev. 12:9 NASB)

**4. In cases where the analogy of Scripture leads to the establishment of two doctrines that appear contradictory, both doctrines should be accepted as Scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves into a higher unity. Think of the doctrines of predestination and free will, of total depravity and human responsibility.**

Consider the **sovereign election** of those who will be saved and the **necessity and responsibility** of Christians to preach the gospel to the whole world, knowing that only the elect will respond in faith (Rom. 10: 13-15; Acts 13: 48; Eph. 1: 4-6; Rom. 9; 1 Pet. 1: 2, Rom. 8: 28; Jn. 6: 25-40, 65; Jn. 10: 11, 14-15, 25-29).

<sup>13</sup>for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Rom. 10:13-15 NASB)

In this passage, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions demanding obvious answers. People cannot call on the Lord for salvation unless they have believed in Him. They cannot believe in Him if they have never heard of Him. They cannot hear about Him unless someone preaches (witnesses) to them. The witnesses cannot preach the message of salvation unless they are sent. Conclusion: The witness of believers is **essential** to the goal of saving unbelievers who must believe their message in order to be saved.

When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been **appointed to eternal life** believed. (Acts 13:48 NASB)

This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*," <sup>8</sup> and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, **and to this doom they were also appointed.** (1 Pet. 2:7-8 NASB)

Those Gentiles who believed the gospel because they had been **appointed to eternal life**. But those who stumbled over the gospel and rejected it did so, ultimately speaking, because they were appointed to this end.

<sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup>He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:4-6 NASB)

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup>for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, <sup>12</sup>it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." <sup>13</sup>Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." <sup>14</sup>What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." <sup>16</sup>So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Rom. 9:10-16 NASB)

"But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup>"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup>"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup>"This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn. 6:36-39 NASB)

God the Father has given **some** men and women to the Son. Of all those given to Him, He will lose **nothing**—i.e. none of those given will be lost. There are people in this world who will be lost. Not everyone will be saved. Conclusion: Not everyone is **given** to Christ by the Father.

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (Jn. 6:44 NASB)

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (Jn. 10:11 NASB)

"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, <sup>15</sup>even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I **lay down My life for the sheep**. (Jn. 10:14-15 NASB)

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup>Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. <sup>26</sup>"But you do not believe because **you are not of My sheep**. <sup>27</sup>"**My sheep hear My voice**, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup>and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup>"My Father, **who has given them to Me**, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. (Jn. 10:24-29 NASB)

"I have **other sheep**, which are **not of this fold**; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. (Jn. 10:16 NASB)

There are three classifications of people:

- (1) **Sheep** already in the fold who have heard Jesus' voice and are following Him. These have been given to the Son by the Father.
- (2) **other sheep not already in the fold** whom Jesus **must bring...also** who will also **hear His voice in the future and will follow Him**. These also are given to Jesus because they also come to Jesus.
- (3) Those who are **not His sheep** who **do not believe**, nor will they ever believe because they are not given to Jesus.

Another apparent contradiction is the sovereignty of God and the responsibility and privilege of prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray, **“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** Yet, God says to Isaiah,

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me,<sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isa. 46:9-10 NASB)

Also, Eph. 1: 11.

...also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, (Eph. 1:11 NASB)

Since God is Sovereign and will do **all His pleasure**, prayer would appear unnecessary. Yet, Scripture also teaches that God uses prayer to accomplish His purposes (Ex. 32) as well as human responsibility (Acts 27). Moreover, if Jesus believed prayer did not accomplish anything, He would not have commanded us to pray (Lk. 11: 1-3). Let's look at these texts one by one.

## Exodus 32

So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for **your** people, whom **you** brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*."<sup>8</sup> "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'"<sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people."<sup>10</sup> **"Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."**<sup>11</sup> Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against **Your** people whom **You** have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?<sup>12</sup> **"Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'?** Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to **Your** people."<sup>13</sup> **"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"**<sup>14</sup> So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people. (Exod. 32:6-14 NASB)

Ask yourself this question: Did Moses provide Yahweh (translated: **Lord**) with any new insights about His people Israel? Can we picture God's eyes brightening as Moses enlightened Him about the fact that He, the Lord, not Moses, had brought Israel out of Egypt or that He had made a covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (namely, Jacob) to multiply their descendants—not specifically Moses' descendants—as the stars of the heavens? Can we imagine God saying, “You know, Moses, I had not thought of that before! How could I be so stupid? Okay, I have decided on a change of plans based upon your superior wisdom and insight into this situation which prevented Me from making a dreadful mistake about destroying Israel!” Can we imagine this scene? No? I didn't think so. God is infinitely wise and knows everything past, present, and future. He also foreordains everything that comes to pass, even the intercession of Moses which He had ordained before He created the world.

Moreover, we can see from the conversation itself that God was planting seeds into Moses' mind which would guide him in his intercession?

"Go down at once, for **your** people, **whom you brought up** from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.

Moses takes God's hint and "reminds" Him (as if God ever forgot) that Israel belonged to Him, not Moses, and that He delivered Israel from Egypt by powers which Moses did not possess. Moreover, had not Moses heard God say that He would harden Pharaoh's heart so that He could multiply his signs and wonders before Israel that they and even the Egyptians would know that He alone is God (Ex. 7: 3-5)? Will God now throw all that away by destroying Israel and permitting the Egyptians to blaspheme His name? And had not Moses heard God say that His name is Yahweh, I AM Who I Am, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the covenant-keeping God who always keeps His promises (Ex. 3: 13-15)?

Would God have forgiven Israel without the intercession of Moses? Not likely. Was it necessary? Indeed! Had God planted Moses between Himself and Israel for the express purpose of interceding for Israel? Most assuredly!

## Acts 27

If God had already told Paul that he would appear before Caesar in Rome, why does Paul put up such a fuss about the sailors staying on the ship when the waves began to pound the ship against the rocks? I will not recount the whole story, but several verses will help us see the compatible relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

After Paul had told the centurion and captain of the ship not to set sail from Crete, (2) and after the centurion had ignored his advice, (3) and after the ship's crew had lost control of the ship, jettisoned the cargo, and abandoned all hope of survival, (4) Paul gives his "I told you so" speech, followed by encouraging news that an angel had assured him of the survival of everyone on the ship.

When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss.<sup>22</sup> "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship.<sup>23</sup> "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,<sup>24</sup> saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, **God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.**'<sup>25</sup> "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. (Acts 27:21-25 NASB)

Later on, fearing that the ship would be broken to pieces on the rocks closer to shore but still far off, the sailors attempt to escape the ship in a small boat, leaving no one on the ship capable of navigating it closer to shore where there would be a greater opportunity of swimming ashore. At this point,

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "**Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.**"<sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship's* boat and let it fall away. (Acts 27:31-32 NASB)

This was all the Roman soldiers needed from Paul to convince them that nobody was getting off the ship! But wait a minute! Had not the angel promised Paul the lives of **all those** on the ship? Why then, was Paul insisting that the sailors' halted efforts at sailing the ship would result in the

deaths of the centurion and the soldiers? Simply because God would use the sailors' skills to accomplish His desire of saving everyone on board (vv. 39-40). God was not going to pick the ship up in mid-air and sail it through the sky. He could have done so easily enough, but He would not do so. God saves according to His own will and way, and He cannot be manipulated into saving anyone on their terms. God had ordained that everyone on the ship would be saved, but His will would be accomplished through obedience to the words of His prophet, the apostle Paul—words which they had ignored so far. If they ignored them again, they were dead!

Enough said, the soldiers take action, and everyone gets off the ship at the right time. And wouldn't you know it, Paul's predictions come true: **And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.** God had already instructed Paul that he must appear before Caesar (Acts 27: 24). The means of bringing this to pass was the skillful navigation of experienced sailors and Roman soldiers who could keep them on the ship.

### Luke 11: 1-3

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."<sup>2</sup> And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.'<sup>3</sup> 'Give us each day our daily bread. (Lk. 11:1-3 NASB)

The prayer in Luke is not as complete as that in Matthew, but it is preceded by the disciples' request for Jesus to teach them to pray. He proceeds to do so, giving them instructions on how to pray. One of the things included to pray for in Luke, as in Matthew's gospel, is for the Father's kingdom to come. Matthew's version includes, '**Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.**' (Matt. 6:10 NASB) The Father's kingdom and doing His will **on earth** was at the very top of Jesus' priority list, and He wanted the disciples to have the kingdom always on their hearts and in their prayers. We may ask: Will this kingdom finally come **on earth** as it is in heaven? We know from the rest of the NT and particularly in Revelation that there is no stopping it. Jesus assured Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church. So, why pray for it? First, because Jesus says so, and second, because praying for the consummation of the kingdom of God is not a mere formality without any real meaning—like the current King Charles of England requesting a newly elected prime minister to set up his government. It's merely a ceremony. Everyone in England knows that a duly elected prime minister will assuredly be invited to the palace to set up his government.

However, God so ordered His kingdom in such a way that the prayers of His people would play a very strategic and important role in bringing the kingdom to its consummation. Without prayer, it will not come. Of course, God has not only ordained the consummation of the kingdom but also the very prayers that will play an integral part of its coming.

### Conclusion of the Analogy of Faith

The hermeneutical principle of the analogy of faith is akin to the theological analysis of Scripture or systematic theology. There is, of course, the ever-present danger of reading our theological system into a particular text of Scripture. In doing this, we may be missing what the text is saying due to the conscious or unconscious desire to protect our system. We may also be inclined to dismiss what other Biblical interpreters are saying because they do not fall into our particular "camp". For example, we may dismiss what a dispensationalist interpreter says about a passage just because he is a dispensationalist even though what he says is accurate. This is known as the ad hominem fallacy, an argument against a person rather than a valid argument against his position.



We need to listen to what a person is saying before we judge his words as false because his theology is not our own.

One famous illustration of this ad hominem fallacy is the debate between Martin Luther and John Eck in Leipzig in the early days of the Reformation. After making a statement about justification by faith alone, Luther was reprimanded by Eck who retorted, “Jon Hus said that!”, as if a reference to Hus was the end of the argument. Jon Hus was a reformer who lived and wrote 100 years before Luther who taught the same doctrine as Luther and was burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Thus, when Eck mentioned Jon Hus, this was supposed to be the end of the argument. If Hus said it, then the statement must be false. To Eck’s retort, Luther responded in like kind, “I don’t care if the devil said it; if it is true, it is true no matter who said it!”

To put this into context here in Africa, just because a preacher is not of our particular denomination, this doesn’t necessarily make his teaching wrong; and just because a preacher may have a high position in our own denomination, this doesn’t necessarily make him right. The Bible tells us to **test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world** (1John 4:1; See also Rev. 2:2). When these words were written, there were only individual churches; there were no denominations like the Church of Uganda or the Presbyterian Church in Uganda. Our attitude should be like that of the Jews in Berea, who, upon receiving the word of God from Paul and Silas, were **examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so**. No matter how Biblical or evangelical a church may be, it only takes a short time for that church to be overcome by false teaching due to the laziness of its teachers who neglect the careful study of the word of God.

## Lesson One Questions

1. Why is the study of Biblical Hermeneutics necessary?
2. Did the Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic Church encourage individual members to study the Bible for themselves? Explain
3. What fundamental doctrine of the Reformation allows for the privilege and duty of individual interpretation of the Scriptures?
4. Does the priesthood of all believers imply that there is equality of ability among all believers in interpreting Scripture? Explain.
5. Is the question: What does this passage of Scripture mean to you? the proper starting point in our quest to understand the Scriptures? Explain.
6. Did the author always understand the full implications of his writing? Explain.
7. Explain the analogy of faith.
8. What should be one’s first reaction when he confronts two passages of Scripture which appear to contradict each other?
9. Why can we expect the Bible to be self-consistent?
10. Prove the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone from Romans, Galatians, 1 Peter, Genesis 15, and other passages. Does James 2: 14-26 contradict this doctrine? Explain.
11. What other NT passages teach that genuine faith characteristically produces good works?
12. Are all analogies in Scripture equally strong? That is, is every doctrine in Scripture as clear as every other doctrine? Explain.
13. Berkhof says that “a doctrine that is clearly supported by the analogy of faith cannot be contradicted by a contrary and obscure (unclear) passage.” How would you apply this rule to Hebrews 6: 1-8?
14. What should we do if two seemingly contradictory analogies or doctrines are equally taught?
15. What is one danger of systematic theology?

## Lesson Two

### II. The Context

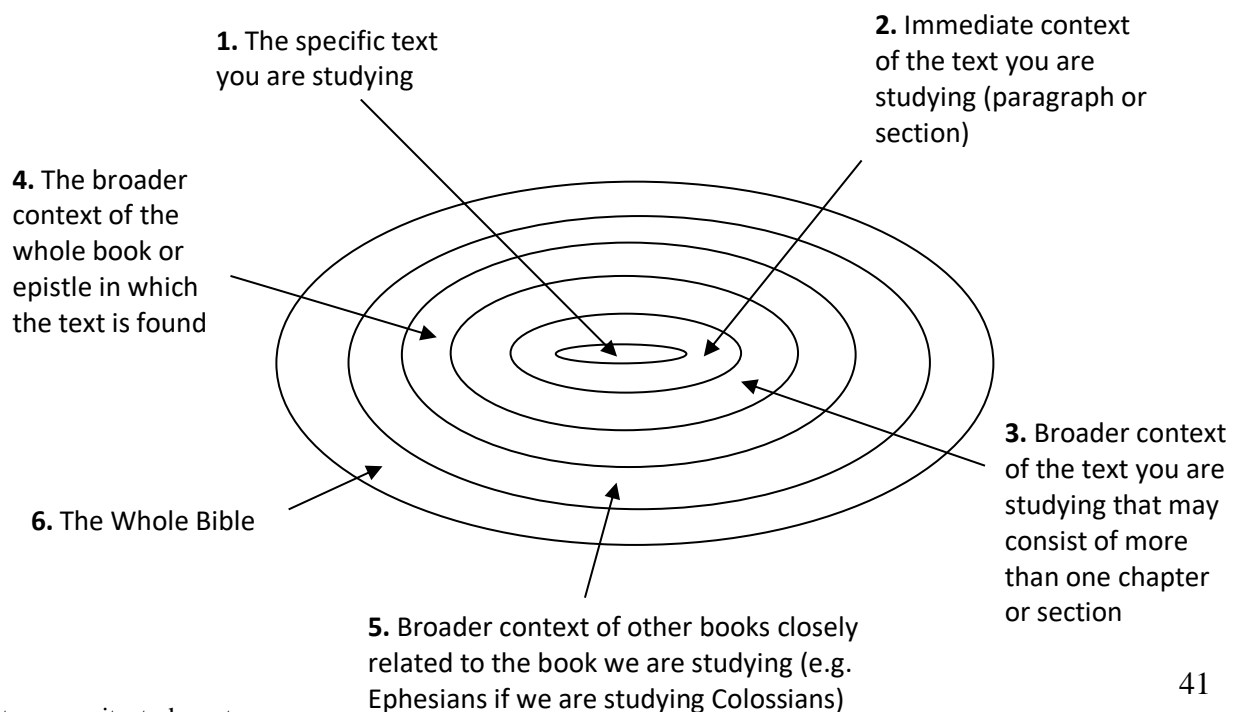
Second in importance to the analogy of faith is the importance of context in the interpretation of Scripture. Alternatively, we could say that context is the *most* important since the analogy of faith pertains to the broader context of the whole Bible. The Bible consists of 39 books in the OT and 27 books in the NT, but it is still *one book with one central message* and one divine author. And since this one divine author inspired all the human authors, we can safely assume that each human author wrote in such a way that his thoughts in each part of the book were related to one another.

Context is important because thought is usually expressed in a series of related ideas. Occasionally a person does make a swift and radical departure from the train of thought he is pursuing. Sometimes thoughts are tied together loosely by a general theme. But whether ideas are thus bound by close logical union or whether the main propositions are developed by repetition, the meaning of any particular element is nearly always controlled by what precedes and what follows (A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, p.100).

#### A. The Immediate Context

##### 1. The Passage Before and After the Passage under Consideration

The context of any passage is the whole Bible, but when preparing a sermon each week, the preacher does not have time to read the whole Bible in advance. This is a task which should be an ongoing routine. What he must do is begin his search for the truth from the specific text outward into broader circles. He can start first with the verses which come before the text in question. Then he can examine the verses which follow the text in question. Both the passages which come before and those which come after is the immediate context. He can then examine the context of the author's argument or ethical instruction, and then the whole book in which the text is found. If the passage under examination is written by an author who has written more than one book, then the other books by that author can be examined for ideas, phrases, concepts, etc. which are similar to the one being examined. (The diagram below is adapted from Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message—A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, p. 33).



### a. Ignoring chapter divisions.

One of the first considerations when dealing with the immediate context is to ignore the chapter divisions of the passage. This will be difficult since we are somewhat programmed to believe that these divisions are inspired by God. They are not.

Our modern chapter divisions of the Bible were created by Stephen Langton and were completed around AD 1227. Wycliffe's Bible (completed in 1382 before the printing press) was the first Bible to use Langton's chapter divisions. Since this time, English Bible translations have followed the pattern, with other languages adopting the same division system. Bible verses were created much later. The verses of the Old Testament were developed by a Jewish rabbi named Nathan in 1448 (compellingtruth.org).

Therefore, chapter and verse divisions were added many years after the writing of the Scriptures had been completed. They were added so that people worshipping together could find an announced passage easily. Just imagine trying to direct a congregation to a particular part of Scripture in any book of the Bible, particularly a large one, without chapter and verse divisions.

Sometimes these divisions can be very helpful in sorting out the segments in an author's thought. However, chapter divisions often prevent us from understanding the author's complete thought. At this point we will do a few short exercises to illustrate the importance of ignoring chapter divisions. We will also pay attention to context and the analogy of faith.

### Acts 5

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira are judged for lying to the Holy Spirit, a judgment which ends in physical death (5: 1-11). The seriousness of their crime and the severity with which God deals with it can be understood more fully by examining the context. In Acts 4: 31-37, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit had been mightily demonstrated from the Day of Pentecost onward. After Peter's and John's arrest and release (4: 1-30), the Holy Spirit responded to the corporate prayer of the saints by shaking the building they were in (v. 31). Immediately afterward, Luke (the author) reports,

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.<sup>34</sup> For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales<sup>35</sup> and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35 NASB)

In other words, this was a time of unusual manifestation of the Holy Spirit who was hovering over His church protecting it from dangers outside and dangers inside. On the outside were the dangers of the Jewish leaders who had Peter and John arrested. In all likelihood they would have executed Peter and John had it not been for the fact that they performed an undeniable miracle by healing a lame man (Acts 3). On the inside were Ananias and Sapphira who were willing to lie to the apostles and the Holy Spirit, thus quenching the Holy Spirit and threatening to interrupt "the victorious progress of the people of God" (F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 110). Bruce likens the sin of Ananias and Sapphira to the sin of Achan in Joshua 7 in which Achan steals objects under the ban and halts the progress of Israel in conquering the land of Canaan.

## 1 Thessalonians 4

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.<sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.<sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until **the coming of the Lord**, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.<sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and **the dead in Christ will rise first**.<sup>17</sup> Then we **who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord**.<sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words. Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know full well that **the day of the Lord** will come just like a **thief in the night**.<sup>3</sup> While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then **destruction will come upon them suddenly** like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.<sup>4</sup> But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;<sup>5</sup> for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; (1 Thess. 4:13-5:5 NASB)

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15, a brief reading of the text will lead us to believe that **the coming of the Lord** is the same as **the day of the Lord** in 5:2. Some interpreters wish to separate these two events in time, maintaining that chapter 4 refers to the "secret rapture" of the church before the Great Tribulation, while chapter 5 refers to the coming of the Lord in judgment at the end of the world at least a thousand years later. If we can ignore the chapter divisions, we can see that the coming of Christ for His people takes place at the same time as the judgment of the wicked. The simultaneous salvation of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked is a constant theme throughout the OT—e.g., the conquest of Canaan and the dividing of the Red Sea in which Israel is preserved while their enemies are destroyed.

It is also evident from this juxtaposition (placed side by side) of the **coming of the Lord** for His people and the **day of the Lord** in judgment of the wicked that Paul believed that they were one and the same. He therefore warns them to be sober and alert, just as Jesus does in the parables of Matt 23—25.

"Therefore be on the alert, for **you do not know which day your Lord is coming**.<sup>43</sup> "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. (Matt. 24:42-43 NASB)

"Be on the alert then, for **you do not know the day nor the hour**. (Matt. 25:13 NASB)

"Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the *appointed* time will come.<sup>34</sup> "*It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert.*<sup>35</sup> "Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—<sup>36</sup> in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep.<sup>37</sup> "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" (Mk. 13:33-37 NASB)

There are other principles of hermeneutics, including the analogy of faith, which will help us with the interpretation of this passage. Several parallel phrases come up in the 1 Thess. 4—5 which we can find elsewhere in Scripture.

"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN **COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY** with power and great

glory.<sup>31</sup> "And He will send forth His angels with **A GREAT TRUMPET** and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other...

<sup>36</sup>"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.<sup>37</sup> "For **the coming of the Son of Man** will be just like the days of Noah.<sup>38</sup> "For as in those days **before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage**, until the day that Noah entered the ark,<sup>39</sup> and they **did not understand** until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.<sup>40</sup> "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.<sup>41</sup> "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.<sup>42</sup> "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know **which day your Lord is coming**.<sup>43</sup> "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at **what time of the night the thief was coming**, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.<sup>44</sup> "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*. (Matt. 24:30-31, 36-44 NASB)

We see in the texts that the **coming of the Son of Man** and the **Day of the Lord** are the same event, not two separate events. In this event, we see the salvation of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked. We also see that the metaphor of the **thief** is used in both Matthew and 1 Thessalonians. The reference to His coming like a **thief** is not a reference to the secrecy of His coming, but a reference to the time of his coming. The thief does not announce his coming by knocking on the door of your house and saying, "I am now coming to rob you, so get ready!" And neither will Christ, but we as believers should always be looking for the coming of the Lord.

In Matt. 24, Jesus is talking about His second coming. If we examine the verses previous to v.43, Jesus likens **the coming of the Son of Man** to the days of Noah when God destroyed the world with a flood. In those days the people were **eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark** (Matt.24: 38). We can imagine them greeting one another with "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5: 3) when the flood came unexpectedly. The second return of Christ will be just like this, unexpected, like the coming of a **thief at night**.

The **coming of the Son of Man** (Matt. 24:37) is parallel to the **coming of the Lord** in 1Thess. 4:15, and the mention of a **thief** (24: 43) parallels 1Thess. 5: 2, 4. Note also that the **coming of the Son of Man** (Matt. 24: 37) is mentioned in the same text as **the day your Lord is coming** (24: 42), indicating once more that the **coming of the Lord** and the **day of the Lord** are one and the same in both texts. We should, therefore, be inclined to think that Paul was drawing upon the instruction of Christ about His second coming and incorporating this instruction into his epistle to the Thessalonians. It does not really matter whether 1 Thessalonians was written before or after Matthew's gospel—it was probably written sometime around 50-51 AD, before Matthew (60 AD)—since Paul could have received this same information by direct revelation.

In Matt. 24:42 Jesus warns believers not to let His future coming be a surprise to them as it will be to the rest of the world. Just as the flood was not a surprise to Noah and his family, the coming of the Son of Man should not come as a surprise to the people of God. When He comes back, we should be going about His business preaching the gospel and doing good to people just like the **sensible slave** in vv.45-47. The rest of the world will be totally self-absorbed with daily life and unprepared for His coming, just like the people of Noah's day and just like the people Paul mentions in 1Thes. 5:3.

Matthew 25: 31-46 also demonstrates that the judgments of the righteous and the wicked—the sheep and the goats—will occur at the same time and will not be separated by 1000 years. This is another

example of using the analogy of Scripture (Scripture interpreting Scripture) to help us interpret a text.

<sup>31</sup>"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>"All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; <sup>33</sup>and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup>"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...

<sup>41</sup>"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels...

<sup>46</sup>"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matt. 25:31-34, 41, 46) NASB)

The parallels in Matthew demonstrate that Jesus and Paul are talking about the same event. In this event, we not only see that God is going to save His people but is also going to destroy His enemies at the same time. If not, then the coming of the Son of Man is not like the days of Noah in which God saved Noah and His family and destroyed everyone else. There is not the slightest hint in the passage that there will be a delay of 1000 years before Christ returns (a third coming) in judgment of the wicked. Just as soon as we are being united with the Lord, He will turn in wrath upon His enemies. Like those who didn't believe Noah's warnings (2 Pet. 2: 5), there will be no time or second chance for those who have not believed in Christ or who have not listened to the infallible witness of creation (cf. Rom. 1: 18-32).

We might also ask how the "rapture" of the church (meeting the Lord in the air) can be a *secret* event in light of the fact that **the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first** [*i.e. rise out of their graves*]? Can such a coming of Christ be a secret event with all the noise in the air and bodies emerging from graves? Was the Noahic flood a secret event, or was it simply unexpected? The reference to His coming like a **thief** is not a reference to the secrecy of His coming, but a reference to the time of his coming. The thief does not announce his coming by knocking on the door of your house and saying, "I am now coming to rob you, so get ready!" And neither will Christ, but we as believers should always be looking for the coming of the Lord.

Moreover, Rev. 1: 7 says "every eye" will see Christ when he comes in the clouds, not just believers.

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and **every eye will see Him**, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. (Rev. 1:7 NASB)

The coming of Christ in salvation and judgment will be a **single**, historical event, **not two events** separated by 1000 years. This doctrine is strengthened by the express words of Jesus in John 5.

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, <sup>29</sup>and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment. (Jn. 5:28-29 NASB)

This text demonstrates the bodily resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous at the same time, not as two separate events separated by a thousand years. It also demonstrates the judgement of the unrighteous and the salvation of the righteous as occurring at the same time. Therefore, by using the analogy of faith, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, along with the hermeneutical principle of interpreting specific texts in their immediate contexts, we find that the doctrine of the secret rapture of the church is not

taught in the Bible. We also find that the separate judgement of the righteous and unrighteous is also not taught in the Bible.

## Ephesians 5-6

<sup>21</sup>and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. <sup>22</sup>Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord...<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...<sup>33</sup>Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband. (Eph. 5:21-22,25,33 NASB)

<sup>1</sup>Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup>HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise)...<sup>4</sup>Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ...<sup>9</sup>And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.<sup>13</sup>Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup>Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,<sup>15</sup> and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;<sup>16</sup> in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*.<sup>17</sup> And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:1-2, 4-5, 10-17 NASB)

Everyone is familiar with Paul's instructions to the Ephesians concerning spiritual warfare in Eph. 6, and we are inclined to believe that he is talking primarily about an "Elijah-on-Mount-Carmel" experience where Elijah does battle with the prophets of Baal. However, Paul is not talking about fighting false prophets or squaring off against demons, although demonic spirits are clearly involved in the passage.

If we ignore the chapter divisions, we will see that Paul has just given the church many practical instructions about life in the church, the family and at work. Everyone should be subject to one another in the fear of Christ knowing that Christ is head of the church (5: 21). On a functional level, wives should be submissive to their own husbands (5: 22), and husbands should love their own wives as Christ loved the church and sacrificed His life for the church (5: 25). Children should obey their parents in the Lord as they are directed in the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother" (6: 1). Fathers should not provoke their children to wrath but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (v. 4). At work, slaves should be obedient to their masters even as they would be obedient to Christ, for in the final analysis it is really Christ whom they are serving (vv. 5-8). Masters, on the other hand, should be kind to their slaves knowing that they have the same Master in heaven who will not be partial because of social or economic standing (v. 9). Before God, both the slave and the earthly master are equal.

How would the Christian community be able to obey these instructions? For hundreds of years the old covenant community, the nation of Israel, had failed to do so. The answer to this question is found in Eph. 5: 18-19.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (Eph. 5:18-19 NASB)

By being filled with the Holy Spirit as they relate to one another both in worship (v. 19) and in everyday life (5: 22—6: 9), believers have the opportunity to live in obedience to God, an otherwise hopeless adventure. Notice that Paul does not command the Ephesians to be indwelt by the Spirit, for all believers are indwelt (Rom. 8: 9).

Therefore, when we come to Eph. 6: 10-20, it would seem strange that Paul would depart from the ordinary struggles of God's people attempting to live out the Christian life in the home, the church, and at work, to take up the more sensational conflicts with demonic forces which we normally call "spiritual warfare"—for example, casting out demons and healing the sick, events which were so common during the ministry of Jesus. Instead, it is more likely that Paul is speaking of the spiritual warfare which is ever present in the life of ordinary Christians (Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 179).

Where, exactly, are the demons lurking—in the brothels (houses of prostitution), in the crime-ridden districts of Ephesus (New York? Nairobi?) in the high places of government? The answer is: all of the above. But they are also lurking in the living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms of Christian homes where husbands, wives, fathers, mothers and children wage fierce conflicts with one another. They are lurking in every work place where employers are tempted to mistreat their workers by withholding wages and benefits, and workers are tempted to cheat their employers by stealing or being lazy. Spiritual warfare is an everyday affair, and we will not be up to the battle unless we strap on the spiritual armor prescribed by the Apostle Paul.

### Other Passages

In his book, *Knowing the Scriptures*, Arthur T. Pierson mentions several passages whose interpretations are facilitated (made easier) by ignoring the chapter divisions: Matt. 9:38 and 10:1; Matt.16: 28 and 17:1; Matt. 19:30 and 20:1; Mark 2:23-28 and 3:1-5; Luke 20: 45-47 and 21:1-4; Acts 7:60 and 8:1; 1 Cor. 10:33 and 11:1; 1 Cor. 12:31 and 13:1; 2 Cor. 4:18 and 5:1; 2 Cor. 6:18 and 7:1 (pp.135-136). In each of these examples, the thought of the biblical author is carried forward into the succeeding chapter.

### Matthew 9:35-38

<sup>35</sup>Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. <sup>36</sup> Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> "Therefore **besech the Lord of the harvest** to send out workers into His harvest." (Matt. 9:35-38 NASB)

Jesus laments that the harvest is plentiful but there are insufficient workers to send into the harvest to reap it. He then tells the disciples to ask God to send out workers to reap the harvest. Based on the chapter division, we could easily lose the lesson of this situation. One can reasonably assume that as soon as Jesus asked the disciples to *pray* for more laborers, they began to pray that God would soon provide laborers for His harvest of human souls.

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (Matt. 10:1 NASB)



The very next thing we see Jesus doing in chapter 10 is sending these very same disciples into the harvest. The application or lesson we can gain from this is that when we begin to pray that God would do something, He will often choose us to do it, so we better be careful what we pray for!

### Matthew 19: 30

"But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first. (Matt. 19:30 NASB)

What could Jesus mean by this statement? To find out, we must examine the context. Jesus had previously dealt with the rich ruler (a story also found in Lk. 18). Commanded to sell all his goods, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus, the man had walked away. This is followed by Jesus' statement that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Believing the conventional wisdom that God blesses the rich, the disciples were startled. "Then who can be saved?" In other words, if rich people, upon whom God has lavished his favor, can scarcely be saved, then where does that leave the rest of us? Peter later says, "We've left everything and followed you. What then will there be for us?" In other words, "We've done what you told the rich ruler to do."

Jesus does not chide Peter for his question; rather, He assures him that they will be rewarded for their labors.

And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>29</sup> "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. (Matt. 19:28-29 NASB)

This is followed by the mysterious verse 30 about the first being last and the last being first. This order is reversed in Jesus' conclusion to the parable, "**So the last shall be first, and the first last**" (Matt. 20:16). This statement connects the parable to 19: 30. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard in **Matt. 20** is told as an explanation of 19: 30. What was Jesus saying?

The parable serves as a mild warning to the disciples who often argued among themselves who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (See 18: 1 which occurs in the near context of this parable). Regardless of the rewards bestowed on any of God's servants, they must be ever mindful that even the rewards are the gifts of God's grace. They are not given because they are earned independently, but because God is gracious to reward His people (Carson, *John*, p. 428). In this sense there is a **fundamental equality** among all of God's people regardless of the level of giftedness—whether apostles, elders, or Christians who have no positions of leadership (Chamblin, p. 167). No matter what we have given up or sacrificed in this life (19: 27), we must never presume that somehow God will be in debt to us at the end of the age when Christ returns (20: 11-12). Anything bestowed upon us on that day will be due solely to His generosity.

Moreover, consider the fact that there were many workers still standing idle in the market place. Only a few were chosen for working in the vineyard, a metaphor for the calling of **election**. Whether called to work in the kingdom of God for a **short** time or a **long** time, and regardless of how difficult our calling as Christians may be in comparison to others, it is an act of grace for which we must be grateful. Billions more have never, and will never, receive an effectual call to labor in the kingdom of heaven.

### Mark 3:1-5

He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. <sup>2</sup> They were watching Him *to see* if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. <sup>3</sup> He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" <sup>4</sup> And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. <sup>5</sup> After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (Mk. 3:1-5 NASB)

When Jesus heals the man with the withered hand, the miracle was in response to the murmuring of the Pharisees in 2:24 who were offended when the disciples were harvesting grain on the Sabbath to feed themselves. Jesus heals the man on the Sabbath as proof that He is Lord of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" (Mk. 2:24 NASB)

### Luke 21: 1-4

And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. <sup>2</sup> And He saw a **poor widow** putting in two small copper coins. <sup>3</sup> And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all *of them*; <sup>4</sup> for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on." (Lk. 21:1-4 NASB)

The Pharisees enjoyed the respect and prestige of all the people in public places. Widows had no such respect, but they were the very ones who contributed to the needs of the scribes and Pharisees so they could continue their studies in the Law. This contribution, which was sometimes beyond their means, was solicited (asked for) by the Pharisees through pressure. Jesus mentions this when He described the Pharisees as those "who devour widows houses" (v.47; see Geldenhuyts, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament, The Gospel of Luke*, p. 518).

"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, <sup>47</sup> who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation." (Lk. 20:46-47 NASB)

When the widow put her two insignificant copper coins into the temple treasury, Jesus used her sacrifice as an opportunity to teach the disciples and others a valuable lesson. It is not the amount of the offering that matters, but the willingness to sacrifice. The Pharisees and scribes who put vast sums of money into the treasury to receive the praise of men were those who were least respected by Jesus. They were not making a real sacrifice, but giving from their abundance. The poor widow, whom no one but Jesus seemed to notice, was the most highly esteemed in the eyes of Jesus. Her contribution was not insignificant after all.

### 1 Cor. 11:1

When Paul says in 1 Cor. 11:1, **Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ**, we may wonder what the substance of this imitation would include. Does it mean that we should all become traveling missionaries? Does it imply that we should not marry? The command finds its context in 1 Cor. 8—10 in which Paul lays down the principles and practice of Christian liberty. All things permitted in the moral law of God were permissible for Paul, but sometimes it was necessary to forego even lawful liberties in order to seek the salvation of others (1 Cor. 10:33). In doing so, he was doing no more than His Savior before him ("just as I also am of Christ"). The imitation of Paul is the willingness to sacrifice his own interests for the interests of others.

## 1 Cor.13:1

In 1 Cor.13:1, charity (love) is the more excellent way which Paul mentions in 1 Cor.12:31. It is important to read chapter 13 along with chapter 12. The problem with the Corinthians was that some were flaunting (making a show of) their spiritual gifts without demonstrating the love of Christ with their gifts. Paul wishes to show in chapter 13 that without the demonstration of love, the spiritual gift amounts to nothing. They are given to individual Christians not for personal edification, but for edifying the whole body of Christ.

## 2 Corinthians 5:1

The discussion of the **earthly tent** in 2 Cor. 5:1 is a continuation of the **eternal things** Paul is talking about in 2 Cor. 4: 18. To do justice to the text in 2 Cor.5:1-10, we need to go back as far as v.7 of chapter 4.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 5:1 NASB)

while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18 NASB)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup> *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Cor. 4:7-10 NASB)

From v.7 to the end of chapter 4, Paul is talking about the frailty and weakness of the human body, the key verse being v.10. In this body we are always manifesting the weakness of the Lord Jesus Christ who submitted Himself willingly to the death of the cross. We do this so that the self-sacrificial life of Christ can be demonstrated to the world through our lives. Christians are also put on display to the world in the weakness of their human bodies, sometimes being put to death. At the very least, our physical bodies will one day wear out (4:16) and be torn down in death (5:1). But the weakness of Christ was temporal, and now He is ruling and reigning with power, and the weakness of the Christian is also temporal, and one day we will “have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”, a “dwelling from heaven (5:2). We know this because our estimation of reality is not based on what we see but on what we believe: “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (5:7).

## 2 Cor.6:14-18

A closer examination of 2 Cor.6:14-18 would reveal that 7:1 would better fit into chapter 6 than chapter 7. The “promises” refer to 6:18 and the exhortation to **cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh...** refers to being bound together with an unbeliever in 6:14-16.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit**, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1 NASB)

<sup>14</sup>Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup>Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup>Or what agreement has the temple of God with

idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (2 Cor. 6:14-16 NASB)

### b. The immediate context within the same chapter.

Thus far, we have only dealt with passages in which the chapter divisions may obscure the immediate context of the passage and therefore its meaning. The student should be aware of the danger of distorting the meaning of any passage within a single chapter by ignoring the immediate context.

This may be illustrated in **Hebrews 6**, a text we looked at earlier.

For in the case of those **who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,**<sup>5</sup> and **have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,**<sup>6</sup> and *then have fallen away*, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.<sup>7</sup> For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;<sup>8</sup> but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (Heb. 6:4-8 NASB)

After all the disturbing warnings in vv. 4-8, we are ready to conclude that a Christian can lose his salvation. After all, how can a person not be truly saved who has been made **a partaker of the Holy Spirit**? However, if we keep reading the passage, we come to v.9 in which the writer assures his readers,

But, beloved, we are convinced of **better things** concerning you, and **things that accompany salvation**, though we are speaking in this way.<sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust so as to forget **your work** and the **love** which you have shown toward His name, in **having ministered** and in **still ministering to the saints.**<sup>11</sup> And we desire that each one of you show the same **diligence** so as to realize the **full assurance of hope** until the end,<sup>12</sup> so that you **will not be sluggish**, but imitators of those who through **faith and patience** inherit the promises. (Heb. 6:9-12 NASB)

Several things are highlighted in the passage to distinguish the **better things** which **accompany salvation** from the inferior characteristics of those who **have fallen away**. As good as the former characteristics sound, they are obviously inferior to the persistence in **love, ministering to the saints, diligence, faith, and patience** of those who had not fallen away.

Being **partakers of the Holy Spirit** sounds like those who had been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but since this is distinguished from the **better things** of vv. 9-12 which **accompany salvation**, we must conclude that this is something other than the indwelling of the Spirit. Someone may have received a special visitation, or even an endowment, of the Spirit who has not been truly indwelt or regenerated by Him.

Notice also that the writer holds out the possibility that some can fall away from the faith who have tasted of **the powers of the age to come**. Such apostates can be partakers of spiritual gifts. Remember that Jesus warns that at the end of the age some will appeal to God on the basis of their spiritual gifts (using the analogy of faith).

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.<sup>16</sup> "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?<sup>17</sup> "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.<sup>18</sup> "A good tree cannot

produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.<sup>19</sup> "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."<sup>20</sup> "So then, you will know them by their fruits."<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*."<sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, **did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?**' "<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matt. 7:15-23 NASB)

In this text, Jesus does not either affirm or deny the reality of the spiritual gifts claimed by unbelievers; therefore, we cannot prove either the presence or absence of the gifts from this text alone. Did they actually **cast out demons** in His name and **perform miracles** in His name. But from the analogy of faith, is it not possible, even most likely, that **Judas** had been able to do exactly the same things as the rest of the disciples on their missionary journey? When they returned from this mission (Matt.10), is there any indication from the text that Judas had been unable to perform the same miracles as the rest? On the night of Jesus' betrayal, not one of the other eleven disciples suspected that Judas was the one who would betray Christ (John 13:22). What Jesus denies in Matt. 7 is the internal reality of their faith since the lives of these professing Christians had not shown evidence of the holiness which faith inevitably produces. They practiced **lawlessness**. (By using the hermeneutical principle of grammatical analysis, we find that the word **practice** is a present participle implying continuing activity. These people lived in habitual lawlessness.)

King Saul was able to prophesy under the inspiration of the Spirit but appears to have remained unconverted (See 1 Sam. 10:1-16; 16: 1, 14). **Samson** was endowed by the Spirit with great strength; yet, judging from his behavior, he may have been converted only at the very end of his life.

**Demas** was a co-worker of Paul close enough to him in his ministry for Paul to mention his name in 2 Tim. 4:10. It is inconceivable that Demas would have worked so closely with Paul that he would have avoided the responsibility of teaching and preaching the word. Yet Paul says of him that he **loved this present world**. Over 25 years ago, I heard of a well-known preacher from Cambridge, England who had left his wife and ministry for a male lover. I have heard and read many of his sermons, and they are some of the best expositions of the word of God that I have ever heard. There is little doubt in my own mind that for a season the Spirit of God was influencing this man's ministry; but unless there is repentance in the future, it is evident that he was never converted. Such is the mystery of providence and the work of the Holy Spirit.

## Luke 15

By examining the context of the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, we will find that the parable is far more concerned with Pharisees than "sinners." We may be inclined to change the popular name of the parable to "the elder brother." Notice from 15: 1-2 that the Pharisees and scribes were complaining that Jesus socialized with the most hated members of society, the **tax-gatherers and the sinners**.

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.<sup>2</sup> Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."<sup>3</sup> So He told them this parable, saying, (Lk. 15:1-3 NASB)

He then told three parables, all of which end with a reference to rejoicing: Lk. 15:4-7; Lk. 15:8-10; and Lk. 15: 11-32. Just as the man rejoices over his one lost sheep, **there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no**

**repentance** (v.7). Special notice should be given to the words **righteous persons who need no repentance**. In the second parable, the woman who finds the lost coin rejoices when she finds it. In the same way, the angels in heaven rejoice when even one sinner repents.

The third parable is the parable of the “prodigal son,” but notice that Jesus begins this parable by saying that “**A certain man had two sons.**” The younger son goes away and squanders his inheritance with irresponsible living while the elder son stays with his father and keeps all the rules. When the younger one comes back, everyone is delighted (**began to celebrate**) that this sinner has come to his senses and returned—all except the elder brother. Far from rejoicing, he becomes angry that his younger brother is getting so much positive attention and complains to his father that he has been mistreated (vv.29-30). His self-righteousness is plain for all to see.

The purpose of telling this parable was to present a vivid picture of the scribes and Pharisees as the self-righteous elder brother, the brother who thought he “needed no repentance” (v.7). Jesus was using sarcasm. There were no people who actually did not need to repent, and the parable vividly portrays the lack of repentance of these Jewish leaders. However, Jesus leaves room for their repentance as well. As Doriani observes,

As the elder brother must ultimately decide if he will welcome his sinning-but-restored brother and enter the party, so too the Pharisees must decide if they will welcome restored sinners and join the kingdom celebration. Jesus leaves the final decision of the older brother in doubt, to keep the Pharisees involved by inviting them to finish the story for themselves (*Getting the Message*, p.36).

The student should be warned not to press all the details of the parable in an effort to isolate the meaning of every detail. We will discuss this hermeneutical error later on in our discussion of parables. In verse 31, when the father tells the elder son that “all that is mine is yours,” this should not be interpreted as meaning that the unrepentant scribes and Pharisees were members of the Father’s kingdom. A parable has one main point to make, generally constrained by the context, and the point of this parable has been given above. Perhaps even two main points are permissible with this parable—the joy of the Father when people repent and the folly of self-righteousness. Added to this would be minor sub-points: the nature of true repentance and the nature of true forgiveness, what becomes those who despise their parents, the perils of the love of money, etc. Yet, none of these subpoints are the reason Jesus told the parable. The context of 15: 1-2 has established the main point and reason for telling the parable.

Doriani uses this parable to illustrate one of his six principles of literary context: “Try to determine why your text belongs precisely where it is, and nowhere else” (*Getting the Message*, p. 35).

## **2. The Immediate Context of the Author’s Argument or Ethical Instruction**

Sometimes the immediate context takes far more into consideration than several verses before and after the passage in question. The immediate context of the author’s argument or ethical instruction must also be taken into consideration. Virkler gives us six principles which will guide us in this process (*Hermeneutics*, pp.84-88). These principles are paraphrased in bold type, followed by my examples of how they are to be applied.

**a. Understand how the passage under consideration fits into the whole picture of what the author is saying.**

In **Matt. 18: 15-20**, we find instructions from Christ on how to deal with sin within the body of

Christ. (For a more thorough treatment of this text, see my “Synoptic Gospels” as well as many published commentaries).

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.<sup>16</sup> "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.<sup>17</sup> "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.<sup>18</sup> "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.<sup>19</sup> "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.<sup>20</sup> "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matt. 18:15-20 NASB)

When a **brother** sins against us, we must confront him in **private**. If he refuses to listen to us we must take **one or two** more believers with us and confront him again. If this fails, we eventually take the matter to **the church** which may find it necessary to remove this unrepentant member from the communion of the church. I don't think Jesus intended to limit the frequency of each step in the process. It may be necessary for someone to confront his brother three or four times alone, or with another brother several times in an attempt to reason with him. But finally, sin must be dealt with and an attempt to reclaim the erring brother must be made. The whole passage may seem severe and unloving unless we take note of the immediate context in vv. 1-14.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"<sup>2</sup> And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,<sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>5</sup> "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;<sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.<sup>7</sup> "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!<sup>8</sup> "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.<sup>9</sup> "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.<sup>10</sup> "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.<sup>11</sup> "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.<sup>12</sup> "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?<sup>13</sup> "If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.<sup>14</sup> "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. (Matt. 18:1-14 NASB)

In the early part of the chapter, Jesus has stressed the importance of receiving the kingdom of God as a **little child**. Anyone receiving the kingdom in this fashion is considered one of Christ's **little ones** (v. 6) who are precious in His sight and who are, by virtue of their identification with Christ (v. 5), entitled to His protection. Woe to the person who causes even one of His little ones to **stumble** into sin (v. 7). God provides His little ones angelic protection (v. 10), and if even one strays from the fold, the **good shepherd** (Jn. 10: 11, 14) will leave the **99** and go look for the **one sheep** which is lost. It is clear from v. 14 that the lost sheep is another metaphor (figure of speech) for one of Christ's little ones for whom He will exert great effort to find and rescue. It is not the Father's **will** for one of these little ones to perish (Jn. 10: 28).

From Matt. 18: 15-20, we understand that the erring brother is identified with the little ones of vv. 1-14 and specifically the wayward sheep of vv. 12-14. But the one who goes looking for this sheep is the church. First, the person offended confronts the erring brother. Then, he comes with one or two more, and finally with the whole church if necessary. Christ will spare no energy in pursuing and rescuing the erring brother and bringing him back into the protective fold of the church. The goal of such action is, therefore, not punishment but restoration (cf. 1 Cor. 5, especially v. 5). There is, therefore, nothing negative about the whole passage of vv. 15-20 except the erring brother's sin. The passage is specifically about the care and concern of the body of Christ about one sheep who strays off and endangers himself.

### **Analogy of Faith** passage: 1 Cor. 4: 18—5: 13

Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.<sup>19</sup> But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.<sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.<sup>21</sup> What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

<sup>18</sup>It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.<sup>2</sup> You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.<sup>3</sup> For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.<sup>4</sup> In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,<sup>5</sup> *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*?<sup>7</sup> Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.<sup>8</sup> Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.<sup>9</sup> I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;<sup>10</sup> I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.<sup>11</sup> But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one.<sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?<sup>13</sup> But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (1 Cor. 4:18-5:13 NASB)

We learn from 1 Cor. 5 that the purpose of church discipline is two-fold.

- (1) To reclaim the erring member so that he will eventually repent and be saved.
- (2) To curb the sin of other members in the church who may be encouraged to sin by the neglect of the church. The sin of one may spread quickly to the whole church. God is serious about sin, and so should we be.

Continuing with this lesson, and in answer to Peter's question in Matt. 18: 21, Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving slave which has one major meaning.

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."<sup>23</sup> "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves."<sup>24</sup> "When he had begun to settle *them*, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him."<sup>25</sup> "But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made."<sup>26</sup> "So the slave fell *to the ground* and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will



repay you everything.<sup>27</sup> "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.<sup>28</sup> "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'<sup>29</sup> "So his fellow slave fell *to the ground* and *began* to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'<sup>30</sup> "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.<sup>31</sup> "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.<sup>32</sup> "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.'<sup>33</sup> 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'<sup>34</sup> "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.<sup>35</sup> "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matt. 18:21-35 NASB)

Forgiveness is not to be measured out to others in exact quantities. We must be as generous in our forgiveness to others as the heavenly Father has been to us. If we are not forgiving, our lack thereof only proves that we have never tasted of forgiveness ourselves. This parable fits with the immediate context of the previous instructions to forgive your brother if he agrees that he has sinned against you, implied in the words, **if he listens to you, you have won your brother** (18: 15).

In consideration of the broader context of the passage and **how a single passage fits into the author's whole purpose**, it is helpful to have an outline of the whole book. Some books are more easily outlined than others since some of the Biblical authors are more systematic in their thinking than others (e.g. Paul is more organized than Peter and James). This doesn't make any book less authoritative than another, only harder to discern its arguments. Consider the following outline of **Romans** by William Hendriksen (*Survey of the Bible*, pp. 342-343).

- I. Exposition. Justification by faith, apart from the works of the law, is: (chaps. 1-11)
  - A. Necessary. (chaps. 1-3)
  - B. Scriptural. (chap. 4)
  - C. Effectual. (chaps. 5-8)
  - D. Historical (chaps. 9-11)
- II. Significance for every sphere. The attitude of the justified believer toward: (chaps. 12-16)
  - A. God and the brotherhood. (chap. 12)
  - B. The higher powers (the state). (chap. 13)
  - C. Those who are weak. Salutations. (chaps. 14-16).

### **A. Necessary. (chaps. 1-3)**

Now we may proceed to interpret a particular passage as part of the author's broader argument. In chapters 1—3, Paul wishes to prove that justification apart from the works of the law was necessary in the plan of God. Why was this so? In Romans 1, he shows that even the Gentiles had knowledge of the many perfections of God seen in creation, and yet they **exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator...**

#### Introduction to Paul's argument that justification by faith apart from works is necessary.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.<sup>17</sup> For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Rom. 1:16-17 NASB)

Why would Paul suddenly say that he is not ashamed of the gospel of justification by faith apart from law-keeping? Because many of his Jewish brethren in Rome would be ashamed of such a gospel. The Jews, including those in Rome, had been taught their whole lives that one must keep the law to be saved. Indeed, life under the Old Covenant is promised to those who keep the law. In the second giving of the law, Moses, acting as the Lord's spokesman, says,

"See, **I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity**; <sup>16</sup>in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. <sup>17</sup>"But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup>I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. <sup>19</sup>"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. **So choose life** in order that you may live, you and your descendants, <sup>20</sup>by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." (Deut. 30:15-20 NASB)

The problem, of course, is not that the Law promised life, but that sinful Israel made the mistake in thinking that they could keep it. But in fact, Israel would not keep this law, and their evil hearts rendered them incapable of keeping it. Moses had been informed by the Lord long ago that they would not keep it and would suffer the consequences.

The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. <sup>17</sup>"Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?' <sup>18</sup>"But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods. <sup>19</sup>"Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. (Deut. 31:16-19 NASB)

Later, in Romans 2:14-15, he says that the Gentiles also have a general understanding of God's moral absolutes because they show the "**work of the law written on their hearts.**" That is, everyone has a sense of God's moral standard even if he has never heard of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup>in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (Rom. 2:14-15 NASB)

The Jews, on the other hand, received the Law directly from God but didn't keep it any better than the Gentiles who never received the law in writing (2: 17-24).

But if you bear the name "Jew " and rely upon the Law and boast in God, <sup>18</sup>and know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, <sup>19</sup>and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup>a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, <sup>21</sup>you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who

abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? <sup>24</sup> For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. (Rom. 2:17-24 NASB)

As it turned out, the Jew was no better at keeping the law than the Gentile with the result that both Jew and Gentile remained under the dominion of sin, a dominion which continues until this day (3:9-19).

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; <sup>10</sup> as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; <sup>11</sup> THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; <sup>12</sup> ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." <sup>13</sup> "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; <sup>14</sup> "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; <sup>15</sup> "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, <sup>16</sup> DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, <sup>17</sup> AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." <sup>18</sup> "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES." <sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; (Rom. 3:9-19 NASB)

Therefore, justification by faith and not by law is necessary because both Jew and Gentile have failed to live up to God's righteous standards presented both in the written law and in the work of the law written on the heart. By paying attention to Paul's argument in chapters 1—3, we can see how the argument is an extension of the theme of the whole epistle found in 1: 16-17.

## **B. Scriptural. (chap. 4)**

In Romans 4, Paul uses the story of the life and faith of Abraham to prove that justification is not through the law but through faith. It is in the context of this broader argument that we can understand the details of Romans 4. In v.9 Paul asks whether the blessing of forgiveness mentioned by David in Ps. 32:1 is upon those who are circumcised or upon those who are uncircumcised. Then he quotes Gen. 15:6, **Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness** to prove that Abraham's faith was reckoned as righteousness before Abraham was circumcised.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. <sup>8</sup> "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT." <sup>9</sup> Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." <sup>10</sup> How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; (Rom. 4:5-10 NASB)

This proves that circumcision is not the ground or basis of Abraham's justification. Abraham's justification before God was never on the basis of his circumcision but always on the basis of his faith in the promise of God (vv.10-13). The whole chapter is an extended argument from the OT that justification is by faith apart from the works of the law.

### **b. Determine the contribution of the passage in question to the flow of the author's thought.**

In other words what is the logical or theological connection between the passage in question and

the passage before it and after it? As an example let us go back to Romans, this time to chapter 6. How are we to interpret Rom. 6: 6-11?

### What is the contribution of Rom. 6: 6-11 to the flow of Paul's argument in chapters 5—8?

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup> knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; <sup>7</sup> for he who has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, <sup>9</sup> knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. <sup>10</sup> For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. <sup>11</sup> Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:1-11 NASB)

In Romans 5, Paul establishes the doctrine of justification by faith in the atoning work of Christ. At the end of this chapter in v.20, he indicates that the purpose of the Law (the Law of Moses) was that transgressions might **increase**. Such a statement sounds strange in light of the fact that the Law reveals the holy character of God, but when it is read in context with Romans 5: 14 we understand that the Law of Moses multiplies the kind of sin which is represented in Adam's offense.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1-2 NASB)

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—<sup>13</sup> for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (Rom. 5:12-14 NASB)

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. <sup>19</sup> For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup> The Law came in so that the transgression would **increase**; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, (Rom. 5:18-20 NASB)

And what kind of offense is the offense of Adam? It was sin against the expressly revealed law of God and not the law of God impressed merely on the conscience. In v.14, death reigned during the period from Adam to Moses over men who had not sinned against expressly revealed law (Rom. 5: 14). They sinned against the law of God revealed in their consciences but not against a law engraved on stones, for they were never exposed to the Law of Moses engraved on stones. With the coming of the Law of Moses, the sins against expressly revealed law were increased. (See John Murray, *Romans*.)

However, as the sins against God's revealed law increased, so did grace. But grace did not increase in proportion to sin (the same as sin), but grace **abounded all the more**. That is, grace "super-abounded" through Jesus Christ. If so, then one might be led to believe that the super-abounding of grace against the background of more sin actually enhances the glory of grace (makes grace more

glorious). After all, we would not see the stars if it were not for the blackness of the sky. The more we sin, the more wonderful God's grace appears to be.

Paul then anticipates a misunderstanding of the doctrine of justification by faith: that is, if grace increases as sin increases, and if grace is shown to be more glorious the more we sin, then why not continue in sin that grace may continue to increase. This error is called antinomianism. His answer to this misunderstanding is, **May it never be!**

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (Rom. 6:1-2 NASB)

Throughout the remainder of the chapter, he demonstrates that just as Christ died as our representative to the reign of sin and death, so too, the believer died with Christ in his crucifixion and death. Moreover, he was also buried with Christ, symbolized in his baptism; and when Christ rose again to life, the believer rose with Christ to a new life characterized by the life of Christ, a life of righteousness.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3-4 NASB)

When Christ was crucified, our old man was crucified with Him, the old man dominated by sin. Since the old man is now crucified with Christ, the relationship of the believer to the dominion of sin is now terminated. His relationship to the world of sin cannot remain or be sustained any more than the relationship of a physically dead man can be sustained to the physical world. As the deceased man is dead to his former physical existence, so the believer is now dead to the realm and rule of sin. By way of analogy, if a citizen of US dies, he is no longer obligated to obey the constitution and laws of the United States. He is now dead to the rule and reign of US law over his life. Before his death to sin through the crucifixion of Christ, the believer was under the reign and rule of sin, but by his death in the death of Christ, the believer has died to that rule so that he is no longer bound to the dominion which held him in bondage. He is now dead to that rule and resurrected with Christ to an entirely different rule of life.

For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup> knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; (Rom. 6:5-6 NASB)

This is precisely what Paul talks about in Gal. 2:20 which is a parallel passage.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me. (Gal. 2: 20 NASB)

That is, it is no longer the old Paul (i.e. Saul of Tarsus) who lives, because Saul of Tarsus has been crucified with Christ. And the life Paul now lives is no longer lived through the resources and power of Saul, but the resources and power of Christ who lives His life through Paul (See Rom. 7: 4-6). It is for this reason of death to sin that Paul now says that it is impossible for sin to reign in the life of the believer. **How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** (v.2)—a rhetorical question demanding a negative (no) answer.

## How does 6: 6-11 contribute to Paul's argument in chapters 7 and 8?

Just as Paul demonstrated the inability of the Law to justify in chapters 1—3, he demonstrates the inability of the Law to sanctify in chapters 7-8. Conversely (by way of contrast), he shows how the gospel is effective for justification in chapters 1—3, and he shows how the gospel is effective for sanctification in chapters 7—8. We cannot rely on ourselves to keep the law for justification (Chaps.1—3) and we cannot rely on ourselves to keep the law for sanctification (Chaps 7—8). We are completely dependent on grace for both justification and sanctification.

None of this is designed to say that there is anything wrong with the law of God which reveals the unchanging holiness of God. The problem is with us (cf. Rom. 7: 7-13).

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. <sup>13</sup>Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. (Rom. 7:12-13 NASB)

What is needed for us all is a personal crucifixion of the old man and a continual reminder that he remains crucified. The old man is thoroughly wicked and beyond reformation. We cannot reform or improve the old man; he must be killed by crucifixion. Through faith in Christ Jesus, the old man is now crucified and the new man has taken his place. Yet, because of remaining sin, the new man sometimes fails to reckon the old man as dead (6: 11) and yields himself to the desires of the flesh (7: 14-25). But because the Christian is essentially and characteristically a new man, he cannot deliberately sin without being smitten in his conscience (7: 24), and he cannot live in sin as a way of life (6: 14) For the analogy of faith, we will take a quick look at 1 John 3:3-10).

And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. <sup>4</sup> Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; <sup>8</sup> the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 Jn. 3:3-10 NASB)

In Romans 8:1 and throughout the chapter, Paul proceeds to show us that the sanctifying work which the law of God could not do because of the powerlessness of our flesh, God did through the work of Christ (8: 1-3). Now, through the Holy Spirit (who was sent by the Father and the Son as a consequence of the Son's completed work), we are enabled to keep God's holy requirements (not perfectly but habitually) because the Holy Spirit gives us a change of mind which is **set** on the **things of Spirit** rather than the **things of the flesh** (8: 6). In 8:12 he says that we are no longer under **obligation... to live according to the flesh**—essentially the same thing he said in 6: 11 to **consider** ourselves **dead to sin**. The verse also reminds us of 6: 12 in which Paul tells us not to let sin reign in our bodies that we should **obey its lusts**. Obeying the lusts of the flesh is the same thing as being **under obligation... to live according to the flesh** in 8: 12.

Some of Paul's arguments can be long and complicated. The student of the Bible must be willing to spend considerable time and effort reading these arguments to understand them.

### c. Understand the author's perspective

Is the author speaking from the perspective of God (noumenologically) or from man's perspective (phenomenologically)? Paul's instruction to the Romans is didactic (teaching) instruction which must be taken noumenologically as God's perspective. However, other portions of Scripture are narratives (stories) and must be understood phenomenologically (that is, the way the author saw the events). This does not mean that the passage is not what God wanted the writer to say. Rather, it means that the Holy Spirit allowed the writer to speak the truth using the particular perspective of the author who described events the way he saw them rather than the way only God could have seen them.

In Gen. 15: 12, Moses said, **Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram...** Is God ignorant of the scientific fact that the earth rotates on its axis around the sun? Obviously, God allows Moses to describe the sunset the way he saw it without going into great detail about scientific laws. Moses did not understand scientific law. We do the same thing all the time when we say the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. This is the way we see it and no one ridicules us for being scientifically inaccurate.

Milton S. Terry believed that Moses also used a phenomenological perspective when telling the story of the flood in Gen. 6—9 (Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, p.85). Moses' description seemed to indicate a universal flood but, according to Terry, he was probably describing it the way it was seen by Noah and passed on to other generations of people through story telling.

If Terry were correct, it would be a good illustration of phenomenological language. However, the local flood theory seems highly unlikely. In Matt. 24: 37, Jesus tells us that the coming of the Son of Man in judgment would be **just like** the days of Noah and the flood. If only a small portion of the human race had been extinguished in the flood, it would hardly have served Jesus' purpose as a type of universal destruction of the wicked at the end of the world. The destruction brought by the flood was not a human exaggeration (cf. Matt. 3: 5) but total annihilation from God's perspective.

### d. Determine whether the passage in question is prescribing principles of moral truth or merely describing what happened at a particular time in Biblical history?

In Romans, it should be clear that Paul is not merely describing what has happened in his life as a result of his conversion. He is prescribing the way all Christians should think about the gospel. All of Paul's didactic epistles (and the epistles of other Scripture writers) are prescriptive (direct commands) of Christian behavior as is all the didactic portions of the gospels which report the teachings of Jesus.

In narratives, historical events are usually reported without any comments from the author passing judgment upon what happened. Take for example the two stories of Abraham's lying to Pharaoh and Abimelech about Sarah being his sister without also telling them that she was his wife (Gen. 12: 10-20; Gen. 20).

Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. <sup>11</sup>It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; <sup>12</sup>and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup>"Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." <sup>14</sup>It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup>Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. <sup>16</sup>Therefore he

treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.<sup>17</sup> But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.<sup>18</sup> Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"<sup>19</sup> "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go."<sup>20</sup> Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him. (Gen. 12:10-20 NASB)

Abraham plotted to save his life rather than trust God to protect him and Sarah, which God succeeded in doing supernaturally without Abraham's help. God had promised Abraham that he, not Pharaoh or Abimelech, would become a great nation (Gen. 12). God also promised that Abraham would have an heir from his own body (15: 4), an impossibility if he was dead.

Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar.<sup>2</sup> Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.<sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married."<sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a nation, even *though* blameless?"<sup>5</sup> "Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister' ? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this."<sup>6</sup> Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her."<sup>7</sup> "Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."<sup>8</sup> So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened.<sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done."<sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?"<sup>11</sup> Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife."<sup>12</sup> "Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife;<sup>13</sup> and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother.'""<sup>14</sup> Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. (Gen. 20:1-14 NASB)

The interesting thing about these stories is that God does not chastise Abraham either time for lying about Sarah, but He strikes Pharaoh with plagues for taking Sarah as his wife and warns Abimelech with death. We might conclude, wrongly, that what Abraham did was acceptable since all is well that ends well. That is, since everything worked out well for Abraham, he must not have sinned. But this is pragmatism—if something “works”, it must be good and true. But the consequences we receive in this life, good or bad, do not determine whether our actions are ethical or unethical, true or false. Moses, the writer, does not attempt to examine the rightness or wrongness of Abraham's actions. He merely reports what happens and shows how God is taking care of His elect servant regardless of his failings. God's covenant promise to Abraham that He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him is being fulfilled in both stories. God's covenant faithfulness is not conditioned upon Abraham's perfect behavior, nor upon our perfect behavior. It is conditioned upon the promise of God. Therefore, it would be a mistake for us to use the story as an ethical guide, assuming that we can lie to unbelievers as long as good things happen in the end.

The story of Rahab is a bit different (cf. Joshua 2).



Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.<sup>2</sup> It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land."<sup>3</sup> And the king of Jericho sent *word* to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."<sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from."<sup>5</sup> "It came about when *it was time* to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." (Jos. 2:1-5 NASB)

Certainly, we cannot conclude that lying in this situation is permissible just because her lie had good consequences, the escape of the Israelite spies. Nor can we conclude that her lie was permissible because nothing is said in Scripture to condemn her lie. But the Scripture gives us much more information about Rahab's actions. She is included in the physical line of Christ in Matt. 5: 5, undoubtedly a great honor. This fact alone is not conclusive, but considering that the Bible gives us no other information about her life than what we find in Joshua, it carries considerable weight in assessing her actions in the story. Hebrews 11: 31 includes her in faith's "hall of fame" and James 2: 25 says that her act was an indication that her faith was not an empty boast but one that was perfected (brought to its completion or goal) by her actions.

**By faith** Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. (Heb. 11:31 NASB)

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (Jas. 2:25 NASB)

It would be very difficult to separate the Scriptures' approbation (approval) of Rahab's faith from the act upon which the approbation of faith rests—namely, her lie. This is, of course, not an encouragement for us to lie, but an admission that moral situations are sometimes very complex. The narrative of Rahab's faith-in-action gives us an example of a situation in which a person does not break the ninth commandment against bearing false witness against his neighbor by lying during a time of war, provided you fight with the right side. Israel and Jericho were at war, and Rahab had changed her allegiance from false gods to the God of Israel. She was now at war with her own people, idolaters who worshipped false gods.

In Nazi-occupied Europe, some believers decided to provide safe-havens for Jews who had been condemned to concentration camps or execution in the gas chambers. When German soldiers came looking for the Jews, these courageous Christians would do anything necessary to protect them, including deception. What would you have done: handed over Jews for unlawful execution or lie to protect them? Is it Biblical to lie to a would-be murderer in order to save a life? Rahab was rewarded for doing so, and her fame has been recorded in Biblical history. (For a more complete discussion of Rahab's lie, see Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp.542-549; Henry Krabbendam, *The Epistle of James: Tender Love in Tough Pursuit of Total Holiness*, an unpublished commentary, pp. 121-123; and for a contrary view, John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, pp.138-139.)

The story of the mid-wives in Exodus 1: 15-21 demonstrates the importance of authorial comments. Authorial comments occur when the author of the story, in this case Moses, comes out from behind the curtains to front stage (so to speak) and makes a direct comment to his reader.

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah;<sup>16</sup> and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see *them* upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live."<sup>17</sup> But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.<sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?"<sup>19</sup> The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." [authorial comment in v. 20]<sup>20</sup> **So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty.**<sup>21</sup> **Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them.** (Exod. 1:15-21 NASB)

The mid-wives lied to Pharaoh to save the lives of Hebrew children. But Moses does not stop with merely describing what happened. He comments on the blessing God gave the mid-wives for obedience. Notice that Moses does not say that the mid-wives lied. He says, rather, that they **feared God**. They were, therefore, not obligated to tell the truth to a godless tyrant (Pharaoh) who would use the truth to murder Hebrew children. Thus, in the mind of Moses, the mid-wives had not broken the ninth commandment.

We see from this example that sometimes the Biblical narrative suggests normative (moral) behavior for God's people which is not expressly stated from the text, but rather implied. Not all biblical narratives supply authorial comments like what we have in this story, so we are often left in doubt about what to think. But whenever these comments are supplied, it is very important to pay special attention to them.

Acts 15 gives us a description of what happened at the Council of Jerusalem when the topic of justification by faith apart from the observance of circumcision and the Law of Moses (v.5) was debated by the apostles and elders of the church (v.22). Some scholars have used this chapter as a prescription for a certain form of church government, particularly the existence of a "general assembly" consisting of teaching and ruling elders from all the churches within the denomination (Thomas Witherow, *The Apostolic Church, Which Is It?*) While this chapter may be a good illustration of the advantages of the collective wisdom of the church, it is questionable to use it as the definitive prescription (or command) for a certain form of church government since it is a narrative portion of scripture. Moreover, we do not find a definitive reference to the continuing requirement of such councils elsewhere in the didactic portions of the NT. Doubtless this is why there are so many differences of opinion among evangelical scholars concerning the proper form of church government.

Addressing the issue of church government, John Frame notes:

I am, as I stated earlier, a Presbyterian, because I believe in a body of congregations connected to one another by a plurality of elected representative officers. I believe this because (a) I find in the New Testament some indication that the Christians followed in general the organization of the synagogues from which they came, because (b) it appears that bodies larger than local house churches functioned as "churches," and because (c) the New Testament always refers to church rulers ("the bishops," "the elders") in the plural. Pragmatically, the Presbyterian form seems to me to allow the best combination of mutual accountability with local control and freedom, a system which forms the pattern, e.g., for the remarkably successful structure of the U. S. civil government.

I would hope that the one, true church will one day, by God's grace, achieve reunion and adopt the Presbyterian form of government as its pattern for reorganization. However, the arguments for Presbyterianism summarized above are certainly not water tight; certainly they don't have the same

force as those for the deity of Christ or salvation by grace. After all, the New Testament never commands us to follow the "synagogue pattern" alluded to in (a). And although the evidence for city-churches (presbyteries) is strong in the New Testament, it is harder to establish the existence of courts higher than those, except for that which included the apostolic band itself (Acts 15) and which had only one meeting that we know of; so (b) may not lead us to a full-blown Presbyterian structure. And although the New Testament speaks of bishops and elders in the plural (c), this fact does not quite prove that all churches were normatively required to have a plurality of elders. Can we be sure that there was never any church in which only one man was qualified for the eldership? Can we be sure that there were no distinctions of gifts, wisdom and responsibilities among the elders such that one could become *primus inter pares* [first among equals, DFM]?

So there is some uncertainty about the original form of government in the New Testament. If it were important to God that the church be governed in one and only one way, I have no doubt that he would have made it more clear. Therefore, I am inclined to take the issue of church government a bit less seriously than many people do. I think that God regards the structure and method of church government to be less important than the reality of Jesus' own government of the church as its supreme priest-king. The relative indifference of the New Testament to matters of human government would seem to be an invitation to us to take the reality of Jesus' own government more seriously. Related to this, another reason, perhaps, for the uncertainty about governmental structure is that this structure is less important than the spiritual qualities of the leaders and the people. When those spiritual qualities are lacking, the best form of government (the Presbyterian, of course) will be a curse upon God's people. When they are present, even inadequate forms of government will work well....

I suspect that if God ever permits the one, true church to reunite under a common government, he will at the same time bring about a great increase in our love and trust for one another; how else could reunion even be conceivable? And when that happens, even though I dearly hope that the church will be Presbyterian, it won't bother me terribly if my dear brothers choose another system to govern God's people. I trust that this attitude of mine is not motivated by theological indifference, but by a desire to respect the emphasis, as well as the specific teaching, of the Word of God, and to promote the unity of the church which the Word of God requires more clearly than it requires any particular governmental structure. (Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*).

**e. Determine the “teaching focus” of the passage in question and distinguish it from that part of the passage which is only “incidental detail.”**

Virkler mentions two heresies which arose from a failure to carefully distinguish between the main focus of the passage and the incidental detail. In John 15 Jesus identifies Himself as the vine and His disciples as the branches. One heretical group came to the conclusion that since a vine was part of creation, then Jesus Himself must also be part of creation rather than the Creator. Another heretical group, the Pelagians of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, determined from the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 that since the son went directly to his father without a mediator, we may conclude that we also do not need a mediator.

Parables are particularly “fair game” for often well-meaning preachers who use their imaginations recklessly. For this reason, we will deal with parables more in detail later.

Several years ago, I had a discussion with a Methodist preacher about the suitability of female pastors in the church. He used Col.4:15 to support his belief that the practice was biblical.

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. (Col. 4:15 NASB)

Only a brief examination of this passage will prove that the propriety (suitableness) of women pastors is not the teaching focus of this text. Paul simply wishes to extend Christian greetings to those who have been especially helpful and supportive of his ministry. It teaches us to appreciate the work and the support of women; it does not say specifically that Nympha was the pastor of the church which met in her house. One must read something into the text (eisogesis) to come to this conclusion. If we want to know explicitly what Paul taught concerning leadership in the church, we must turn to 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 in which Paul clearly forbids the practice of women teaching men in the church—one of the important functions of elders (1 Tim. 3: 2b, **able to teach**). Therefore, if women cannot fulfill one of the most important roles of elders, then they cannot serve as elders.

A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.<sup>12</sup> **But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man**, but to remain quiet. (1 Tim. 2:11-12 NASB)

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, **the husband of one wife**, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (1 Tim. 3:2 NASB)

For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve.<sup>14</sup> *And it was not Adam who was deceived*, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Tim. 2:13-14 NASB)

I once heard about a pastor who preached on the barrenness of Elizabeth in Lk. 1. His main point in the sermon was directed to barren women: “If you are barren, you need an angel.” Needless to say, this was not the teaching focus of the passage.

#### **f. Determine the audience of the author.**

To whom is the author addressing the particular passage? What was normative (required) for the OT believer living in Israel is not necessarily required for the NT Christian. The OT believer could not wear a garment made with two different kinds of material mixed together (Lev.19:19). The intent of this prohibition was to teach Israel in a tangible way that they were not to mix with the wicked nations around them lest they practice the same immorality and idolatry. The same intent was given to the food laws and other ceremonial laws which are now no longer directly applicable to the Christian. The specific commands of Lev.19:19 and 11: 2-8 apply only to the context of the ancient Israelite. God doesn't care about whether we mix two kinds of cloth together in our clothes or whether we eat pork (cf. Acts 10).

'You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together. (Lev. 19:19 NASB)

"Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth.'<sup>3</sup> 'Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, *and* chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat.'<sup>4</sup> 'Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you.'<sup>5</sup> 'Likewise, the shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you;<sup>6</sup> the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you;<sup>7</sup> and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you.'<sup>8</sup> 'You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you. (Lev. 11:2-8 NASB)

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.<sup>10</sup> But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;<sup>11</sup> and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great

sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,<sup>12</sup> and there were in it all *kinds of* four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.<sup>13</sup> A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"<sup>14</sup> But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."<sup>15</sup> Again a voice *came* to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy."<sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky. (Acts 10:9-16 NASB)

On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.<sup>25</sup> When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped *him*.<sup>26</sup> But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am *just* a man."<sup>27</sup> As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.<sup>28</sup> And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and **yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.** (Acts 10:24-28 NASB)

However, these old laws are applied in principle when we are careful not to be unduly influenced by the evil of this world (2 Cor. 6: 14-18). Therefore, we still keep these laws, but not in the same way.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?<sup>15</sup> Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?<sup>16</sup> Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."<sup>17</sup> "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you."<sup>18</sup> "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor. 6:14-18 NASB)

God also instructed the Israelites to conduct holy warfare against the Canaanites, wiping out men, women, and children in the cities within certain geographical areas (Deut. 20: 10-20).

"When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace."<sup>11</sup> "If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you."<sup>12</sup> "However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it."<sup>13</sup> "When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword."<sup>14</sup> "Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you."<sup>15</sup> "Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby."<sup>16</sup> "Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes."<sup>17</sup> "But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you,<sup>18</sup> so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God. (Deut. 20:10-18 NASB)

Quite obviously, this command no longer applies to us today in the same way it did to Israel. Exterminating the wicked Canaanites was a theological *type* (picture) of the warfare God is waging against all unbelief in the world even to this day, but the method He gives us for waging war has dramatically changed. The Christian is not commanded to kill the unbeliever, but to win him to Jesus Christ thus "killing" his old man in bondage to sin. The Great Commission to make disciples has replaced the command to make war (Matt. 28: 18-20). Our tactics for doing so are not carnal (physical) weapons, but spiritual ones (Eph. 6: 10-18). We could only wish that the Islamic

extremists terrorizing the world today would adopt the same spiritual tactics of influence rather than terror.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.<sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20 NASB)

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.<sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. (Eph. 6:11-12 NASB)

Even passages within the NT have to be carefully evaluated to determine if the instructions of the author apply equally to every Christian or to a certain group of Christians living during the time the author is writing. For example, Paul advises those in Corinth who are not married to remain unmarried.

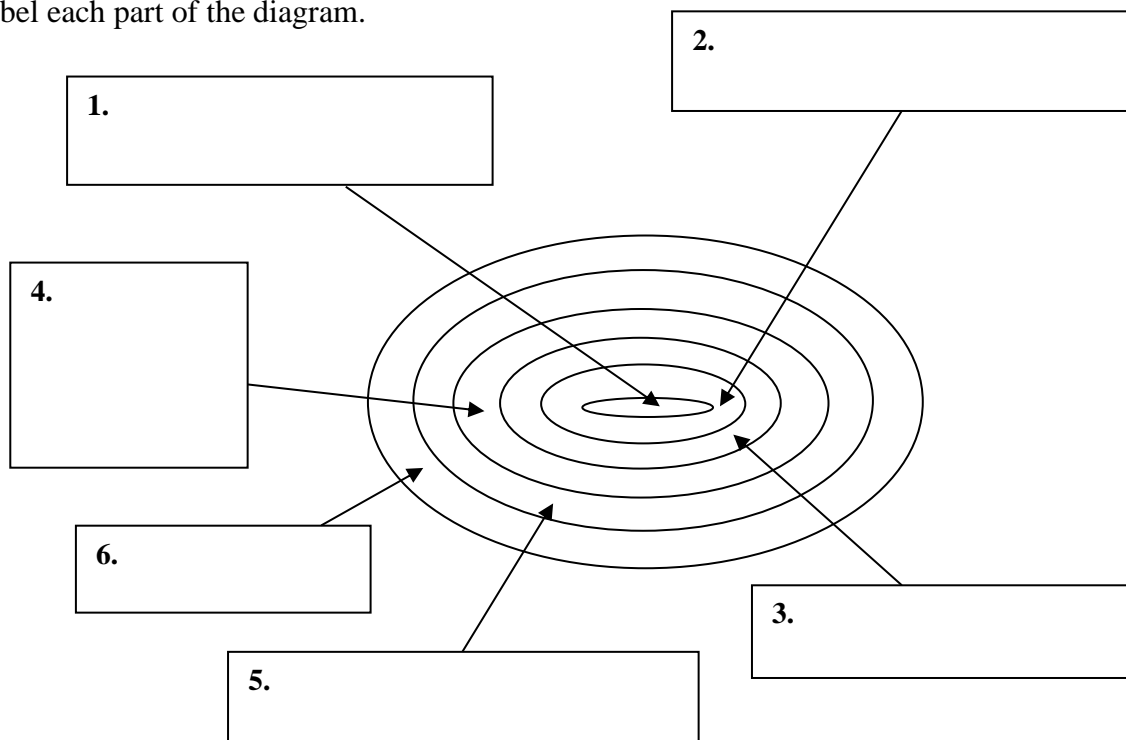
Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.<sup>8</sup> But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. (1 Cor. 7:7-8 NASB)

I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.<sup>27</sup> Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.<sup>28</sup> But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. (1 Cor. 7:26-28 NASB)

Should we today take this instruction as advice against marriage or as proof of the superiority of singleness? Paul gives us a hint in v.26 when he says, **I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.** What this **present distress** was we are not told, but we must understand Paul's reservations about single people getting married or remarried within the context of this specific, difficult situation facing the Corinthians at that time. His instruction does not apply to every context. On the other hand postponement of marriage would be appropriate for Christians today who may be facing imminent (without delay) danger or situations hindering them from getting a good start in their marriage. All over the world, Christians are facing persecution, especially in countries where Islam is the official religion of the state; and persecution often occurs in cycles which come and go, as they did in the Roman Empire in the first four centuries. Yet Paul also qualifies his instructions, saying that even under the **present distress** those who do not have the **self-control** to remain single may get married or remarried (vv. 9, 28). Incidentally, the passage proves that the remarriage of those who have been **released** or divorced from a spouse is not necessarily a sin. Paul says in v.28, you have not sinned. Every case must be evaluated on its own merit as to whether it is a biblical or unbiblical divorce or remarriage.

## Lesson Two Questions

1. Why can we say that “context” is the most important rule of interpretation?
2. Label each part of the diagram.



3. Paying attention to the context, interpret the following verses:
4. Aside from the weight of evidence for the security of true believers, how does the immediate context of Hebrews 6: 1-8 argue against the idea that a believer can lose his salvation?
5. How does Matthew 18: 15-20 fit into the whole context of Jesus’ discourse in Matthew 18?
6. Determine the contribution of Romans 6: 1-11 to Paul’s exposition of justification by faith in Romans 3-5 and his exposition of sanctification in Romans 7-8?
7. Can we use Genesis 12 and 20 to justify lying to our enemies since Abraham is blessed in both stories? Explain your answer.
8. How is the story of Rahab different from that of Abraham? Can we form any conclusions about the ethics of her deception?
9. Can Colossians 4: 15 be used as a proof text for female pastors and elders? Explain why or why not.
10. Is it sinful to plant two kinds of seed in our gardens, to wear clothes made of two different kinds of material, or to breed cows of two different kinds (Lev. 19: 19)? Explain your answer using one of the principles of hermeneutics.
11. How would you answer a Muslim who says that the OT supports Jihad warfare (cf. Deut. 10: 10-20)?

## Lesson Three

### B. The Context of the Book in which the Passage is Found

Often a Biblical author has more than one “axe to grind.” That is, he has more than one argument to make and several purposes for writing the book which contribute to his central purpose. An examination of 1 Corinthians will reveal many important matters Paul addressed in this letter. He wished to address the problems of Christian unity (chps.1—3), triumphalism (chp.4), sexual immorality within the church and church discipline (chp.5), lawsuits by Christians against fellow Christians (chp.6), marriage and divorce (chp.7), unlawful use of Christian liberty (chp.8—10), unlawful participation in the Lord’s Supper (chp.11), misunderstanding of spiritual gifts and its remedy (chp.12—14), and denial of a bodily resurrection (chp.15). If anyone thinks that the early church presented the ideal for what the church should be, he needs to read 1 Corinthians to rid himself of any romantic illusions about the early church. The early church had a bushel bag full of problems.

Virkler gives us some valuable help in understanding the context of the entire book (*Hermeneutics*, pp. 81-84). Three questions should be asked when approaching any book: (1) Who wrote the book? (2) To whom did he write it? (3) What was the writer’s purpose in writing it?

#### 1. Who wrote the book?

For our purposes, we need not concern ourselves here with the tedious scholarship which has defended the authorship of several books of the Bible, books which specifically state the author’s name. Some examples are the following:

The vision of **Isaiah** the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem... (Isa. 1:1 NASB)

The words of **Amos**, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel... (Amos 1:1 NASB)

The word of the LORD which came to **Hosea** the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah... (Hos. 1:1 NASB)

The words of **Jeremiah** the son of Hilkiyah...(Jer. 1:1 NASB)

**Paul**, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle...(Rom. 1:1 NASB)

**Peter**, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen (1 Pet. 1:1 NASB)

**James**, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. (Jas. 1:1 NASB)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant **John**, (Rev. 1:1 NASB)



We are indebted to conservative scholars who have labored to defend what the Bible expressly states so that we can get on with the labor of determining what the author said. However, some books of the Bible do not state the author's name. The book of Hebrews is one such book and speculations have ranged from the apostle Paul to Apollos. In the opinion of many, judging from the style in which it was written, Paul does not appear to be a likely candidate for authorship.

Many OT books do not state the author's name: Genesis through Deuteronomy (believed by most evangelical scholars to be the work of Moses), 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Job, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and many more.

It is very helpful to know the author since we can compare the way in which he uses words and phrases from one book to another. For example, even a casual reading of Ephesians and Colossians will reveal a similarity of content in both epistles. If we are in doubt about what Paul means in one epistle, we can refer to the other one to help us with our interpretation. The same thing is true with regard to many of the arguments in Romans and Galatians. We will talk more about this later when we come to the subject of parallel passages and the broader context of multiple books by the same author.

## 2. To whom did the author write the book?

Did the author write the book to “believers, unbelievers, apostates, believers who were in danger of becoming apostates?”(Virkler, p.81) It is not enough to know, for example, that Paul is writing to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians, because there are various factions of believers in the church (as we learn from 1 Cor.1—4).

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.  
<sup>11</sup> For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, **that there are quarrels among you**. (1 Cor. 1:10-11 NASB)

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.  
<sup>2</sup> I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,  
<sup>3</sup> **for you are still fleshly**. For since **there is jealousy and strife among you**, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Cor. 3:1-3 NASB)

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? **And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?** <sup>8</sup> You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, *I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you*. (1 Cor. 4:7-8 NASB)

So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, <sup>6</sup> **but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?** (1 Cor. 6:4-6 NASB)

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, **that someone has his father's wife**. (1 Cor. 5:1 NASB)

The tone of Paul's letter changes from one section to the other—from tenderness (chap. 2) to mild exhortation and admonition (chap.8—9) to an outright confrontation with those in the Corinthian church who were challenging his apostleship (chaps.10—13). The tone in chapters 1—9 differs so

dramatically from 10—13 that some conservative scholars have speculated about the possibility that chapters 10—13 actually constitute a separate letter from chapters 1—9, but this theory is not widely accepted.

In Romans, sometimes Paul is addressing Gentiles in the church at Rome and sometimes he is addressing Jews in the same church. Compare Rom.1: 18-32 with 2: 17-29.

<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.<sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.<sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Rom. 1:18-23 NASB)

But if you bear the name "Jew " and rely upon the Law and boast in God...You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?<sup>24</sup> For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. (Rom. 2:17, 23-24 NASB)

In Hebrews, the author is addressing Jewish Christians, who because of ongoing persecution, were in danger of returning to the types and shadows of Judaism and thus apostatizing from the Christian faith (see 2: 1-4; 3:3-6; 8: 1-13; 10: 32-39; 12: 18-24.)

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*.<sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,<sup>3</sup> how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:1-3 NASB)

<sup>5</sup> Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;<sup>6</sup> but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Heb. 3:5-6 NASB)

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.<sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. (Heb. 10:35-36 NASB)

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven. (Heb. 12:25 NASB)

Understanding the difference in audiences is an important element in determining the interpretation of James 2 which maintains that a man is not saved by faith alone but also by his works. Unless we want to oppose James and Paul (who said that justification was by faith apart from the works of the Law) we need to consider the different audiences of the apostles. Paul was addressing Judaizers in his letter to the Romans and Galatians who maintained that faith alone was not enough; one must also obey the Law. James, on the other hand, was opposing antinomians who taught that since we are saved by grace alone through faith, it does not matter how much we sin. James drives his point home in no uncertain terms that faith which does not produce good works is not a true faith and will not save anyone. By considering the differences in audiences, we are able to understand the distinction between Paul and James when they both use the expression **faith without works**. The

words are the same but they do not mean the same thing because Paul and James are using the words differently. Paul uses the term “faith” in its genuine sense as the faith of Abraham whose faith “was reckoned as righteousness.” He uses the term “works” as the self-righteous works of the flesh which supposedly earn God’s favor. James, on the other hand, uses the words “faith without works” to denote insincere faith which is devoid of true content (2: 14). “Works” in James signifies genuine works of righteousness which flow out of a genuine faith. Hence, faith without genuine works is not a true faith and will not save.

In **Genesis**, Moses is writing to the Hebrews coming out of Egypt who had been absorbed into the idolatry of Egypt. To counter their superstitions and idolatrous thinking, Moses spends considerable space (Gen.1—2) developing the importance of man as the image of God living throughout the earth as a testimony that the true God rules over all the earth and demands worship from His creatures. Pharaoh, with all the multiplied images of himself throughout the land of Egypt, was not in control; God was in control. (See my notes on the image of God in *Systematic Theology*, *Anthropology*, and Richard Pratt, *Designed for Dignity*, p.8.)

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."<sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27 NASB)

Human beings are God’s vice-regents or vice-rulers over the whole earth to cultivate and develop the earth beyond the boundaries of the garden of Eden. When you look in the mirror, you behold God’s image. Elements of the image of God include: spirituality and immortality, rationality, morality, free agency in making choices, creativity, vocation or dominion (the desire and capacity for work).

Certain OT laws follow from the truth that man is made in God’s image.

- Laws against murder and other violent crimes
- Law against manufacturing idols

"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. (Gen. 9:6 NASB)

<sup>22</sup>"If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, **yet there is no injury**, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*.<sup>23</sup> "But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life,<sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,<sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. (Ex. 21: 22-25)

For You formed my inward parts; **You wove me in my mother's womb.**<sup>14</sup> I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. (Ps. 139:13-14 NASB)

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. (Exod. 20:4 NASB)

'You shall not make for yourselves idols, nor shall you set up for yourselves an image or a *sacred* pillar, nor shall you place a figured stone in your land to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God. (Lev. 26:1 NASB)

<sup>18</sup>To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? <sup>19</sup>As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, A goldsmith plates it with gold, And a silversmith *fashions* chains of silver. <sup>20</sup>He who is too impoverished for *such* an offering Selects a tree that does not rot; He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman To prepare an idol that will not totter.

<sup>23</sup>He *it is* who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. <sup>24</sup>Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. <sup>25</sup>"To whom then will you liken Me That I would be *his* equal?" says the Holy One. (Isa. 40:18-25 NASB)

The story of Joseph should be understood in light of the 400 years of Egyptian bondage. If the Israelites were inclined to question the goodness of God—and they did continually—they should understand their bondage in Egypt as part of God’s overall plan to protect them and make them a strong nation. Joseph’s exhortation to his brothers is properly applied to the whole Jewish nation coming out of Egypt:

“And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

<sup>5</sup>“Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for **God sent me before you** to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>“For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. <sup>7</sup>“**God sent me** before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup>“Now, therefore, it was **not you who sent me here, but God**; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Gen. 45:5-8 NASB)

God never sends His people through suffering for no purpose, but to try them and hopefully bless them if they respond in repentance and faith. Coming as it does at the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph’s statement may well serve as one of the major purposes for which the book was written. “**God meant it for good**” (50: 20) was a statement designed not just for Joseph’s brothers, but for all Israel. The exile in Egypt was not meant for punishment but for testing and protection. They should, therefore, respond with thanksgiving and obedience rather than complaining. Likewise, we should also respond in thanksgiving and obedience to the trials/temptations and suffering of this life, knowing that God always has a benevolent purpose for our suffering—namely, conformity to the image of Christ in **holiness, righteousness, and true knowledge.**

<sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes **all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom. 8:28-30 NASB)

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a **true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him**— (Col. 3:9-10 NASB)

that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, <sup>23</sup>and that you be **renewed** in the spirit of your mind, <sup>24</sup>and put on the new self, which in ***the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*** (Eph. 4:22-24 NASB)

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various **trials** [*peirasmos*],<sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.<sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so **that you may be perfect and complete**, lacking in nothing. (Jas. 1:2-4 NASB)

Let no one say when he is **tempted** [*peirazo*], "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (Jas. 1:13 NASB)

Then Jesus was led up **by the Spirit** into the wilderness to be **tempted** [*peirazo*] by the devil. (Matt. 4:1 NASB)

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.<sup>8</sup> Although He was a Son, He **learned obedience from the things which He suffered**. (Heb. 5:7-8 NASB)

Originally, the books of **1 and 2 Kings** were combined as one book. The book of **1 Kings** begins with the consolidated kingdom of David under Solomon and **2 Kings** ends with Jerusalem burned, the temple destroyed and looted, and the inhabitants of Israel in exile. The writer (unknown) is writing to the exiled people of Israel to show how such a drastic change of events could take place. The reason: Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh.

And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and **his kingdom was firmly established**. (1 Ki. 2:12 NASB)

Thus **the kingdom was established** in the hands of Solomon. (1 Ki. 2:46 NASB)

Now King Solomon **loved many foreign women** along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,<sup>2</sup> from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon **held fast to these in love**. (1 Ki. 11:1-2 NASB)

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites.<sup>6</sup> Solomon **did what was evil in the sight of the LORD**, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father *had done*. (1 Ki. 11:5-6 NASB)

Then the king of Assyria carried **Israel away into exile to Assyria**, and put them in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes,<sup>12</sup> **because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant**, *even* all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded; they would neither listen nor do *it*. (2 Ki. 18:11-12 NASB)

Now in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, **Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon** came, he and all his army, **against Jerusalem**, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it. (2 Ki. 25:1 NASB)

He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire.<sup>10</sup> So all the army of the Chaldeans who *were with* the captain of the guard **broke down the walls around Jerusalem**. (2 Ki. 25:9-10 NASB)

But, one might say, "This is in the OT. God no longer judges his corporate people for their sins because of the finished atonement of Christ." But this is not what we discover in the NT, for God also judges His New Covenant people.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: <sup>2</sup>'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be false*; <sup>3</sup>and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>'**But I have *this* against you**, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup>'**Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place— unless you repent.** (Rev. 2:1-5 NASB)

### 3. What was the purpose of the author in writing the book?

Virkler gives us three ways to go about determining the purpose of a book (*Hermeneutics*, p.83).

#### a. Be alert to the author's "explicit statement [of purpose] or his repetition of certain phrases."

The express statement of Luke's purpose in writing the gospel according to Luke is found in Luke 1: 1-4.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup>it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; <sup>4</sup>**so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.** (Luke 1:1-4 NASB)

The Acts of the Apostles, also written by Luke, takes up where he had left off in presenting an account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Acts is an account of what happened after Jesus' ascension into heaven just before the Day of Pentecost. In this account, the ministry of Jesus continues in His physical absence but not in the absence of the Spirit of Jesus who empowers His apostles to continue the work of taking the gospel to the entire world.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup>until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders **to the apostles** whom He had chosen. <sup>3</sup>**To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days** and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," *He said*, "you heard of from Me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:1-5 NASB)

<sup>8</sup>but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and **you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem**, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NASB)

The pattern for the **apostles'** future ministry was the same as that of Jesus. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for his ministry at the very beginning at John's baptism. Likewise, the disciples are baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost for the ministry ahead of them. The work of the kingdom of God must be attended by the presence and power of the Spirit; otherwise, the church can do nothing. The **apostles** were to be **witnesses** in a special, foundational sense. They were witnesses of the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. When choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot, the criteria for their selection was well-defined.

"Therefore it is necessary that of the **men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus**

**went in and out among us**—<sup>22</sup>beginning with the **baptism of John** until **the day that He was taken up from us**—one of these *must* become a **witness with us of His resurrection.**" (Acts 1:21-22 NASB)

The three requirements were:

- The apostle must be a man [*aner*]. If a woman had been chosen either by Jesus or as Judas' replacement, this selection would have forever silenced all argument about female leadership in the church. As it stands, Paul strengthens the argument for male-only leadership in 1 Timothy 2 by a strict prohibition against women teaching or exercising authority over men.
- He must have accompanied Jesus and the eleven apostles their entire ministry
- He must be a witness not only of the resurrection but also the ascension

There were other apostles in the NT era other than the eleven remaining apostles who accompanied Jesus. James, the Lord's brother became an apostle, and Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection. The strict criteria of the eleven apostles for Judas' replacement was modified by the Lord Jesus himself who appeared to Saul of Tarsus, who had not accompanied Jesus nor witnessed His ascension. Yet the risen Jesus had appeared to him on the road to Damascus. We hear nothing more about Matthias, but a great deal about Paul whose missionary work dominates the book of Acts and whose writings constitute one-third of the NT. This does not prove that Matthias was inactive, for we also have no narratives in Acts concerning most of the original eleven apostles.

But I did not see any other of the apostles **except James**, the Lord's brother. (Gal. 1:19 NASB)

then He appeared to **James**, then to all the apostles;<sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to one untimely born, **He appeared to me also.** (1 Cor. 15:7-8 NASB)

### **Three questions should be asked when approaching any book:**

- (1) Who wrote the book?
- (2) To whom did he write it?
- (3) What was the writer's purpose in writing it?

### **Excursus on John's Purpose for Writing His Gospel**

In the Gospel of John, the purpose of the book is stated explicitly in John 20: 30-31, that the one reading the account may believe in Jesus Christ and have everlasting life in Him.

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;<sup>31</sup> **but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31 NASB)

Beginning in chapter 2, John presents a series of **signs** which continue until chapter 13. The words **sign** or **signs** is characteristically used by John in referring to the miracles of Jesus. They also refer to Jesus' predictions of his resurrection.

This beginning of *His signs* Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His **glory**, and His disciples believed in Him. (Jn. 2:11 NASB)

Thus, the first of Jesus' signs was the conversion of 120-180 gallons of water into wine for a wedding party. The result was that his **glory** was displayed to the disciples, resulting in **belief**. The manifestation of Christ's glory is one of the **themes of John's gospel** recorded in the prologue (introduction) in Jn. 1: 1-18.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His **glory**, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:14)

### John 2—Jesus' prediction of his resurrection

And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; (Jn. 2:15 NASB)

The Jews then said to Him, "What **sign** do You show us as **your authority** for doing these things?" (Jn. 2: 18 NASB)

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But He was speaking of the temple of His body. <sup>22</sup> So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (Jn. 2:18-22 NASB)

Therefore, Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection became a sign for the disciples after His resurrection, a sign that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Christianity is the only religion that claims as its basic foundation the **physical** resurrection of its founder. Disprove the physical resurrection and Christianity ceases to be a viable religion. It is also the only religion which claims the deity and humanity of its founder; therefore, many heresies arose in the first century claiming that Jesus was not flesh and blood or that he was not God.

Some of these heresies remain to this day, including Jehovah's Witnesses, who claim that Jesus was created by God rather than co-creator with God, as John's gospel teaches. This heresy was called Arianism, named for the Alexandrian priest, Arius (AD 250-333).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with God**, and the Word **was God**. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (Jn. 1:1-3 NASB)

Christ cannot be **with God** in the **beginning** while also being created by God. If God created Christ, then Christ did not exist in the beginning **with God**.

### Analogy of Faith (Scripture interprets Scripture)

In Colossians, Paul says,

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. <sup>15</sup> He is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> **For by Him all things were created**, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> **He is before all things**, and in Him **all things hold together**. <sup>18</sup> He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for **all the fullness to dwell in Him**, <sup>20</sup> and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col. 1:13-20 NASB)

Do we find anything else in the Bible supporting Paul's proposition that Jesus is co-creator with God and is, in fact, the same essence or being as God?



God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,<sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in **His Son**, whom He [*the Father*] appointed heir of all things, **through whom** [*Christ*] **also He** [*i.e. the Father*] **made the world.** <sup>3</sup> And **He** [*Christ*] **is the radiance of His** [*the Father's*] **glory and the exact representation of His** [*the Father's*] **nature**, and upholds all things by the word of His [*Christ's*] power. When He had made purification of sins [*on the cross*], He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty [*the Father*] on high, (Heb. 1:1-3 NASB)

This is known in theology as the ontological trinity. Ontology is a branch of philosophy dealing with the **nature of being**. The being of God the Father and Christ is the **same**. Their function is different, known as the economic or functional trinity. The Father **plans** the redemption of mankind, the Son **executes** the plan of redemption by becoming a man and dying on the cross. The Spirit **applies** redemption by drawing people to Christ and indwelling them.

#### **John 4—Jesus demonstrates prophetic knowledge of the Samaritan woman's past sins.**

He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."<sup>17</sup> The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband';<sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." (Jn. 4:16-18 NASB)

So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men,<sup>29</sup> "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" (Jn. 4:28-29 NASB)

From that city many of the Samaritans **believed** in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." (Jn. 4:39 NASB)

#### **John 4—Jesus heals the royal official's son from a distance.**

Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a **royal official** whose son was sick at Capernaum.<sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring *Him* to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.<sup>48</sup> So Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe."

Though they have from Jesus the prophetic word, they will not be satisfied unless they have visual proof of his authority. Yet, we will recognize from John's gospel that "seeing" is not necessarily "believing". The multitudes who saw his miracles, including his own earthly brothers born of Mary and Joseph, were still not believing in him.

Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing."<sup>4</sup> "For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be *known* publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."<sup>5</sup> For not even His brothers were believing in Him. (Jn. 7:3-5 NASB)

But God is patient toward unbelief, and Jesus continues to utilize **signs and wonders to draw attention to his main message** (salvation through repentance and faith in Him) and to authenticate his authority. After his ascension into heaven, the disciples continue the same pattern: preaching the gospel and authenticating or proving the authority of the gospel through **signs and wonders**. This authentication of the gospel through signs and wonders is part of the reason Acts is known as "The Acts of the Apostles". In the same way Jesus authenticated His ministry and His claim to be from the Father, so also the apostles replicated these signs and wonders as proof of their authority as Jesus' apostles.

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many **wonders and signs** were taking place through the apostles. (Acts 2:43 NASB)

"And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,<sup>30</sup> while You extend Your hand to heal, and **signs and wonders** take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4:29-30 NASB)

At the hands of the apostles many **signs and wonders** were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. (Acts 5:12 NASB)

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great **wonders and signs** among the people. (Acts 6:8 NASB)

Therefore they spent a long time *there* speaking boldly *with reliance* upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that **signs and wonders** be done by their hands. (Acts 14:3 NASB)

All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what **signs and wonders** God had done through them among the Gentiles. (Acts 15:12 NASB)

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,<sup>19</sup> in the power of **signs and wonders**, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 15:18-19 NASB)

The **signs** of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by **signs and wonders and miracles**. (2 Cor. 12:12 NASB)

Continuing with the story of the royal official in John 4,

<sup>49</sup> The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man **believed** the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. <sup>51</sup> As he was now going down, *his* slaves met him, saying that his son was living. <sup>52</sup> So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." <sup>53</sup> So the father knew that *it was* at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself **believed** and his whole household. (Jn. 4:46-53 NASB)

Therefore, the signs and wonders Jesus was performing were often effective in bringing people to faith in Christ—John's purpose in writing his gospel—especially among the common people who had no religious turf to protect. But the religious authority of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and chief priests was now in jeopardy. This becomes evident in the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection in John 11. As it turns out, the royal official believed Jesus' word before he actually saw **signs and wonders**. That is, he **believed** that Jesus healed his son before he saw visual proof of this healing.

Sometimes, Jesus' miracles (signs) produce more resistance than belief.

### **John 5—Jesus heals the man crippled for 38 years.**

After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. (Jn. 5:1-2 NASB)

A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.<sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"<sup>7</sup> The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me."<sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk."<sup>9</sup> Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.<sup>10</sup> So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet."<sup>11</sup> But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" (Jn. 5:5-11 NASB)

The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.<sup>16</sup> For this reason **the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath**.<sup>17</sup> But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."<sup>18</sup> For this reason therefore **the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God**. (Jn. 5:15-18 NASB)

Two things stand out in this story. Jesus violates the Sabbath rules imposed on the people by the Jewish leaders, called here, simply, **the Jews**. The Sabbath commandment never forbade doing a good deed, nor did it forbid anyone from carrying their own pallet. These were man-made rules which violated the spirit of the fourth commandment. Therefore, a turf battle is going on between Jesus and the Jewish leadership concerning who is the authority on the Law of God. On another occasion, Jesus acknowledged that protecting life on the Sabbath was permissible.

And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"<sup>6</sup> And they could make no reply to this. (Lk. 14:5-6 NASB)

Secondly, Jesus calls **God His own Father, making Himself equal with God**. And so He was. Jesus never denied such claims, and this identity of essence with the Father was part of John's purpose in writing his gospel.

"I and the Father are one." (Jn. 10:30 NASB)

Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (Jn. 14:9 NASB)

### **John 6—Jesus feeds the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, but the crowds do not believe**

Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."<sup>15</sup> So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and **take Him by force to make Him king**, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone. (Jn. 6:14-15)

When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."<sup>27</sup> "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."<sup>28</sup> Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent**."<sup>30</sup> So they said to Him, "**What then do You do for a sign**, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?"<sup>31</sup> "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'"<sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the **true bread** out of heaven."<sup>33</sup> "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and **gives life**

**to the world.**"<sup>34</sup> Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.**"<sup>36</sup> "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe."<sup>37</sup> "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."<sup>38</sup> "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."<sup>39</sup> "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."<sup>40</sup> "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."<sup>41</sup> Therefore the Jews were **grumbling** about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."

The word, **grumbling** is the same word used in the Greek translation of the OT in Numbers 14: 27 and 17: 5.

"How long *shall I bear* with this evil congregation who are **grumbling** against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. (Num. 14:27 NASB)

"It will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the **grumbings** of the sons of Israel, who are **grumbling** against you." (Num. 17:5 NASB)

Even as the Israelites in Moses' day were grumbling against Yahweh—in spite of all the miracles they had seen—so the Jews in Jesus' day were grumbling against Jesus, God in the flesh. In 1500 years from Moses to Christ, they had not changed for the better.

**Miracles alone do not change the unbelieving human heart.** It takes the supernatural work (6: 29) of God for a person to believe in him. This is part of John's apologetic answer (defense) to the readers who are asking, "Why didn't the Jews believe in Jesus?"

Continuing with John 6,

<sup>42</sup> They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not **grumble** among yourselves."<sup>44</sup> "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." (Jn. 6:25-44 NASB)

"Coming" to Christ is the same as "believing" in Him.

"But there are some of you **who do not believe.**" For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were **who did not believe**, and who it was that would betray Him.<sup>65</sup> And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." (NASB)

Therefore, the Father must **grant** belief to the sinner; otherwise, he will remain in unbelief.

<sup>66</sup> As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.<sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"<sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."<sup>69</sup> "**We have believed** and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." (Jn. 6:64-69 NASB)

The rejection of Jesus is anticipated in the prologue of the gospel of John, the first 18 verses. Part of the prologue says,

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.<sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who **believe** in His name,<sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (Jn. 1:11-13 NASB)

The words, **who were born...of God** anticipate Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup> "That which is **born** of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>7</sup> "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'<sup>8</sup> "The wind [pneuma] blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit [*Pneuma*]." (Jn. 3:3-8 NASB)

The sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit in working wherever, whenever, and upon whomever he wishes is equivalent to the Father's **drawing** men to the Son and **granting** to men the faith and repentance to **come** to the Son. This is why John says in the prologue that those who **received** Christ are not born of natural means—**not of blood** (a particular biological race or family), **nor of the will of the flesh** (sexual desire), **nor the will of man** (possibly the will of the husband to have children). They are **born...of God**, i.e. by the will of God.

We are still discussing **(3) the author's purpose in writing the book**. We are seeing that the content of John's gospel is designed to inspire belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God—the evangelistic purpose. But it is also designed as an apologetic or defense. It answers the question of why so many Jews, particularly most of the leadership, rejected Jesus.

"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

We are saved not by the sovereign will of man, but by the sovereign will of God.

### **John 9—Jesus heals the man born blind.**

After the blind man is healed, the Pharisees approach him and ask what happened. He reports how Jesus had restored his sight. Many questioned whether this was, indeed, the same man who was born blind, and his parents were called to verify his identity. The Pharisees tell the man,

"We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from."<sup>30</sup> The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and *yet* He opened my eyes."<sup>31</sup> "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him."<sup>32</sup> "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind."<sup>33</sup> "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."<sup>34</sup> They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" **So they put him out.** (Jn. 9:29-34 NASB)

In other words, they put him out of the synagogue. We know that this is what **put him out** means from the **immediate context**, the verses closest to the verse in question.

The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight,<sup>19</sup> and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?"<sup>20</sup> His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;<sup>21</sup> but how he now sees, we do not know; or

who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." <sup>22</sup> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. (Jn. 9:18-22 NASB)

Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you **believe** in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup> He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." <sup>38</sup> And he said, "**Lord, I believe.**" And he worshiped Him.

Some form of the word **believe** is used 77 times in John's gospel, consistent with his purpose.

<sup>39</sup> And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." <sup>40</sup> Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. (Jn. 9:35-41 NASB)

The Pharisees had received what they demanded, namely, visual signs authenticating Jesus' authority. Had they been physically blind, they **would have no sin** of unbelief since they would not be able to see visible proof of Jesus' identity. But since they admit that they see these verifying signs and yet do not believe, they are culpable or blameworthy for their continuing unbelief. Jesus is playing with words when he says, **so that those who do not see** [*namely, the man born blind*] **may see, and that those who see** [*the Pharisees*] **may become blind** [*i.e. spiritually blind*]."

The rejection of the Jews presented in John's gospel is part of his apologetic (defense) against those who would argue, "If Jesus was really the Christ, the Son of God, then why didn't **all** the Jews believe in him, especially the Jewish leadership?" John's answer to this objection is that their hearts were hard, their eyes blind, and their ears deaf to the insurmountable evidence that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God. Moreover, in order for this spiritual blindness to be healed, an act of God was just as necessary as in the healing of physical blindness.

This is why all Jesus' acts of healing were living parables. Those who were blind were given their sight as a metaphor that Jesus could also heal spiritual blindness, the worst kind of blindness. Those who were spiritually deaf would have their ears opened to hear the gospel with understanding. Those who were lame could **walk** [*live*] **in newness of life**.

John had already introduced this defense in the prologue. All who **received** Christ were **born of God**. He further clarifies what born of God means in Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus. One must be born again of the Spirit who is like the wind, moving at His discretion in whomever he wishes to produce repentance and faith. The reason for rejecting Christ was not that the evidence was insufficient, but that they were predisposed by their sin to reject the evidence.

The Jews and the Roman government, with virtually unlimited power at their disposal, could not stop the spread of Christianity for one simple reason—they could not prove to anyone that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Debunking the resurrection of Jesus should have been easy if it had never happened. Where would witnesses be found who would risk their lives for a dead savior and the false rumor of a resurrection? Yet, there were more than 500 eye-witnesses during Jesus' 40 days on earth after the resurrection.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He appeared to more than

five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;<sup>7</sup> then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;<sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Cor. 15:3-8 NASB)

If Paul wrote 1 Corinthians between 53 and 57 AD (information available in a good study Bible), then eye-witnesses of the resurrected Christ would have been testifying to this fact for a quarter of a century by the time the letter was written. We can only imagine the impact of over 500 people, enthusiastically telling and re-telling the story of seeing the resurrected Christ with their own eyes to thousands of people. It is not a story one would keep to himself. It was not some myth that Jesus' followers kept alive to promote the Christian sect.

The hardness of men's hearts is just as evident today, predisposing them to reject the evidence. There is more evidence that Jesus was a real person who lived in the first century AD than for any other historical figure who lived at that time or even much later in history. That the life of Christ has changed human history more than anyone who has ever lived is beyond reasonable dispute. That the Bible, more than any other written document, sets forth the true nature of man's condition and the divine solution is just as clear to the unbiased reader. The problem is that all sinners are biased against the truth (Rom. 1: 18).

Now **we** have received, not the spirit of the world, but the **Spirit who is from God**, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,<sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.<sup>14</sup> But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.<sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.<sup>16</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But **we** have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:12-16 NASB)

The Apostle Paul reminded King Agrippa that there was sufficient evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

"Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if **God** does raise the dead? (Acts 26:8 NASB)

"For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. (Acts 26: 26 NASB)

The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ had not occurred in some remote, obscure **corner** of the Roman Empire, but in the land of Palestine, always a hot-bed of political intrigue, contention, and rebellion. Therefore, news of the resurrection would have spread around the Roman Empire.

<sup>27</sup> "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."<sup>28</sup> Agrippa *replied* to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." (Acts 26:27-28 NASB)

No one familiar with the predictions of the OT prophets concerning the Christ could deny that these OT predictions had been fulfilled to the letter.

They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me **vinegar** [*oxos* in the Greek OT] to drink. (Ps. 69:21 NASB)

A jar full of **sour wine** [*oxos*] was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a *branch of hyssop* and brought it up to His mouth. (Jn. 19:29 NASB)

All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, *saying*,<sup>8</sup> "Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him." (Ps. 22:7-8 NASB)

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying,<sup>42</sup> "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him."<sup>43</sup> "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, **IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM**; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matt. 27:41-43 NASB)

I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.<sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death.<sup>16</sup> For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. (Ps. 22:14-16 NASB)

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. (Jn. 19:34 NASB)

But he [*Thomas*] said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (Jn. 20:24-25 NASB)

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:27-28 NASB)

<sup>2</sup> For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.<sup>3</sup> He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.<sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.<sup>5</sup> But He was **pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities**; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. (Isa. 53:1-5 NASB)

It was not humanly possible for Jesus to fulfill such OT prophecies. As a mere human, being executed on a cross, it was not possible for him to influence the Roman soldiers or the chief priests to give him sour wine, quote the Psalms, or for Him to choose the manner of his execution. But while dying on the cross, He is still God who participates with the Father and the Spirit to control all the events on the day of His crucifixion, before that day and afterwards.

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup> this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. (Acts 2:22-23 NASB)

However, Agrippa could not openly admit the accuracy of OT prophets for fear of offending his Roman superiors, nor could he outright deny them for fear of offending the Jews. So he shoves Paul's comment aside jokingly, accusing him of manipulating him to "play the Christian".

Jesus' ministry, including his rejection by the Jews, fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah to whom God said,

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"<sup>9</sup> He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.'<sup>10</sup> **Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim,** Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." (Isa. 6:8-10 NASB)



After the crowds began to reject Jesus' teaching, he began to speak to them in parables as a judgment against them but also to lessen God's judgment for rejecting him. The more they understood of Jesus' teaching without understanding it and obeying it, the greater their guilt in rejecting it.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered them, "**To you it has been granted** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, **but to them it has not been granted**." <sup>12</sup> "For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has **shall be taken away from him**." <sup>13</sup> "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." <sup>14</sup> "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; <sup>15</sup> FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND **THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES**, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'" <sup>16</sup> "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. (Matt. 13:10-16 NASB)

Those who have already received Christ' teaching, repented, believed, and begun to obey, will receive more and more understanding. But those who continue to hear Him and refuse to accept His teaching, even the understanding they have will be taken away from them. Their light will be turned into darkness. The judicial hardening which we find in Matthew is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction of hardening which had become a reality during Jesus' ministry.

## Pages 88-98 need revision with calibri font

### John 10—Jesus knows His sheep, and His sheep know Him.

So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **I am the door of the sheep**." <sup>8</sup> "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them." <sup>9</sup> "**I am the door**; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." <sup>10</sup> "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly." <sup>11</sup> "**I am the good shepherd**; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (Jn. 10:7-11 NAU)

Consistent with his purpose in showing that Jesus is the Christ, John includes explicit statements indicating **Jesus' self-awareness of his deity**. All the **I AM** passages in John allude to the covenant name of God in the OT, Yahweh. Yahweh means literally, "I am". It also implies "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be". Therefore, the name implies the unchangeableness of God's essence and his purpose to save Israel. When 70 Greek scholars translated the OT into Greek in the second and third BC, they translated God's answer to Moses' question using the Greek language.

Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM**"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, '**I AM** has sent me to you.'" (Exod. 3:13-14 NASB)

The Greek translation of "I am" is *ego eimi*, the same words Jesus uses when he says, "**I am** the good shepherd" and many other **I am** expressions.

In the Garden of Gethsemane:

So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" <sup>5</sup> They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "**I am He**." [*He is not in the*

Greek text. /And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. <sup>6</sup> So when He said to them, "**I am He**," they drew back and fell to the ground. (Jn. 18:4-6 NASB)

God incarnate, **veiled in human flesh**, momentarily revealed a glimmer of his infinite power to his captors, giving them an opportunity to reconsider what they were doing. He was the very essence of **I AM** of the OT. It was a sign that Jesus was who he said he was. But they were **blind** to what was happening, even Judas. Anyone who claims that there is no evidence of Jesus' divinity in the gospel accounts either has not read John's gospel or he is blind to the significance of Jesus' words.

Revealing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God is John's purpose in writing this gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. (Jn. 1:1-2 NAU)

Continuing with John 10,

"He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the **owner** of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*. <sup>13</sup> "*He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> "**I am the good shepherd**, and I know My own and My own know Me, <sup>15</sup> even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> "I have **other sheep**, which are not of this fold; **I must** bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. (Jn. 10:12-16 NAU)

Notice the certainty in Jesus' statements. He **must bring** the other sheep into the fold who are not yet there. The **other sheep** include every future believer throughout the history of mankind. Can Jesus fail in anything that he must do? The other sheep also will hear his voice and will become one flock with the other sheep who are already in the fold. There is no uncertainty in this statement. He does not say that the other sheep **may** hear his voice and **may** become one with the existing flock.

As Jesus says earlier,

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup> "For I have come down from heaven, **not to do My own will**, but **the will of Him who sent Me**. <sup>39</sup> "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn. 6:37-39 NASB)

In order to accomplish the **will of the Father** who sent him, Jesus **must** bring all the sheep into the fold. And of that number, he will not lose a single sheep, but will raise the sheep up on the last day, the day of his return. In fact, Jesus is praying for those who have been given to Him by the Father, beginning first with the disciples.

"I **ask** on **their** behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for **they** are Yours; (Jn. 17:9 NASB)

"While I was with them, I was **keeping** [*guarding, watching over*] **them** in Your name which You have given Me; and I **guarded them** and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. (Jn. 17:12 NASB)

"I do not **ask** You to take them out of the world, but to keep [*guard*] them from the evil one. (Jn. 17:15 NASB)

Jesus prays that the Father will guard his disciples, keeping them from the devil. Will the Father answer this prayer?

So they removed the stone [*of Lazarus' tomb*]. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.<sup>42</sup> **"I knew that You always hear Me;** but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." (Jn. 11:41-42 NASB)

The Father **always** answered Jesus' prayers—all except one—and Jesus knew that it was not possible for the Father to answer it.

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." (Matt. 26:39b NASB)

Therefore, when Jesus asks the Father to keep, guard, or watch over the eleven disciples in the upper room, we may be assured that God will protect them—but not **only** them.

"I do not **ask** on behalf of these **alone** [*namely, these 11 disciples*], but for those also who believe in Me through their word;<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (Jn. 17:20-21 NASB)

Therefore, Jesus is not only praying for the protection of the immediate 11 disciples, but for **every Christian** in the history of the world who believes in him through the witness of the eleven disciples plus the Apostle Paul whom Christ chooses later on the road to Damascus.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;<sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and **they will never perish;** and **no one will snatch them out of My hand.**<sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.** (Jn. 10:27-29 NASB)

**If** Jesus himself is praying for us, and **if** we are being kept and guarded by Him, and **if** we are safely in the hands of the Father and the Son, **then** our salvation is secure.

The church for whom Christ prays has been built upon the foundation of the apostles (i.e. the apostolic witness) and the continuing witness of NT believers who were given the gift of prophesy. This foundational witness is now complete in the NT Scriptures. There is no further need for prophesy because only one foundation is necessary.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of **God's household,**<sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,<sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together into a **dwelling of God** in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22 NASB)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;<sup>3</sup> that by revelation there was made known to me **the mystery,** as I wrote before in brief.<sup>4</sup> By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ,**<sup>5</sup> which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;<sup>6</sup> *to be specific,* that **the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel** (Eph. 3:1-6 )

In other words, the **mystery** of the Gentiles being fellow members—on equal footing—with the Jews in the body of Christ, the church, was not revealed to the OT prophets. In the OT Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes (converts) to be accepted into Israelite society (e.g. Ruth the Moabite

and Uriah the Hittite). In Acts 10, Peter required a special revelation from God to understand that he could go to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, to preach the gospel to his family.

OT believers trusted in the revelation of salvation that God had given to them. However incomplete this revelation was, it was still sufficient to save them.

"Your father Abraham **rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.**"<sup>57</sup> So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"<sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, **I am.**" (Jn. 8:56-58 NASB)

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"<sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "**God will provide for Himself the lamb** for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. (Gen. 22:7-8 NAU)

Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.<sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."<sup>12</sup> He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, **since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.**"<sup>13</sup> Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering **in the place of his son.** (Gen. 22:10-13 NASB)

Abraham already understood the need for sacrifice. He now understood that God himself would provide the necessary sacrifice for sin.

Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.<sup>29</sup> And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing *became white and gleaming.*<sup>30</sup> And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were **Moses and Elijah,**<sup>31</sup> who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Lk. 9:28-31 NASB)

Moses and Elijah, representative of the Law and the Prophets and all OT believers, had a vested interest in what Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem by dying on a cross and making his **departure** from this fallen world. Christ's death was necessary for **their** salvation. The word departure in the Greek is *exodus*. Just as Israel made its exodus from Egypt, Jesus makes his exodus from this world. But his exodus also represents the exodus of all His people from the world of sin and ruin. This takes place spiritually at conversion and death and physically at the return of Christ. Therefore, Jesus did not come to make salvation possible for everyone but certain for none. It is not possible that Jesus would have died on the cross exposing himself to the potential that not a single solitary person would be saved because of unbelief. He died **knowing** full well the sheep for whom he died and that they would be saved, kept, and guarded. The **certainty** of Christ's success in saving us is also clear from the OT prophets.

But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He **will see His offspring**, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD **will prosper** in His hand.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, **will justify the many**, As He will bear their iniquities. (Isa. 53:10-11 NASB)

Returning to John 10,

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (Jn. 10:11 NASB)

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and **you do not believe**; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me."<sup>26</sup> "**But you do not believe** because you are not of My sheep. (Jn. 10: 24-26 NASB)

Once more, this narrative is included as part of John's defense (apologetic) against readers who insisted that Jesus must not have been the Christ because he was rejected. Jesus makes it plain that some don't believe, not because His works are insufficient evidence of His truth claims, but because those who do not believe his message are not His sheep for whom he lays down His life, for whom he prays, and who are safely kept from the evil one.

### Detour: Being and Personality of God taught in John's Gospel

<sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand."<sup>30</sup> "I and the Father are one." (Jn. 10:24-30)

The gospel of John establishes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. There is **My Father**, and then there is **Me** (Christ). Moreover, to whom does Christ pray in John 17 to protect his disciples? He is not praying to himself, but to the Father. Yet, they are **one**. They are not one **person**, but one **being** or **essence** consisting in all the attributes or qualities of God.

"If you had known **Me**, you would have known My **Father** also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."<sup>8</sup> Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'?"<sup>10</sup> "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works."<sup>11</sup> "Believe Me that I am **in** the Father and the Father is **in** Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. (Jn. 14:7-11 NASB)

Obviously, Jesus cannot be telling Philip that He and the Father are one **physically**; otherwise, He would be contradicting what he told the Samaritan woman, "God is **spirit**...". He meant that they are one in **essence**.

But what about the Holy Spirit?

"I will ask the **Father**, and He will give you another Helper [*paracletos*], that **He** may be with you forever;<sup>17</sup> that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.<sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (Jn. 14:16-18 NASB)

**Another Helper** [*paracletos*] implies that Jesus is the first helper.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** [*paracletos*] with the Father, **Jesus Christ** the righteous; (1 Jn. 2:1 NASB)

Moreover, Jesus says that the Helper, the Spirit, will be **with you forever** and **will be in you**. Then he says,

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

What can this mean except that Christ is the same essence as the Spirit?

Analogy of Faith:

Now **the Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. (2 Cor. 3:17 NA)  
and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and **the Spirit of Jesus** did not permit them; (Acts 16:7 NASB)

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the **Spirit of God** dwells in you? (1 Cor. 3:16 NASB)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and the **Son** and the **Holy Spirit**,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20 NASB)

How is Jesus **with** us **always**? By means of His Spirit who is none other than the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Jesus distinguishes between His personality and the personality of the Father and the Spirit.

"I will ask the **Father**, and He will give you another Helper [*paracletos*], that **He** may be with you forever;<sup>17</sup> *that is the Spirit of truth...*"

The **I** refers to Christ, the **Father** is God the Father, and the **Helper** is the Spirit. Three distinct persons, one essence.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (Jn. 14:6 NASB)

Back to John 10,

"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;<sup>38</sup> but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (Jn. 10:37-38 NASB)

Jesus never asked people to take a leap of faith in the dark without any supporting evidence of his claims to be the Christ. "Take a look," he says, and John wants the reader to know that **even some of the Pharisees** were taking a second look.

A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words.<sup>20</sup> Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?"<sup>21</sup> Others were saying, "These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. **A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?**" (Jn. 10:19-21 NASB) Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "**How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?**" And there was a division among them. (Jn. 9:16 NASB)

John is intent to show that not **all** of the Pharisees continued in opposition to Jesus. Nicodemus was also a Pharisee who was "a ruler of the Jews" (Jn. 3: 1), which implies that he was a member of the highest religious court in Judea, the Sanhedrin, whose majority consisted of Sadducees, former high priests, and the current high priest, as well as a minority number of Pharisees, including Nicodemus, who later helped Joseph of Arimathea anoint Jesus' dead body with spices for burial. Joseph was a rich man; therefore, not all rich people rejected Jesus.

### John 11—Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

In the raising of Lazarus, John presents the zenith of Jesus' signs pointing to his truth claim to be the Christ, the Son of God. He had already raised the dead before: the widow of Nain's son (Lk. 7)

and the synagogue official's daughter (Matt. 9). John does not report these incidents, but uses the raising of Lazarus as the most important sign Jesus performs just before His crucifixion. In Lazarus' resurrection is the assurance of His own resurrection and that of all believers.

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." (Jn. 11:1-4 NASB)

In v. 4 we encounter again one of the **major themes** in John which is introduced in the prologue.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His **glory**, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:14 NASB)

The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and to enjoy God. Consequently, it is improper and idolatrous for man to glorify himself. The chief purpose of God is to glorify **himself**, simply because he is God.

...after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." <sup>12</sup> The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." <sup>13</sup> Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. <sup>14</sup> So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." (Jn. 11:11-15 NASB)

This statement once more demonstrates John's **evangelistic** purpose in recording the miracles of Jesus—so that people will believe in Christ. The statement also demonstrates that John's purpose in recording the miracles was not original with him; it originated from **Christ' own purpose** for his signs, to generate and inspire belief. Had Jesus been present when Lazarus was dying, He would not have let him die; but He uses Lazarus' death to produce faith.

Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "**I am** the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." (Jn. 11:20-27 NASB)

Martha believed in the hope of a future resurrection. But how was Jesus to **assure** her and others present, including his own disciples, that this future resurrection was a certainty, not just wishful thinking? He would give them visible proof in the present that there would be a future resurrection. Lazarus' resurrection was different from the widow of Nain's son and the nobleman's daughter. Both of them had been dead only a short time. Lazarus had been dead four days and decay had set in. What about dead believers whose bodies had already rotted and turned to dust?

The analogy of faith:

What Jesus does in this story is similar to the **prophetic confirmation of OT prophets**. The OT prophets often made **future** predictions which would not be fulfilled within the lifetimes of their audiences. How then, would their audiences believe in the certainty of their prophecies? They had been warned by Moses that false prophets should not be obeyed or feared.

'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'<sup>21</sup> "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'"<sup>22</sup> "When a prophet speaks **in the name of the LORD**, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:20-22 NASB)

We have an OT example of the confirmation of the prophetic word from Jeremiah 25 and 28.

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon),<sup>2</sup> which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying,<sup>3</sup> "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened."<sup>4</sup> "And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear,"<sup>5</sup> saying, "Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever;<sup>6</sup> and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm."<sup>7</sup> "**Yet you have not listened to Me**," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm."<sup>8</sup> "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, '**Because you have not obeyed My words**,<sup>9</sup> behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.'<sup>10</sup> 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.'<sup>11</sup> 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon **seventy years**.<sup>12</sup> 'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.'<sup>13</sup> 'I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. (Jer. 25:1-13 NASB)

## Jeremiah 28

Now in the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, **Hananiah** the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying,<sup>2</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.'<sup>3</sup> 'Within **two years** I am going to bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD'S house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon.'<sup>4</sup> 'I am also going to bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon,' declares the LORD, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'" <sup>5</sup> Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and in the presence of all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD,<sup>6</sup> and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD confirm your words which you have prophesied to bring back the vessels of the LORD'S house and all the exiles, from Babylon to this place."<sup>7</sup> "**Yet hear now this word** which I am about to speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people!"<sup>8</sup> "The prophets who were before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence."<sup>9</sup> "The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, then that prophet will be known *as* one whom the LORD has truly sent."<sup>10</sup> Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke it.<sup>11</sup> Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'Even so will I break within two full years the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations.'" Then the prophet Jeremiah went



his way.<sup>12</sup> The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying,<sup>b13</sup> "Go and speak to Hananiah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made instead of them yokes of iron."'<sup>14</sup> For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they will serve him. And I have also given him the beasts of the field.'"<sup>15</sup> Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie."<sup>16</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. **This year you are going to die**, because you have counseled rebellion against the LORD.'"<sup>17</sup> So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year in the seventh month. (Jer. 28:1-17 NASB)

Therefore, since Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Hananiah is confirmed the same year in the lifetime of his Israelite audience, the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning Judah's return after **70 years** was also confirmed as true, even though most of the people who are listening to this prophecy will be dead before the seventy years is fulfilled. Daniel the prophet becomes aware when the seventy years are complete and prays a prayer of confession to God.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans—<sup>2</sup>in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was *revealed as* the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, *namely*, **seventy** years.<sup>3</sup> So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek *Him* by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. (Dan. 9:1-3 NASB)

According to Jeremiah's prophetic word spoken 70 years earlier, Cyrus king of Persia in 536 BC permits the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying:<sup>2</sup> "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He **has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem**, which is in Judah.'<sup>3</sup> 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. (Ezr. 1:1-3 NASB)

In the gospel of John, Jesus is being presented as the prophet par excellence who is even **greater than Moses**, a prophet whose words are always true and whose predictions always come true. In accommodation to Martha, Mary, and all who are present at Lazarus' grave, Jesus gives them **hope of the future resurrection beyond their lifetimes** by raising Lazarus from the dead **during their lifetime**. They are not reduced to a mere wish that they will one day experience resurrection.

So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, **for he has been dead four days**."<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"<sup>41</sup> So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me."<sup>42</sup> "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me."<sup>43</sup> When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." (Jn. 11:38-43 NASB)

Two things should be noted here. **First**, Jesus continues to perform deeds which cannot be explained in any other terms but "miraculous". Lazarus was plainly **not** in a coma. He had been dead four days; and when the tomb was opened, the by-standers could smell his decaying body. This was **different from the two previous resurrection miracles**. Jesus had deliberately used the method of undeniable plausibility before now. He had healed a lame man who had been cripple for 38 years who was well-known to many people. He had also healed a blind man who had been blind

from birth, something verified by his parents. Contrary to much modern thinking, people in the first century were not stupidly superstitious or gullible. They were naturally skeptical, just like you and me. That's why they kept asking Jesus for signs from heaven. It is also why they did not continue believing in him after his explanation of the miracle of feeding the five thousand. They didn't like what he had to say. **Natural skepticism** was also the reason why Thomas would not believe unless he actually saw the risen Christ in person, and the reason the disciples did not initially believe the female witnesses of the risen Christ.

Reports of miracles were not being circulating daily in the streets of Judea and Galilee before the ministry of Christ; otherwise the man born blind would not have said, "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind." (Jn. 9:32 NASB) The Jews listening to this testimony did not contradict the man born blind with, "Oh, but we hear of miracles like this all the time! This is not new!"

**Secondly**, Jesus' purpose for signs to inspire belief is once again demonstrated here in one of the last signs just before his crucifixion. He prayed audibly to His Father so that those standing at the grave would **believe** that He was sent by the Father. Yet, also consistent with John's **apologetic** purpose, John demonstrates that even in the face of a confirmed miracle, there were those who did not believe.

Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, **believed in Him**.<sup>46</sup> **But** some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.<sup>47</sup> Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? **For this man is performing many signs**."<sup>48</sup> "If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (Jn. 11:45-48 NASB)

The word, "**But**" in v. 46 implies malicious intent on the part of those who report Lazarus' resurrection to the Pharisees. Otherwise, John would have used the word, "and" instead. By now it was widely known that most Pharisees were rejecting Jesus and that the common people who were believing in Him as the Christ were being **put out of the synagogues**. In vv. 47-48, the Pharisees admit that Jesus is performing prophetic signs which cannot be explained from natural causes, but they are not concerned with truth, only personal power and politics.

But the **chief priests** planned to put Lazarus to death also;<sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus. (Jn. 12:10-11 NASB)

They are so blind to the truth that they will eliminate the evidence to prevent losing their political and religious power over the masses. John uses this as part of his **apologetic**. The proof of Jesus' claims was irrefutable, but the lust for power blinded many leaders who later won over the masses to crucify Jesus.

Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the **chief priests** all that had happened.<sup>12</sup> And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers,<sup>13</sup> and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'<sup>14</sup> "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble."<sup>15</sup> And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and **this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day**. (Matt. 28:11-15 NASB)

And this story is **still believed**, and must be believed, by the millions of skeptics who believe that Jesus was an historical person who was executed. Many also believe that the women got confused about which tomb Jesus was buried in, but the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea was one of very few tombs of its kind, the tomb of a wealthy man carved out of a solid rock, easily identified by a large

stone rolled across the entrance. Another theory was that he was not really dead, begging the question of how Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea would not have noticed that Jesus was alive.

So, for twelve chapters we have traced John's purpose statement that "these [*signs*] have been written so that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God; and that **believing you may have life in His name**. (Jn. 20:31 NAU) This purpose can also be traced through the remaining chapters of John.

### End of Excursus of the Purpose of John's Gospel

Continuing with:

#### What is the Author's Purpose in writing the book?

In **Galatians**, we do not have an explicit statement of purpose, but the reader cannot miss the extreme emotion and urgency with which Paul makes his appeal to the Galatians. He is so urgent in his purpose that he cuts short his usual greetings to the churches and gets right to the point of his letter.

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; <sup>7</sup> which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:6-9 NASB)

The "gospel" which the Galatians are hearing from others is not the gospel Paul brought them, and whoever preaches another one (even if Paul himself) will be **accursed** (Greek, "anathema"—**placed apart from**; see Rom.9:3). In other words, Paul says "If another person, even me, comes to you preaching a gospel other than the one I have preached to you, let him go to hell." Strong words, especially from a preacher and missionary! But his purpose was urgent—to save the Galatians from the soul-damning heresy of salvation by works rather than salvation by grace through faith in Christ (see my *Galatians*).

His purpose was urgent—to save the Galatians from the soul-damning heresy of salvation by works rather than salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

We may trace this purpose throughout the book of Galatians.

- (1) Paul proves that his status as an apostle of Christ is equal to the status of the other eleven apostles. Therefore, the gospel **he** preached was the **only** gospel.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:11-12 NASB)

Just as the other eleven disciples had received the gospel directly from Christ during his ministry on earth, Paul received the gospel on the road to Damascus and afterward directly through special revelation from Christ after His ascension.

But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup> Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) (Gal. 1:15-20 NASB)

Fifteen days is not a sufficiently long enough time for Paul to be “tutored” in the gospel by Peter and James. Paul is intent to show that he did not **learn** his gospel from the other apostles, but from Christ alone.

Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. <sup>2</sup> It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. <sup>3</sup> But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. <sup>4</sup> But *it was* because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

It was important for Titus to come along with Paul as a test case. Titus was an uncircumcised Greek, not a Jew. If the other apostles did not **compel** Titus to be circumcised, it proved that they were in agreement with Paul that circumcision was not necessary.

<sup>5</sup> But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. <sup>6</sup> But from **those who were of high reputation** (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, **those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.** <sup>7</sup> But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised. <sup>8</sup> (for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his* apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Gal. 2:1-9 NASB)

The **right hand of fellowship** is offered to Paul by Peter, James, and John, the pillars of the church. They would only offer their support and fellowship if their understanding of the gospel agreed with Paul's. Yet, Paul had already been preaching this gospel of faith apart from works for **14 years** since his first, brief encounter with Peter lasting only 15 days. Paul did not go to Jerusalem to be corrected. He only went to inquire whether he and the other apostles were on the same page as far as the gospel was concerned.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? <sup>15</sup> "We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; <sup>16</sup> nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even **we** have believed in Christ Jesus, so that **we** may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (Gal. 2:11-16 NASB)

"For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.<sup>20</sup> "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.<sup>21</sup> "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." (Gal. 2:19-21 NASB)

If keeping the law (including circumcision) was the means of being accepted by God, then it was unnecessary for Christ to die since men could simply keep the Law to be saved. The confrontation with Peter, with witnesses present, proves that Paul was not inferior to the other apostles.

But although Paul died to the Law as the method of being accepted by God, he did not set the law aside as unimportant. This is evident from other statements in Galatians.

For you were called to freedom, brethren; **only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**<sup>14</sup> For the **whole Law** is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."<sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.<sup>17</sup> For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.<sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.<sup>19</sup> Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,<sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.<sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.<sup>25</sup> **If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**<sup>26</sup> Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:13-26 NASB)

In Chapter 3, Paul then begins another argument supporting his original purpose to expose salvation by works as a false gospel.

This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?<sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?<sup>4</sup> Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?<sup>5</sup> So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal. 3:2-5 NASB)

The Galatians had received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they believed in Christ, not when they were circumcised. They had begun the Christian life by the Spirit, not by being circumcised. Moreover, they would continue being perfected or sanctified by means of the indwelling of the Spirit, not by the flesh, i.e. the works of the flesh or human effort. In the same way, Abraham had begun his journey with God by faith, not by being circumcised.

Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.<sup>8</sup> The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."<sup>9</sup> So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal. 3:6-9 NASB)

### **Analogy of Faith:**

This is essentially the same argument Paul makes in Romans 4 for the doctrine of justification by faith apart from human works.

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.<sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Rom. 4:2-3 NASB)

How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;<sup>11</sup> and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, (Rom. 4:10-11 NASB)

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.<sup>14</sup> For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified... (Rom. 4:13-14 NASB)

## 1 and 2 Kings

Purpose statements are also implied in OT books. A *repetitive phrase* occurs in 1 and 2 Kings in reference to the wicked kings of Israel: "He did evil in the sight of the Lord" (1 Kings 15: 26, 34; 22: 52; 2 Kings 3: 2; 8: 18; 14: 24; etc.).

Now Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years.<sup>2</sup> He did evil in the sight of the LORD, though not like his father and his mother; for he put away the *sacred* pillar of Baal which his father had made. (2 Ki. 3:1-2 NASB)

He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD. (2 Ki. 8:17-18 NASB)

This phrase gives us a clue to the author's purpose; namely, to show the Jews in exile that the troubles brought upon them were due to the poor behavior of their kings and the willingness of the people to imitate them. When did this trouble began?

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites.<sup>6</sup> Solomon **did what was evil in the sight of the LORD**, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father *had done*. (1 Ki. 11:5-6 NASB)

Repetitive phrases can also be *thematic* statements. In his book, *Getting the Message*, Daniel Doriani says that the interpreter should look for "thematic statements that introduce or interpret an entire section." One good example of this is the phrase we find in the Book of Judges, **In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes** (Judges 17: 6). This same thematic statement is made at the very end of the book for heightened emphasis (21: 25), and also occurs in a shortened form in 18: 1 and 19: 1.

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. (Jdg. 17:6 NASB)

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Jdg. 21:25 NASB)

They are given to the reader as an explanation why there is so much lawlessness, violence, and immorality among the Israelites during the period of the Judges (Dorani, p.37). They had no godly leadership and were a law unto themselves.

## The Gospels

The word **kingdom** occurs 53 times in Matthew, 43 times in Luke, and 18 times in Mark, emphasizing the importance of the kingdom of God in the minds of these writers. John, on the other hand, uses **kingdom** only 3 times; yet, he emphasizes many **I am** passages indicating the divine identity of Jesus.

In the creation account in Genesis, the phrase **And God saw that it was good** is repeated many times until we come to the creation of man after which it is said, **And God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good**. Then, in the more detailed account of the creation of man, God says “It is **not** good for the man to be alone....” a phrase which should demand our attention in light of the fact that everything else was good or very good (Dorani, pp. 37-38).

### b. The reader must pay close attention to the ethical instruction of the writer.

We may determine the purpose of the author through the exhortations he is making to his audience. One way we can determine what these exhortations are is by noticing the word, **therefore** in the text. Whenever we see a **therefore**, we need to find out what it is “there for”.

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. (Rom. 12:1 NASB)

This verse is the beginning of the major portion of Paul’s exhortations or ethical instructions to the Romans and is based upon the doctrines of justification by faith and sanctification by faith found in chapters 1—11. Essentially, Paul is saying, “Therefore, in light of what I have been saying from the very beginning of this letter, this is what you must do.” Clearly, Paul is not interested in making arm-chair theologians in Rome who simply enjoy discussing theology for entertainment. His purpose is to inform them of the great doctrines of the faith so that the greatness of their salvation in Jesus Christ will produce holiness of life (sanctification).

At the sunset of Paul’s life, in his second letter to Timothy (his last letter) he says,

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.... (1:8-9).

Such an exhortation is a strong indication of his purpose in writing to Timothy, especially when considered along with other such exhortations (See 2:1-10; 4: 2; etc.).

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup> The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.<sup>3</sup> Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 2:1-3 NASB)

I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:<sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (2 Tim. 4:1-2 NASB)

Paul's purpose was to prepare Timothy, his personal disciple, for the difficult days ahead and to encourage him to keep on preaching the gospel no matter what the costs. From historical sources other than the Bible, we believe that Paul was beheaded by the Roman emperor Nero shortly after writing this letter. This belief heightens the drama and passion of this epistle as we read it. Richard Baxter, a famous preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century once said, "I preach as a dying man to dying men."

In Philippians 4:1-3 Paul gives another "therefore" followed by his exhortation to two prominent women in the church who were not getting along very well. The wonderful "kenosis" passage in 2: 5-11 must be understood in the light of this conflict (See also 2:12-13).

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. <sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of the gospel*, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Phil. 4:1-3 NASB)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup> do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:3-8 NASB)

Based upon what Paul has said about Christ setting aside his privileges and prerogatives as God, he urges two prominent women in the church to live in harmony. If Christ considered his people more important than his divine privileges, then we should treat each other as being more important than our prerogatives and privileges.

### c. We must pay attention to what is omitted and what receives the focus of the author.

A very interesting example of this is found in 1 Kings 16 and 2 Kings 14 in the stories of Kings Omri and Jeroboam II. To determine the omission, we have to gather some historical information from both biblical and extra-biblical (outside the Bible) sources about these two kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. In a very short length of time, Omri established important political and commercial relationships with other countries, including Tyre and Sidon, which gave Israel a sizable advantage in world-wide trade. In Assyrian texts written as many as 100 years after his death, the land of Israel is still called the land of Omri and the Israelite kings who followed him were known as the sons of Omri even if they came from a different dynasty. In other words, from a purely secular standpoint, Omri was one of the most influential, prosperous kings of Israel.

In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel *and reigned* twelve years; he reigned six years at Tirzah. <sup>24</sup> He bought the hill Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; and he built on the hill, and named the city which he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill. <sup>25</sup> Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, and acted more wickedly than all who *were* before him. (1 Ki. 16:23-25 NASB)

Likewise, Jeroboam II was also a powerful king during whose reign the far northern boundaries of Israel were extended as far as they had been under the reigns of David and Solomon. We learn this from 2 Kings 14: 25 but the writer does not highlight the significance of this achievement.



In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, *and reigned* forty-one years.<sup>24</sup> He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin.<sup>25</sup> He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher. (2 Ki. 14:23-25 NASB)

During his kingdom, the nation of Israel grew to new heights of wealth and prosperity, and people built splendid mansions, some of which have been excavated in modern times. The wealthy lived extravagant lifestyles which were condemned during the prophecy of Amos (Amos 1:1; 6: 4-6).

If Omri and Jeroboam II were living today, they would be praised in all the newspapers and magazines for their economic brilliance; and they would be respected for their military might. They would be the envy of many world leaders. However, man's report card is not the same thing as God's report card. As God told Samuel, men look at people and evaluate people by what they see on the outside; but God can see the heart, and His evaluation is not based on worldly achievements. When God's history book is written in the book of 1 Kings, this is what we read about all of Omri's achievements: "And Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, and acted more wickedly than all who were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel with their idols" (1Kings 16:25-26). Jeroboam II did not fare any better at the hands of the biblical writer who says of him, "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin" (2 Kings 14: 24). This is a terrible summary of a man's life-achievements, but it is all these great and powerful men received from the inspired historian.

Therefore, the negative assessment of both Omri and Jeroboam II, in spite of their earthly successes, is presented to us by the writer of Kings not only by what he *says* but by what he *does not* say. He emphasizes their spiritual failures and does not in any way draw attention to their wealth, power, and human achievements. As the famous statement goes, "Life will soon be past, and only that which is done for Christ will last."

During their concurrent life-times, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie had a combined wealth which was the modern-day equivalent of one trillion dollars (\$1,000,000,000,000), greater than the net worth of the 40 wealthiest people in the world today. Their business practices included something originating with J.P. Morgan and his father, Junius Morgan, called "morganization". This practice included laying off as many laborers as possible while at the same time increasing the hours and reducing the salaries of remaining workers in order to increase stock prices. The names of these three men are synonymous for success, and their achievements are celebrated by Wall Street and most people associated with business and investments. But I wonder what God thinks about their success?

## C. Parallel Statements and Concepts...

### 1. Parallels in different books by the same author.

As stated earlier, it is to our advantage that some NT epistles have been written by the same author. This gives us the ability to cross-reference parallel statements and concepts found in all of his writings. In Paul's writings, Ephesians and Colossians are twin epistles, and Galatians and Romans share some of the same concerns and concepts. Galatians and Colossians are both concerned with confronting legalism. Compare some of the following verses from Ephesians, Colossians, Galatians and Romans. The comparisons are not intended to be exhaustive.

<i>Ephesians</i>	<i>Colossians</i>
2: 11-16	1: 19-22; 2: 14
2: 1-2	2: 13
3: 10	2: 15
4: 22-32	3: 5-17
5: 22- 6: 9	3: 18-4: 1
6: 18-19	4: 2-4

<i>Romans</i>	<i>Galatians</i>
6: 1-11	2: 17-20
4: 14	2: 21
4: 13	3: 29
7: 1-6	3: 23-4: 5
8: 15-17	4: 4-7

<i>Galatians</i>	<i>Colossians</i>
4: 8-11	2: 16-23

<sup>12</sup> *remember* that you were at that time **separate** from Christ, **excluded** from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers** to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2: 12-13 NASB)

<sup>21</sup> And although you were **formerly alienated and hostile in mind**, *engaged* in evil deeds,<sup>22</sup> yet He has now **reconciled** you in His fleshly body through death, in order to **present you before Him** holy and blameless and beyond reproach— (Col. 1:21-22 NASB)

<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,<sup>15</sup> **by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances**, (Eph. 2:14-15a NASB)

having **canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us**, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col. 2:14 NASB)

And you were **dead in your trespasses and sins**,<sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Eph. 2:1-2 NASB)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we **were dead** in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), (Eph. 2:4-5 NASB)

When you **were dead** in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He **made you alive together with Him**, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (Col. 2:13 NASB)

so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to **the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places**. (Eph. 3:10 NASB)

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Col. 2:15 NASB)

### **Analogy of Faith: Disarming the rulers and authorities (Rev. 12).**

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;<sup>2</sup> and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.<sup>3</sup> Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads *were* seven diadems.

<sup>4</sup> And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.<sup>5</sup> And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.<sup>6</sup> Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.<sup>7</sup> **And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,**<sup>8</sup> **and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.**<sup>9</sup> And the great dragon was **thrown down**, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; **he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.**<sup>10</sup> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, **for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down**, he who accuses them before our God day and night."<sup>11</sup> "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death."<sup>12</sup> "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, **knowing that he has only a short time.**" (Rev. 12:1-12 NASB)

### Back to parallel phrases in Ephesians and Colossians:

...that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self** [*palaios anthropos*], which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,<sup>23</sup> and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,<sup>24</sup> **and put on the new self** [*kainos anthropos*], which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4: 22-24 NASB)

<sup>9</sup> **Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self** [*palaios anthropos*] **with its evil practices...**<sup>10</sup> **and have put on the new self** [*kainos anthropos*], who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—(Col. 3: 9-10)

Has the old self (old man) been put aside or not? Use the **analogy of faith** in Romans 6 to decide.

For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness of* His resurrection,<sup>6</sup> knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;<sup>7</sup> for he who has died is freed from sin. (Rom. 6:5-7 NASB)

According to the parallel, **he who has died** is the same person whose **old self...was crucified**. Paul is likening the crucifixion of the believer's **old self (old man)** with the crucifixion of Christ. Christ **was crucified**; He is not being crucified. Likewise, the believer **was crucified**. The old man he once was is now dead and buried. The new man has been resurrected to walk in newness of life. The analogy prevents us from believing that the believer is both old man and new man at the same time. The only way we can be **freed from sin** is to be **crucified**. **Freed from sin** does not mean sinless perfection; it means that we are **no longer...slaves to sin** (v. 6). Notice the parallelism in the verse.

<sup>6</sup>knowing this,  
that our old self  
**was crucified with Him,**

in order that

our body of sin

**might be done away with,**

so that

**we would no longer be slaves to sin;**

<sup>7</sup> for he

**who has died is freed from sin.** (Rom. 6:6-7 NASB)

<sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God

that though you were slaves of sin,

you became obedient from the heart

to that form of teaching

to which you were committed,

<sup>18</sup> and having been freed from sin,

you became slaves of righteousness. (Rom. 6:17-18 NASB)

### More parallels from Ephesians and Colossians

**Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth,** but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4: 29)

<sup>8</sup> But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, **and abusive speech from your mouth.** (Col. 3: 8)

<sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> **Be kind** to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving each other**, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Eph. 4:22-32 NASB)

<sup>12</sup> So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Col. 3: 12-13 NASB)

<sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart** to the Lord; <sup>20</sup> **always giving thanks** for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; (Eph. 5:19-20 NASB)

<sup>14</sup> Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. <sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; **and be thankful.** <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and **admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness** in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:5-16 NASB)

### Comparisons between Romans and Galatians.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (Rom. 6: 1-2)

"But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a **minister of sin**? May it never be! (Gal. 2:17)

<sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have **been baptized into His death**? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we **have been buried with Him** through baptism into

death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **so we too might walk in newness of life**. (Rom. 6: 1-4).

"For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.<sup>20</sup> "I have been crucified with Christ; and **it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me**; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:19-20 NASB)

Paul is not talking about living (Gal.) and **walking in newness of life** (Rom.) in heaven, but in the here and now. The resurrection to life he is speaking of in Romans 6 is not the future resurrection of the body in the consummation, but the present spiritual "resurrection" experience when we are **born again** (John 3). Paul is also not talking about justification or glorification. He is speaking of sanctification—becoming more like Christ in our moral behavior, freed from the dominion of sin.

But now having been **freed from sin** and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in **sanctification**, and the outcome, **eternal life**. (Rom. 6:22 NASB)

Notice that the result of **sanctification** is **eternal life**. This is not works-salvation, but an admission that faith without works is a dead faith that will not save anyone.

### Analogy of Faith: James 2

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? **Can that faith save him?**<sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,<sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?<sup>17</sup> **Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being by itself***.<sup>18</sup> But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."<sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.<sup>20</sup> But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (Jas. 2:14-20 NASB)

### More parallels from Romans and Galatians

For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is **nullified**; (Rom. 4:14 NASB)

"I do not **nullify** the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." (Gal. 2:21 NASB)

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, **heirs according to promise**. (Gal. 3:29 NASB)

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be **heir of the world** was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Rom. 4:13 NASB)

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a **spirit of adoption** as sons by which we cry out, "**Abba! Father!**"<sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are **children of God**,<sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. (Rom. 8:15-17 NASB)

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,<sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.  
<sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God has sent forth **the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**  
<sup>7</sup> Therefore you are no longer a slave, **but a son**; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal. 4:4-7 NASB)

## 2. Parallels within the same book.

Repeated words studied in their immediate context will illumine the author's meaning of these words. Unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary, a repeated word or phrase will have the same meaning throughout the book. For example what is the meaning of the **mystery** found in Eph. 1: 9; 3: 3; 3: 9; 5: 32; and 6: 19. The **mystery** remains a mystery to us until we examine the word in Eph. 3: 4-6 in which the mystery is explained as the entrance of Gentiles as fellow heirs on equal standing with Jews in the body of Christ.

He made known to us the **mystery** of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him (Eph. 1:9 NASB)

that by revelation there was made known to me the **mystery**, as I wrote before in brief. (Eph. 3:3 NASB)

By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the **mystery** of Christ,<sup>5</sup> which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;<sup>6</sup> *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Eph. 3:4-6 NASB)

It should also be noticed that the word **mystery** is closely associated with the words **made known, revealed, or revelation** (See 1: 9; 3: 3; 3: 5). The conclusion, then, is that the mystery of which Paul speaks is "not something 'mysterious' but rather a truth previously withheld but now revealed and proclaimed." (Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, pp. 106-107).

## 3. Parallels in books by different authors.

To be expected, there are many parallel statements found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and to a lesser extent, the Gospel of John. Jesus repeated Himself many times throughout the gospels simply because he traveled to many places in the land of Palestine (Mickelsen, p.106). The slightly different forms in which His statements occur do not indicate discrepancies or contradictions in the text, but the variety of ways which Jesus said essentially the same thing with different emphases. Alternatively, the differences may reflect the perspectives of the different authors who were guided by the Holy Spirit as they recalled the words of Jesus from memory. The differences and similarities are both helpful in establishing the meaning of His teaching. For example, in order for us to come to a well-rounded, informed position of what Jesus taught on divorce, we cannot simply study Matt. 5: 31-32 but also Matt. 19: 3-12; Luke 16: 18; and Mark 10: 2-12.

"It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';<sup>32</sup> but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, **makes her commit adultery**; and **whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery**. (Matt. 5:31-32)

He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.<sup>9</sup> "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matt. 19:8-9 NASB)

And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her;<sup>12</sup> and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." (Mk. 10:11-12 NASB)

All divorce is the result of sin, but divorce itself may be legitimate or illegitimate. The exceptional clause, **except for immorality**, is important as it applies not only to the divorce but to the remarriage. The adultery in Matt. 19 is committed when the man divorces his wife for reasons other than adultery and then marries another woman. In Matt. 5, the man divorcing his wife for reasons other than unchastity presents the occasion for his divorced wife to commit adultery when she remarries. Her new husband also commits adultery by marrying a woman divorced for reasons other than adultery.

The Pharisees were trying to determine where Jesus stood on the controversy between two current rabbinical schools of thought concerning divorce: (1) the Shemei school who believed that divorce was only permissible in the case of adultery, and (2) the Hillel school, the liberal school who interpreted Deut. 24 as a license to divorce one's wife for any reason whatever.

It is clear that Jesus' view was that between two covenant members, the context of Deut. 24, divorce was only permissible in the case of adultery or some other form of sexual immorality [*porneia*].

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife,<sup>3</sup> and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife,<sup>4</sup> then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. (Deut. 24:2-4 NASB)

Jesus was not attempting to be exhaustive in his teaching concerning divorce. In Matt. 19, he is simply answering the question of the Pharisees as to why Moses permitted divorce. Moses permitted it because of **the hardness of men's hearts**. By the provisions of the law requiring their husbands to give the divorced wives a writ of divorce, the divorced wives were free to remarry. By allowing divorce, God relieved women of the burdensome obligation of remaining with husbands who despised them. The former husband was not allowed to take his former wife back if she had been remarried.

This requirement had the effect of limiting divorce. Husbands should be deliberate in their decision to divorce their wives. If they do so for any frivolous reason whatever, and if the wife remarries, there is no getting her back even if he finds out that he made the wrong decision. In Assyrian culture, men were allowed to reclaim their divorced wives for up to five years even if they had been remarried, along with the children born to another man. The certificate of divorce in Israel prevented such an abusive practice.

And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman **commits adultery against her**;<sup>12</sup> and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." (Mk. 10:11-12 NASB)

Here in Mark, we have yet another nuance of meaning. Mark is writing for **Gentiles**, and in Gentile culture, women were permitted to divorce their husbands. In the first part of the verse, Mark repeats what we find in Matthew 5 and 19 without the exceptional clause, “except for adultery”. But he adds the part about a woman divorcing her husband. If a woman divorces her husband for reasons other than adultery, and marries another man, she also commits adultery. The **context** of Mark 10 is the same as Matt. 19, the Pharisee’s question about the Mosaic Law concerning divorce between **believers**.

Mark does not include the exceptional clause, “except for the cause of adultery” that we find in Matthew 19 and 5. Therefore, we must compare Mark with Matthew’s gospel to get more detailed information lest we conclude that Jesus was **forbidding divorce** for any reasons whatever, the mistaken position of many Christians today.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul deals with another marriage issue that Jesus did not address in any of the gospels. Again, He was simply answering the Pharisee’s question concerning Moses legislation concerning Israelites, covenant marriages.

But to **the married** I give instructions, **not I, but the Lord**, that the wife should not leave her husband<sup>11</sup> (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.<sup>12</sup> But to **the rest** I say, **not the Lord**, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.<sup>13</sup> And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.<sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are **unclean**, but now they are **holy**.<sup>15</sup> Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.<sup>16</sup> For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?<sup>17</sup> Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And **so I direct** in all the churches. (1 Cor. 7:10-17 NASB)

Paul was not distinguishing between the inspired teaching of Jesus and his uninspired teaching. Paul knew that his teaching was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.” (1 Cor. 14:37 NASB)

Rather, Paul differentiates between the Jesus’ teaching about **married** believers found in the gospels and his own inspired teaching concerning believers married to unbelievers.

“**The rest**” in 1 Cor. 7: 12 is distinguished from “**the married**” in v. 10. The Lord Jesus had already informed the covenant community of believers that immorality was the only grounds for divorce; but he had not said anything about divorce between a believer and an unbeliever. Many in Corinth were already married when they became Christians. The question arose about their relationship to unbelieving spouses. Should they dissolve such marriages?

In 1 Cor. 7, Paul makes clear that if an unbelieving spouse wishes to remain with a believer, the believer should not send him or her away. Through the believing spouse, the children of such a union are **sanctified**, that is, they are **set apart** [the root meaning of **sanctified**] for a special relationship to the Lord in which they are receiving spiritual nurture and training from the believing spouse. They are therefore, **holy**. The unbelieving husband or wife, likewise, is set apart or



sanctified for the special privileges of being exposed to the gospel and its benevolent effects upon his life. This does not mean that he is saved by being married to a Christian.

However, what if the unbelieving spouse does not wish to remain in a marriage with a believer? The normal resources afforded a believing marriage are not in effect: namely, the Scriptures, the church, believing friends of the family, the desire to please the Lord in one's decision. In those cases, the believer should not hang on to the marriage at all costs. The unbeliever may leave the marriage for any reason, and the believer is free to remarry, but **only in the Lord** (1 Cor. 7: 39).

<sup>15</sup> Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. (1 Cor. 7:15 NASB)

All the verses on divorce have been presented to illustrate the importance of paying attention to parallel passages. We must not develop our theological and ethical beliefs on one verse of Scripture to the exclusion of other Scriptures which fill out our understanding of what the Bible really teaches. For example, many Christians believe that adultery is the only grounds for divorce based upon Matt. 19: 9. But this is only part of a complicated picture that must take many things into consideration.

**The Sermon on the Mount** found in Matt. 5—7 should be compared to the shortened account in Luke 6: 20-49.

For years, Dispensationalist theologians made a distinction between the **kingdom of heaven** in Matthew and the **kingdom of God** in Luke and Mark. The **kingdom of God**, in their hermeneutical system, referred to the universal reign of God, including the angelic hosts, while the **kingdom of heaven** referred to the future Messianic reign of Christ on earth during His millennial kingdom. Most interpreters readily see these phrases as parallel terms meaning the same thing. For example, it would be difficult to come up with different meanings for the terms from Luke 13: 18-21 and Matt. 13: 31-33.

So He was saying, "What is **the kingdom of God** like, and to what shall I compare it?" <sup>19</sup> "It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and THE BIRDS OF THE AIR NESTED IN ITS BRANCHES." <sup>20</sup> And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?" <sup>21</sup> "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." (Lk. 13:18-21 NASB)

He presented another parable to them, saying, "**The kingdom of heaven** is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup> and this is smaller than all *other* seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES." <sup>33</sup> He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." (Matt. 13:31-33 NASB)

Besides this, the expressions **kingdom of God** and **kingdom of heaven** both occur in Matthew's gospel (Matt. 12: 29; 13: 44-47; Matt. 18: 1-4; Matt. 19: 24; Matt. 21: 31).

"Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter **the kingdom of God**." (Matt. 19:24 NASB)

"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' <sup>29</sup> "And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. <sup>30</sup> "The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I *will* , sir'; but he did not go. <sup>31</sup> "Which

of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into **the kingdom of God** before you. (Matt. 21:28-31 NASB)

<sup>27</sup> "If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? For this reason they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup> "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then **the kingdom of God** has come upon you. <sup>29</sup> "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong *man*? And then he will plunder his house. (Matt. 12:22-29 NASB)

Are we to suppose that Jesus would confuse His audience by using the different terms in two different ways with no explanation given for the difference? Due to criticisms to this approach, many Dispensationalists no longer make this distinction.

A harmony of the gospels, in which the parallel passages of all four gospels are placed side by side with each other, is very helpful in interpreting the meaning of these passages. Often, by giving us similar accounts with slightly different wording, the Holy Spirit maximizes the teaching of a single passage with different emphases.

"Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3 NASB)

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He *began* to say, "Blessed *are you who are poor*, for yours is the kingdom of God. (Lk. 6:20 NASB)

Luke, more than the other synoptist, aimed his gospel at the poor, the socially marginalized, and women. What he meant in 6: 20 was not that poverty made one eligible to inherit the kingdom of God, but that the poor were not disqualified from entering the kingdom simply because they were poor. This important truth was not generally recognized by a society that looked upon poor people as cursed.

The Gospel of Luke, when compared with the other gospel accounts, appears to highlight the importance of the gospel being offered to the poor. The sacrifice associated with purification given by Joseph and Mary for Jesus in Luke 2: 22-24 was a sacrifice appropriate for poor people.

And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD "), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." (Lk. 2:22-24 NASB)

From Leviticus.

'When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. <sup>7</sup> 'Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears *a child*, *whether* a male or a female. <sup>8</sup> '**But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons**, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.'" (Lev. 12:6-8 NASB)

Jesus' mission is presented in Luke as the fulfillment of the **Day of Jubilee** which included the preaching of the gospel to the poor, the release of slaves who had become slaves because of their poverty, and the liberation of those who were oppressed.

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,<sup>18</sup> "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. <sup>18</sup>HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, <sup>19</sup> TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."<sup>20</sup> And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.<sup>21</sup> And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:17-21 NASB)

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."<sup>20</sup> "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"<sup>21</sup> And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth."<sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; **sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor**, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."<sup>23</sup> But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.<sup>24</sup> And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are **wealthy** to enter the kingdom of God!<sup>25</sup> "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>26</sup> They who heard it said, **"Then who can be saved?"**<sup>27</sup> But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God." (Lk. 18:18-27 NASB)

In Jesus' day, and even today, the common theology was that people with power, wealth, and privilege were undeniably the recipients of God's favor. This theology was also common in Job's day whose three friends were convinced he had done something grievously wrong or else God would not have taken away his health, wealth, and social status. Everyone who heard Jesus say this were surprised, and they expressed this astonishment by asking, **"Then who can be saved?"** In other words, if it is almost impossible for the rich—whom God obviously favors (?)—to enter heaven, where does that leave the rest of us? The belief that God favored the rich was so widespread that all three Synoptic gospels include this story with the same question from the disciples, **"Then who can be saved?"**

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus the poor man; the healing of the ten leprosy men (who by virtue of their sickness were poor); the story of Zaccheus who agreed to give half his possessions to the poor, and the story of the rich fool, are found only in Luke. Spiros Zodhiates, executive editor of the *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* says in his introduction to the Gospel of Luke, "Special emphasis is placed upon the kindness of Jesus toward women, the poor, the outcasts, the weak, and those who were suffering in different ways." Luke, understanding God's purpose, wishes the poor to know that the gospel is equally offered to the poor who will be "blessed" if they receive it, regardless of physical poverty.

By studying both the Matthew and Luke passages together, the fuller meaning of Jesus' words emerges. From Matthew—**blessed are the poor in spirit**—we understand Jesus' emphasis upon the recognition of our spiritual poverty in order to be blessed with the kingdom of heaven (or the kingdom of God). The kingdom belongs not to the proud and self-sufficient, not to the one who believes that he is a good person who deserves the kingdom. Rather, the kingdom belongs to the person who recognizes that in himself there is nothing good, and that nothing he has done in life is deserving of the blessing of God. This difference in people and attitudes is amply illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector in Luke 18: 9-14, in which the Pharisee attempts to establish his reputation and merit before God, but the tax-collector disclaims any merit at all, but humbly begs for mercy. Jesus tells us that the tax-collector went to his house a forgiven man, while the Pharisee went home unforgiven.

And He also told this parable **to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:** <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, **I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.** <sup>12</sup> 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' <sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, '**God, be merciful to me, the sinner!**' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk. 18:9-14 NASB)

The above discussion is an extended illustration both of the importance of parallels in gospel accounts and how the inclusion of some stories, sayings, etc. in some gospel accounts and not others will provide us with clues to interpreting their general purpose. A harmony is helpful in this regard, but also exhaustive concordances and the marginal notes found in study Bibles. These are just a few of the parallels found in the gospels. Others include the following which are listed in Mickelsen (p.109) along with my own interpretive comments.

#### a. The Centurion's Servant—Matthew 8: 5-13 and Luke 7: 1-10.

<sup>5</sup>And when Jesus entered Capernaum, **a centurion came to Him**, imploring Him, <sup>6</sup> and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." <sup>8</sup> **But the centurion said**, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed." <sup>9</sup> "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does *it*." <sup>10</sup> Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. <sup>11</sup> "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; <sup>12</sup> but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." <sup>13</sup> And Jesus said **to the centurion**, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that *very* moment. (Matt. 8:5-13 NASB)

<sup>1</sup>When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. <sup>3</sup> When he heard about Jesus, **he sent some Jewish elders** asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; <sup>5</sup> for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue." <sup>6</sup> Now Jesus *started* on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, **the centurion sent friends**, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; <sup>7</sup> for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed." <sup>8</sup> "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." <sup>9</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." <sup>10</sup> When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. (Lk. 7:1-10 NASB)

In this parallel, Matthew's account indicates that the centurion came in person to plea for the life of his servant, while Luke's account says that the centurion sent some sympathetic Jewish elders to plead for him. There is no contradiction in the two accounts. For the centurion to use Jewish mediators between himself and Jesus is the same as pleading with Jesus in person. He shows his humility by saying that he is not worthy to be in Jesus' presence (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 395). Another possibility is that the centurion had a change of mind and overcame his initial hesitation and came after the elders contacted Jesus (Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 220). Rather than a contradiction,

we have a more detailed account of what happened by consulting both Matthew and Luke, which is what the Holy Spirit intended for us to have.

### **b. The Transfiguration—Matthew 17: 1-13, Mark 9: 2-13; and Luke 9: 28-36.**

**Six days later** Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.<sup>2</sup> And He was **transfigured** before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.<sup>3</sup> And behold, **Moses and Elijah** appeared to them, talking with Him.<sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "**This is My beloved Son**, with whom I am well-pleased; **listen to Him!**"<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard *this*, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.<sup>7</sup> And Jesus came to *them* and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid."<sup>8</sup> And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.<sup>9</sup> **As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."**<sup>10</sup> And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"<sup>11</sup> And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things;<sup>12</sup> but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."<sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist. (Matt. 17:1-13 NASB)

**Six days later**, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was **transfigured** before them;<sup>3</sup> and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them.<sup>4</sup> **Elijah appeared to them along with Moses**; and they were talking with Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."<sup>6</sup> For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified.<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "**This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!**"<sup>8</sup> All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.<sup>9</sup> **As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.**<sup>10</sup> They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.<sup>11</sup> They asked Him, saying, "*Why is it* that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"<sup>12</sup> And He said to them, "Elijah does first come and restore all things. And *yet* how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"<sup>13</sup> "But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him." (Mk. 9:2-13 NASB)

Some **eight days after these sayings**, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.<sup>29</sup> And while He was praying, **the appearance of His face became different**, and His clothing *became white and gleaming*.<sup>30</sup> And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were **Moses and Elijah**,<sup>31</sup> who, appearing in glory, **were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem**.<sup>32</sup> Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him.<sup>33</sup> And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not realizing what he was saying.<sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud formed and *began* to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.<sup>35</sup> Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "**This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!**"<sup>36</sup> And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen. (Lk. 9:28-36 NAU)

In all three accounts, Jesus is transfigured before Peter, John, and James—Jesus' inner circle of disciples. Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah. However, only Luke tells us *what* they are talking about: "His departure which He was about to accomplish" (Luke 9: 31), that is, the events of His crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. Furthermore, all three accounts record different words being said by God the Father (Compare Luke 9: 35 with Mark 9: 7 and Matt. 17:

5). Only Matthew and Mark record Jesus' instructions to the disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen until the resurrection. All three accounts tell the disciples to "listen to Him," indicating His superiority over Moses and Elijah who were representatives of the Law and the Prophets which Jesus came to fulfill. By the very fact that this event is recorded in three gospels is evidence of the extreme importance of the transfiguration. Whenever we find something only once in the Bible, it is important because it is God's word; but when we find the same thing three times, its importance is highlighted.

***c. The Feeding of the Five Thousand—Matthew 14: 13-21; Mark 6: 31-44; Luke 9: 12-17; and John 6: 1-14).***

There are many differences in the four gospels in the recording of this event which may be pieced together to get a fuller understanding of what happened. Only John gives us the theological significance of this event by recording Jesus' discourse on being the bread of life (John 6).

So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?"<sup>31</sup> "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'"<sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven."<sup>33</sup> "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."<sup>34</sup> Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. (Jn. 6:30-35 NASB)

The manna in the wilderness was a type of the bread out of heaven, which is Jesus the bread of life sent from God. This additional detail fits into John's purpose of presenting Jesus as the only begotten (i.e. eternally begotten) son of God.

***D. Historical-Cultural Context***

Thus far, we have only studied the *literary context* of the Bible which Doriani defines in the following way: "Literary context is the words, sentences, paragraphs, or chapters that surround and relate to a text." He goes on to say that the study of the literary context does not depend on our knowledge of the writer (as a person) or the times in which he wrote or an understanding of the culture and concerns of the original audience (*Getting the Message*, p.31). This does not imply that we may ignore the Biblical statements which identify the author or the audience which would be part of the literary context.

Doriani defines the historical context as "the culture, customs, languages, beliefs, and history of the author and his original audience." The historical context shows "how a portion of the Bible fits into its world," and "allows readers to overcome the feeling that the text belongs to another time or culture and allows them to enter the world of the original speakers, writers, and readers" (*Getting the Message*, p. 31). To risk the danger of oversimplification, while literary context can be obtained from a careful reading of the text, much of the historical-cultural context must be obtained from extra-biblical sources. This is not absolutely the case since much of the history and culture can be gleaned from the text themselves (See the examples below). Nevertheless, other passages can only be illumined through the study of other sources such as good commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, etc.

Virkler gives us three key factors which should be determined in establishing the historical-cultural context (*Hermeneutics*, pp. 79-81).

### ***1. The general historical situation of the writer and his audience***

Under this heading, the economic, political, and social setting of the writer and his audience come into view. For an example of this principle, let's examine the prophecy of Amos. During his prophecy, Jeroboam II was king of the northern kingdom of Israel (Amos 1: 1). We have already mentioned the political and military success of this king (see above). In his book *Old Testament Bible History*, Alfred Edersheim tells us that "Jeroboam II was certainly the most warlike king and the most successful administrator of all who occupied the throne of Israel" (Vol. VII, p. 64). His reign was one of the longest in the history of Israel and was characterized by great wealth and prosperity. It was also characterized by wide-spread oppression of the poor (Amos 2:6-8; 3: 15; 4: 1; 6: 4-6).

Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its *punishment*, Because they sell the righteous for money And the needy for a pair of sandals.<sup>7</sup> "These who pant after the *very* dust of the earth on the head of the helpless Also turn aside the way of the humble; And a man and his father resort to the same girl In order to profane My holy name.<sup>8</sup> "On garments taken as pledges they stretch out beside every altar, And in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. (Amos 2:6-8 NASB)

"I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house; The houses of ivory will also perish And the great houses will come to an end," Declares the LORD. (Amos 3:15 NASB)

Those who recline on beds of ivory And sprawl on their couches, And eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall,<sup>5</sup> Who improvise to the sound of the harp, *And* like David have composed songs for themselves,<sup>6</sup> Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. (Amos 6:4-6 NASB)

As indicated in the texts, the rich had extravagant homes for every season, winter homes and summer homes. Their beds were made of ivory (imported from Africa) and they feasted extravagantly and wastefully from the young, half-grown animals of their herds while the poor went hungry. They used the garments of the poor (taken unlawfully as pledges for loans; see Ex. 22: 25-27) as blankets to lie upon as they engaged in the syncretistic (mixed) worship of God and Baal (C. F. Keil, *Hosea*, pp. 58-59, 63). (It is quite possible that the connection between Amos 2: 7 and 2: 8 indicates that these garments were being used as blankets to engage in sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes, a practice common in the worship of Baal. (Keil does not accept this possibility. See C. F. Keil, *Amos*, pp. 253-254).

Religiously, Israel was in terrible decline and the worship of Baal either had been restored from the days of King Ahab (1 Kings 18), or was seriously confused with the worship of Yahweh so that what the Israelites passed off as the true worship of Yahweh was actually the worship of Baal (Amos 2: 8; 4: 4; Hosea 2: 13, 17; Hosea 1: 1, which indicates that Hosea was also written during the reign of Jeroboam II).

Politically, the days of Jeroboam II matched the economic success of the nation. Syria, Israel's arch-enemy, had been defeated and Israel had no one to fear on any side. Its borders had been expanded outward to the same territorial boundaries enjoyed during the kingdoms of David and Solomon. One might say that when Amos began to prophesy, the economic and political elites in Israel were sitting on top of the world. Spiritually, Israel was a slum.

This political, economic, religious, and social situation must be understood in order to interpret the prophecy of Amos. Furthermore, we should take note of the biographical information about Amos himself. This man was not the well-educated Isaiah who prophesied in the palace courts (Isaiah

38—39), but a simple shepherd and fig-grower who did not have direct access to the king (Amos 7: 10, 14-15). This gives us the picture of the drama unfolding in the prophecy in Amos. We behold a simple shepherd-farmer confronting one of the most powerful kings in the history of Israel during a time of prosperity never surpassed with a message that God would “rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword” (7: 9b). Based on the political and economic situation described above, his message was hardly believable. Was it not more believable that God had blessed Israel on every side and that even better and more prosperous days lay ahead?

In the days before the Great Depression in the United States in the 1930’s, there was a very popular song among the economic elite, particularly the new rich class which had recently acquired their riches from stock market investments (as it turned out, overpriced ones). The lyrics of this song went something like this: “Blue skies, falling on me, nothing but blue skies do I see.” In other words, there was no “rain” of ruin and calamity in the economic forecast for these wealthy stock market entrepreneurs (businessmen). They believed their fortunes would last forever. But their hopes and dreams were ill-founded since the stock market crashed and literally thousands of people (rich and middleclass) lost their riches, life savings, and their dreams. Men who became wealthy quickly from an over-priced equity market had become poor in a few days. They were seen jumping from their high-rise offices.

As it turns out, Amos was not just “blowing smoke” with idle threats of doom and gloom, but telling the sober truth. Not too long after Amos’ prophecy, the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria, and the Israelites were exiled into strange lands, never again to sleep on beds of ivory or eat lambs from the flock. Not only were their winter homes gone, but their summer homes as well. They were now homeless and without a country of their own, led along single file attached to one another with fishing hooks pierced through their lips. They had forgotten a very important principle of wealth: Wealth is a gift of God to be used for His glory. He has the right to give it, and He has the right to take it away.

As we have seen from this example of historical-cultural analysis of the context, much of the historical situation can be reconstructed *from the texts of Scripture themselves*. The reader must examine the text carefully for little clues which will help him understand the situation going on at the time of the writer. For example, references to eating lambs from the flocks, sleeping on beds of ivory, and the timing of the prophecy during the reign of a certain king, are all important clues. Other non-biblical references like OT introductions or Edersheim’s *Old Testament Biblical History* will also help us tremendously.

## ***2. The knowledge of cultural practices or customs which govern certain actions.***

One example of this is found in Mark 7 in which Jesus criticizes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. By declaring their material resources “corban,” they avoided the responsibility of helping their parents in old age, thus violating the fifth commandment to honor father and mother. In the practice of corban, they declared all their money given to the temple treasury on the event of their death, thus deceitfully sheltering their money from the needs of aging parents. In this way, the money would be there for their own selfish interests until they died (Virkler, p.79).

Virkler brings up another interesting example by citing Jesus’ instructions to his disciples in Mark 14: 12-14. He told them that they would meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Carrying water was ordinarily done by women, and this would be a secret signal to the disciples without the use of words. Another possible interpretation is that given by William Lane (*Mark*, p.499) who says that only women carried water in jars while it was common for men to carry it in wineskins. Either way, secrecy was important since the Jewish leaders had already put out orders for Jesus’ arrest



(John 11: 57). It goes without saying that information of this sort may not be available from the Bible itself, but must be gathered from other sources like Alfred Edersheim's *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* or G. Earnest Wright's *Great People of the Bible and How They Lived* (Virker, *Hermeneutics*, p. 80, footnote).

We have already noted that the Pharisees disapproved of Jesus eating with sinners (Luke 15: 2). Why was this so? The social custom of the day indicated that sitting down to eat with someone was a sign of acceptance of that person and an intimate relationship with him. The religious custom of the day also did not allow a religious leader to socialize with regular people who had little education (*Getting the Message*, p.45).

**Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey** just before His crucifixion. Horses were used for war, and Jesus wanted all to know that He was coming in peace. His message, well-understood by the culture, was clear. Lay down your weapons and surrender to my Lordship. The kingdom of God is here. They refused and were destroyed in the Wars of the Jews between 66 and 70 AD.

Jesus' instructions in the **Sermon on the Mount** (Matt. 5: 40) to allow someone to take your cloak as well as your shirt do not seem to be such radical demands until we understand that the average person in Palestine at this time owned less than ten garments (*Getting the Message*, p.46). Furthermore, the cloak was the outer garment which was used by the very poor to keep warm at night (Ex. 22: 26-27).

**The Babylonian siege against Jerusalem** during the reign of King Zedekiah lasted about eighteen months (2 Kings 25: 1-2). Why didn't the superior force of the Babylonians just go in and take it? Why did they wait so long? This remains a mystery unless we know something about the topography of Jerusalem. It was a heavily fortified city built on a small mountain making it difficult to attack. It also had its own water source which enabled the city to wait out a prolonged siege. Rather than attacking a fresh army uphill, the Babylonians decided to delay the attack until Jerusalem was sufficiently weakened with hunger. Famine could become so acute during a prolonged siege that cannibalism occurred in Jerusalem as it did much earlier in Samaria (2 Kings 6: 24-30).

In **the parable of the friend at midnight** (Lk. 11: 5-8), it would be helpful to know something about the typical rural house in Israel at that time. It consisted of one room which served as living room, dining room and bedroom. When night came, the mats were brought out and arranged in a row on the floor. Therefore, when the friend came asking for bread at midnight, the audience listening to the parable understood the reluctance of the head of household who did not wish to get up, stumble over his wife and children, and light the lamps and wake everyone up just to get bread. At the same time, the man knew it would be culturally unacceptable to refuse the request of a neighbor. The reader can see from the context that Jesus told this parable as an illustration of the need for persistence in prayer.

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."<sup>2</sup> And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.'<sup>3</sup> 'Give us each day our daily bread.<sup>4</sup> 'And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"<sup>5</sup> Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves;<sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him';<sup>7</sup> and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you *anything*.'<sup>8</sup> "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Lk. 11:1-8 NASB)

**In Matthew 7: 9**, “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?” it is helpful to know that the size of a typical loaf of bread in Palestine was about the size of a large stone.

### 3. *The spiritual condition of the audience*

Consider the audience of the book of Hebrews. Why do we find so many warnings and exhortations in this book (Hebrews 3: 7-19; 4: 1, 7; 5: 11-14; 6: 4-8; 12: 1-13)?

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,<sup>8</sup> DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,<sup>9</sup> WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.<sup>10</sup> "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS';<sup>11</sup> AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'" <sup>12</sup> Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (Heb. 3:7-12 NASB)

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. (Heb. 4:1 NASB)

Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.<sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.<sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb. 5:11-14 NASB)

The answer lies in the fact that many of these Hebrews who had professed faith in Christ were in danger of drifting back into the OT shadows, thus minimizing Christ and the new covenant. Evidence of this fact is found in Hebrews 1—2; 3; and 7 in which the writer demonstrates the superiority of Christ to angels, Moses, and Aaron respectively (in that order). These Hebrews had made a good start, and many of them had suffered greatly for their faith; but they had need of endurance so they would not throw away the riches of the gospel entrusted to them (10: 32-36; 6: 10-12; 12: 14-24).

Their suffering provides the context for chapter 11, which is devoted to the task of illustrating one important principle: the reward of faith is not given in full measure in this life. Even the greatest saints who ever lived, men and women who were giants of the faith, endured suffering and sacrifice until the end of their lives without receiving the ultimate reward for their faith, the promised Messiah and the glory of the New Covenant. In the words of John Calvin, “A tiny spark of light led them to heaven, but now that the Sun of righteousness shines on us what excuse shall we offer if we still cling to the earth?” (Quoted in Philip E. Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 516)

In the same sense, but to a different degree, **the present age** is a day of delayed rewards. It is true that we live in the reality of the full salvation which we have in Jesus Christ and the blessings of the new covenant (the subject of the book of Hebrews), but we still do not have our glorified bodies, and the earth still lies under the futile effects of man’s sin (Rom. 8: 18-25). One day in the future these unfulfilled promises will also be reality; but until then, we must endure the suffering which will inevitably come to those who belong to Jesus Christ (See Hughes, *Hebrews*, p.517).

In making this evaluation of the spiritual condition of the audience the reader should be alert for “pointed questions and objections, sharp rebukes, and terms of endearment” (Doriani, *Getting the Message*, p.50). This is evident in our evaluation of Hebrews above. By examining 1 and 2 Corinthians, we can also safely conclude that Paul’s relationship with this church was strained because of internal factions, immorality, disunity, challenges to his apostleship, etc. (See above in the following passages: 1 Cor. 3: 1-4; 1 Cor. 5; 6: 1-11; 1 Cor. 10: 12; 1 Cor. 11: 22; 1 Cor. 16: 22; 2 Cor. 13: 1-3; etc.)

Paul’s urgency is easily detected in the epistle to the Galatians who were headed toward outright apostasy (Gal. 1: 6-9; 6: 17). On the other hand, Paul could be tender when the circumstances allowed (2 Cor. 7; Phil. 4: 1-7, 10-23; Philemon).

### Lesson Three Questions

1. Why is it helpful to know the author of the book we are studying?
2. Is it absolutely necessary to identify the author of a book of Scripture? Explain.
3. How is it helpful to identify the audience of a book? Give one example.
4. Give examples of explicit purpose statements or thematic statements indicating the purpose for which a book is written.
5. What does the word, “therefore” often indicate? Give an example.
6. Is there a difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven? Explain your answer using hermeneutical principles.
7. What accounts for the difference in Matthew 5: 3 and Lk. 6: 20?
8. Based upon the repetition of a certain word, what seems to be Paul’s purpose in writing Ephesians?
9. Based upon the repetitions found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the different repetitions found in the gospel of John, what would you say is the emphasis in the synoptics and John?
10. Why is it crucially important to compare the different synoptic accounts of Jesus’ teaching on divorce?
11. What do we learn by comparing the different accounts of the transfiguration in Matthew 17: 1-13, Mark 9: 2-13; and Luke 9: 28-36?
12. How does John 6 shed light on the significance of the feeding of 5000?
13. What do the warnings in Hebrews tell us? (cf. Hebrews 3: 7-19; 4: 1, 7; 5: 11-14; 6: 4-8; 12: 1-13). What hermeneutical principle is involved?

## ***Lesson Four***

### ***III. Special Literary Methods***

Thus far, we have been talking about general principles of hermeneutics. We will now discuss special literary methods which are commonly used by the writers of the Bible.

#### ***A. Parallelisms***

Parallelisms are not the same as parallel statements or concepts found in the writings of the same author or in the gospels, etc. Parallel statements or concepts have more to do with the context. Similar statements made by Paul in Ephesians and Colossians must be considered within the context of the author's writings. Similar thoughts and sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ reported in different gospels must be considered together to determine the full scope of their meaning. ***Parallelisms*** are a peculiar literary technique common to Biblical writers. There are three types.

##### ***1. Synonymous parallelism***

This occurs when different lines of a passage present the same thought as the next line in a slightly different way. For example, Ps. 46: 1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The two statements in this verse say basically the same thing in slightly different ways. Other examples of synonymous parallelism are Ps. 22: 27; Ps. 38: 1; 19: 1; 34: 13 and 49: 1; but the Psalms are literally filled with examples of synonymous parallelism. The Proverbs are the same way. Some examples are Prov. 11: 25; 19: 5; 17: 25; and 3: 9, but again, this type of parallelism is characteristic of the Proverbs and are found throughout.

A Psalm of David, for a memorial.

O LORD,  
rebuke me not A  
*in Your wrath,* B  
 And chasten me not A  
*in Your burning anger.* B  
 (Ps. 38:1 NASB)

A false witness A  
 will not go unpunished, B  
 And he who tells lies A  
 will not escape. B  
 (Prov. 19:5 NAU)

For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

The heavens are telling A  
*of the glory of God;* B  
 And their expanse is declaring A  
*the work of His hands.* B  
<sup>2</sup> **Day to day** C  
 pours forth speech, D  
 And **night to night** C  
 reveals knowledge. D  
 (Ps. 19:1-2 NASB)

The generous man A  
will be prosperous, B  
 And he who waters A  
will himself be watered. B  
 (Prov. 11:25 NAU)

Tremper Longman advocates a different approach to reading the parallelisms. Instead of merely seeing the same idea repeated in two different ways, he suggests that there is progression of thought with the second statement: “A, what’s more B” (*How to Read the Psalms*, p. 97-98). According to this view, the second statement always carries forward the thought found in the first statement. In Psalms 6: 1, the chastening in the second statement goes beyond the rebuke in the first statement. Rebuke has to do with words while chastening has to do with actions and is a more serious matter. In the same way, the healing in 6:2 carries the thought a step beyond the graciousness he pleads for in the first statement.

O LORD,  
 do not rebuke me in Your anger,  
 Nor chasten me in Your wrath.  
<sup>2</sup> Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I *am* pining away;  
 Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are dismayed. (Ps. 6:1-2 NASB)

As we read Ps. 2, the “A, what’s more B” approach seems to capture the natural progression which is implied in man’s rebellion.

Why are the nations in an uproar	A		
And the peoples devising a vain thing?		What’s more, B	
<sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand	A		
And the rulers take counsel together		What’s more, B	
Against the LORD			C
and against His Anointed, saying,		What’s more,	D
<sup>3</sup> "Let us tear their fetters apart	A		
And cast away their cords from us!"		What’s more, B	
<sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs,	A		
The Lord scoffs at them.		What’s more, B	
<sup>5</sup> Then He will speak to them in His anger	A		
And terrify them in His fury, saying,		What’s more, B	
<sup>6</sup> "But as for Me, I have installed My King			
Upon Zion, My holy mountain."			
<sup>7</sup> "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:			
He said to Me,			
'You are My Son,	A		

Today I have begotten You.		What's more, B
<sup>8</sup> Ask of Me,		
and I will surely give <b>the nations</b>		
<u>as Your inheritance.</u>	A	
And <b>the very ends of the earth</b>		
<u>as Your possession.</u>		What's more, B
<sup>9</sup> You shall break them		
with a rod of iron,	A	
You shall shatter them		
like earthenware."'		What's more, B
<sup>10</sup> Now therefore,		
O kings,	A	
<u>show discernment;</u>	B	
<u>Take warning,</u>	B	
O judges of the earth.	A	
<sup>11</sup> Worship the LORD	B	
with reverence		C
And rejoice	B	
with trembling.		C
<sup>12</sup> Do homage to the Son,	B	
that He not become angry,	C	
and you perish <i>in</i> the way,	C	

For His wrath may soon be kindled.

How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Ps. 2:1-12 NASB)

In verse 1a, the nations are in an uproar. They are upset, but no action is implied. In the second statement (v. 1b) they are carrying their discontent a further step by plotting against someone. Then in v. 2a the leaders of the peoples are taking a stand and in v. 2b they are taking counsel with one another—there is **organization in their revolt**. Against whom? Against none other than the Lord and against His anointed king. The progression of thought is that man's discontent and plotting is done in opposition to God and the one He has enthroned, not in opposition to other mortals. In v. 3, the progression of thought continues because their opposition against the authority of God builds to the point of rage: "Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!" We can almost sense the rage of the Jews as they were shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! We will not have this man Jesus rule over us!" Progression is also evident in the Lord's response to man's puny rebellion (v. 4). First, the Lord simply laughs at man's rage, not even bothering to get up out of His chair ("sits"). He then belittles them for their simplicity ("scoffs"). Finally, He speaks in anger which then gives way to terrifying fury.

## 2. Antithetic parallelism

This is the opposite of the first type in which the second line stands in contrast to what is stated in the first line. In this sense, the same idea is presented but by using antonyms (words meaning the opposite of another) rather than synonyms (words meaning the same as another) (See Longman, pp. 99-100). For example, "The desire of the **righteous** is only good, **but** the expectation of the **wicked** is only wrath" (Prov. 11: 23). Other examples in Proverbs are Prov. 12: 13; 13: 1; 14: 34 and Prov. 10: 8.

The desire of the righteous is only good,

**But** the expectation of the wicked is wrath. (Prov. 11:23 NASB)

An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,  
**But** the righteous will escape from trouble. (Prov. 12:13 NASB)

A wise son *accepts his* father's discipline,  
**But** a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. (Prov. 13:1 NASB)

Righteousness exalts a nation,  
**But** sin is a disgrace to *any* people. (Prov. 14:34 NASB)

The wise of heart will receive commands,  
**But** a babbling fool will be ruined. (Prov. 10:8 NASB)

This kind of parallelism is very common in Proverbs, but not as common in the Psalms. Examples in the Psalms are 37: 9, 17, 21; 34: 10; and 34: 15-16.

For evildoers will be cut off,  
**But** those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. (Ps. 37:9 NASB)

For the arms of the wicked will be broken,  
**But** the LORD sustains the righteous. (Ps. 37:17 NASB)

The wicked borrows and does not pay back,  
**But** the righteous is gracious and gives. (Ps. 37:21 NASB)

The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;  
**But** they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing. (Ps. 34:10 NASB)  
 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous  
 And His ears are *open* to their cry.

<sup>16</sup>The face of the LORD is against evildoers,  
 To cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Ps. 34:15-16 NASB)

The last example given, Ps. 34: 15-16, is an example of a *compound antithetic parallelism* in which there are more than two sentences in each member of the antithesis (Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 97). Notice that the word, **but**, is omitted. Terry also cites a compound antithetic parallelism in Isaiah 1: 3, 19-20, and 54: 7-8, which indicates that parallelisms should be looked for in any place in the OT where Hebrew poetry is found.

"An ox knows  
 its owner,  
 And a donkey  
 its master's manger,  
**But** Israel does not know,  
 My people do not understand." (Isa. 1:3 NASB)

"If you **consent and obey**,  
 You will eat the best of the land;  
<sup>20</sup> **But** if you **refuse and rebel**,  
 You will be devoured by the sword."  
 Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa. 1:19-20 NASB)

"For a brief moment  
 I forsook you,  
**But** with great compassion  
 I will gather you.

<sup>8</sup> "In an outburst of anger  
 I hid My face from you  
 for a moment,  
**But** with everlasting lovingkindness  
 I will have compassion on you,"  
 Says the LORD your Redeemer. (Isa. 54:7-8 NASB)

Parallelisms are also found in the New Testament. This is to be expected since the writers of the NT were Jewish (Luke being the only exception) and were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. And, of course, Jesus was a Jew, and we find Him using parallelisms in many of His discourses. Consider His instructions on prayer in Matt. 7.

"Ask,  
 and it will be given to you;  
 seek,  
 and you will find;  
 knock,  
 and it will be opened to you.  
<sup>8</sup> "For everyone who asks  
 receives,  
 and he who seeks  
 finds,  
 and to him who knocks  
 it will be opened. (Matt. 7:7-8 NASB)

Jesus piles up phrase upon phrase to emphasize the importance of being persistent in prayer, but each of the phrases says essentially the same thing in different words. Notice also Matt. 7: 13-14 which is an antithetic parallelism.

"Enter through the narrow gate;  
 for the **gate** is wide  
 and the **way** is broad  
 that leads to **destruction**,  
 and there are **many** who enter through it.  
<sup>14</sup> "For the **gate** is small  
 and the way is narrow  
 that leads to **life**,  
 and there are **few** who find it. (Matt. 7:13-14 NASB)

The Apostle Paul, also a Jew, used parallelisms often in his writing. In Col. 3: 16, he exhorted the church with these words,

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you,  
 with all wisdom  
teaching and admonishing one another  
 with psalms  
*and* hymns  
*and* spiritual songs,  
singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:16 NASB)

The psalms and hymns and spiritual songs may very well be different words for the same thing. There have been debates among Christians over “exclusive psalmody”, i.e. whether the church in worship should be singing anything other than Biblical psalms put to music. Other examples in Pauline literature may be found in Eph. 3: 18 and Rom. 8: 35-39.



so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;  
and that you,

being rooted  
and grounded

in love,

<sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth  
and length  
and height  
and depth, (Eph. 3:17-18 NASB)

and to know the love of Christ

which surpasses knowledge,

that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19 NASB)

Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

Will tribulation,  
or distress,  
or persecution,  
or famine,  
or nakedness,  
or peril,  
or sword?...

For I am convinced that

neither death,  
nor life,  
nor angels,  
nor principalities,  
nor things present,  
nor things to come,  
nor powers,  
<sup>39</sup> nor height,  
nor depth,

**nor any other created thing,**

will be able to separate us from the love of God,

which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35, 38-39 NASB)

These are not parallelisms, strictly speaking, but we can see in these examples that Paul occasionally thought in parallel fashion.

### ***B. Similes and Metaphors***

A *simile* is a comparison using the word “like” or “as”. Generally the comparison is between two *similar* ideas. Jesus makes much use of similes when speaking about the kingdom of God. We often encounter His words, “The kingdom of God [or heaven] is **like**...” Notice that He does not make an equation of the kingdom of God with the thing compared to it. He does not say, “The kingdom of God **is**...” but “the kingdom of God is **like**...” (See Matt. 13: 24, 31, 44-50; 20: 1; 22: 2; 25: 1; Mk. 4: 26, 31; Lk. 13: 18, 20.)

He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is **like** a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;<sup>32</sup> and this is *smaller than all other seeds*, but when it is full grown, it is *larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree*, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES.” (Matt. 13:31-32 NASB)

"The kingdom of heaven is **like** a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and ***sells all that he has*** and buys that field.<sup>45</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is **like** a merchant seeking fine pearls,<sup>46</sup> and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and ***sold all that he had*** and bought it.<sup>47</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is **like** a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering *fish* of every kind;<sup>48</sup> and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and ***gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away***.<sup>49</sup> "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous,<sup>50</sup> and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 13:44-50 NASB)

A *metaphor* is also a comparison but it is not introduced as a comparison; that is, it does not use the words "like" or "as". Furthermore, there is an *intertwining of the subject with the thing with which it is compared*. For example, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life," and "you are the light of the world." The subject and the thing it is compared with are considered as one but the words are not to be taken literally. Jesus is not literal bread and Christians are not literally light. One main point is stressed by the comparison. In the first metaphor mentioned, Jesus presents himself as the sustenance of our spiritual lives and Christians are (or should be) the models of how life should be lived (Virkler, p. 158-159).

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life;  
 he who comes to Me  
     will not hunger,  
 and he who believes in Me  
     will never thirst. (Jn. 6:35 NASB)

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (Jn. 10:11 NASB)

So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."<sup>8</sup> "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them."<sup>9</sup> "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. (Jn. 10:7-9 NASB)

### C. Allegories

Allegories are *extended metaphors* in which the comparison between the subject and the thing compared to it is not explicitly expressed (there is no "like" or "as"). Furthermore, the subject and the thing compared to it are intermingled together within the allegory, and "the story and its application are intermingled [*mixed*] and proceed together (Virkler, pp. 159-160).

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, "There were **two men** in one city, the **one rich and the other poor**.<sup>2</sup> "The rich man had a great many flocks and herds.<sup>3</sup> "But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb Which he bought and nourished; And it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom. And was like a daughter to him.<sup>4</sup> "Now a traveler came to the rich man, And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; Rather he **took the poor man's ewe lamb** and prepared it for the man who had come to him."<sup>5</sup> Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die.<sup>6</sup> "He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion."<sup>7</sup> Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!..." (2 Sam. 12:1-7a NASB)

Qohelet's speech in Ecclesiastes 12 is an allegory (an extended metaphor) about the deterioration of the body during old age. Terry says that the description is that of an old sensualist who has not lived his life for God (*Biblical Hermeneutics*).

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them";<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;<sup>3</sup> in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim;<sup>4</sup> and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.<sup>6</sup> *Remember Him* before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;<sup>7</sup> then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. (Eccl. 12:1-7 NASB)

However, I find Terry's insistence that this is the old age of a sensualist (one who lives his life for physical pleasure) unnecessary. Of course, our interpretation of this section will depend on how we interpret the rest of the book (see my commentary on Ecclesiastes). This section could be the testimony of anyone experiencing old age, believer or unbeliever.

The physical difficulties and emotional struggles of old age affect believer and unbeliever alike; and although the believer takes comfort in the prospect of eternal life, he is not exempt from the "evil days" of old age. The testimony, "**I have no delight in them**" refers to the difficulties of getting old; and believers—if they are honest—must confess that old age can minimize one's enjoyment of life. I am not suggesting that old age eliminates our joy in living; far from it. The believer looks forward to being with Christ and having the remnants of sin removed. He still enjoys the fellowship of other believers, and the love of his wife. However, it is not sinful to "have no delight" in chronic back pains, bladder dysfunction, false teeth, poor eyesight, hearing loss, and prostatitis. The ravages of old age are the result of sin which has brought disease, old age, and death. The new heavens and earth will be a place of undiminished health, the way God created the human body to be. We should be *joyful* in every situation (1 Thess. 5: 18), but this does not require that we *enjoy* every situation.

Many metaphors appear in these few short verses which form an extended metaphor or allegory. The light of the sun, moon, and stars may be understood generally as the light of life which recedes gradually behind the dark "clouds" of old age (v. 2; cf. 11: 7 which speaks of light being "pleasant" or "sweet"). The "watchman of the house tremble" (v. 3) is a phrase which refers to the hands and the arms which in more youthful days served as the defenders of his house. In old age, they tremble, helpless to keep out intruders. The "mighty men" which "stoop" refer to the legs that lose their muscular strength and elasticity in old age and become bowed and crooked. The "grinding ones" are the teeth which are now few, making it difficult for old people to eat. Thus, they "stand idle" as the aged person eats less and loses weight because he can no longer chew his food. "Those who look through windows grow dim" is a reference to dwindling eyesight, and the "doors on the street" are the ears which can no longer hear the normal sounds of everyday life (like the grinding mill), but are awakened suddenly by the sharp, shrill sound of a bird (v. 4). The phrase, "the daughters of song will sing softly" is most likely a reference to all the organs of sound including the lungs and voice used in singing. These are now weak and unable to make the joyful noises which they once made. When a person gets old, even his voice is affected, and he can't sing as well as he once did (Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 290-291).

In v. 5, the Qohelet makes note of the extreme difficulty of any kind of movement in old age. When a man is young, he can run upstairs or hills with the slightest of ease, but now in old age climbing stairs and slight embankments must be done with great care for fear of falling. Even the simplest obstacles in his path are cause for alarm (v. 5a). "The almond tree blossoms" refer to the white hair which is falling out, and the grasshopper which "drags himself along" is a metaphor for the old man

who has “lost the spring in his step” and gets around only with great difficulty. Qohelet really gets personal when he mentions the ineffectiveness of the caperberry, widely used as an aphrodisiac, a drug which increases one’s sexual desire. But the old man gets no help from it and no longer has any interest in sex (Tremper Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 291).

The end of his life is near at hand, “For man goes to his eternal home....” When he dies, professional mourners (according to Jewish custom; Bridges, p. 292) “go about in the street” to make an insincere, public display of grief for an old man they don’t even know or care about—a cultural practice which adds to the tragedy of the moment (cf. Matt. 9: 23-24). The “silver cord and the golden bowl” may refer to a golden lamp suspended by a silver cord as a chandelier in a palatial hallway (Terry, p. 309). The silver and gold in the image may be a reference to the high value of a man’s life (Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 170). The silver cord breaks; the lamp falls and is dashed to pieces, a metaphorical reference to the light of a man’s life being extinguished.

Most memorably of all, the pictures in verse 6 capture the beauty and fragility of the human frame: a masterpiece as delicately wrought as any work of art, yet as breakable as a piece of earthenware, and as useless in the end as a broken wheel. The first half of this verse seems to portray a golden lamp suspended by a silver chain; it will take only the snapping of a link to let it fall and be spoilt. And if this seems too finely-drawn a picture of our familiar selves, it is balanced by the scene at the deserted well—eloquent of the transience of the simplest, most basic things we do. There will be a last time for every familiar journey, every routine job (Derek Kidner, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 104).

The “pitcher by the well” and the “wheel at the cistern” visualize the means of drawing water from a well by lowering a pitcher by a rope that runs around a wheel (Eaton, p. 170). These are now all shattered, so that the old, dying man has neither light nor water, both symbols of life (Longman, p. 273). Eventually his body will return to the dust from which it came and his spirit will return to God (v. 7). This is a reference to man’s creation in Genesis and his accountability before God.

It should be noticed that although there are many symbols in this allegory which have independent significance apart from each other, one main point of comparison is made throughout the allegory. It is an allegory about old age.

It should also be said that we are not using the illegitimate hermeneutical principle of *allegorizing* to interpret the above passage. The allegory above is made by the writer of Scripture himself and is plain to see within the passage. We may also observe many allegories in the parables of Jesus, the parable of the sower being one notable example in which Jesus identifies each metaphor within the allegory (Matt. 13: 1-23). However, we would not search for allegories in every passage of Scripture. Were we to do so, we would come up with all sorts of fanciful interpretations which actually obscure (hide) the true meaning of the texts.

**Allegorization** was a method of interpretation which became popular with Clement of Alexandria in the first part of the third century. Using this method, the interpreter would seek the “deeper”, “hidden” meaning of Scripture as opposed to the literal meaning. Clement and other allegorizers (Origen) insisted that this was the intended meaning of the text, and that the literal meaning only skimmed the surface. For example, one preacher I heard said that David’s “three mighty men” could be identified as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But there is nothing in the historical narrative to indicate any such fanciful meaning. The three mighty men are just three mighty men, no one else.

Another example of the allegorical method is the notion that Herod’s massacre of the two year old infants of Bethlehem is a warning that only those who hold to the Trinitarian faith will be saved and

that Binitarians (who believe in two persons of the Godhead and Unitarians (those who hold to one person in the Godhead) will perish in hell. The passage teaches nothing of the kind. A careful examination of Matt. 2: 1-12 will reveal that the magi from the east did not see Jesus in the stable, like the shepherds did, but only later when He was living in a house (Matt. 2: 11). In Matt. 2: 7, we learn that Herod determined from the wise men the time in which they had seen the star which led them to the king of the Jews. The star they had seen finally led them (two years later) to a house. (But this does not mean that they were wandering around in the desert for two years. It does not take that long to get from the east to Palestine—unless you have a very slow camel.) The two-year time table is determined from v. 16 when Herod plotted to eliminate the new competitor to his throne by killing all the babies in Bethlehem two years old and under based on the information he had received from the magi earlier (v.7). Herod figured that if he killed all the infants two years old and under, he could guarantee the death of this infant king. He was wrong; and Luke, the writer, makes a vivid point of his failure. Instead of the child Jesus dying, Herod died instead (v.19). One can see that the allegorical method robs us of the true meaning and significance of the text.

On the other hand, we find a notable example of an OT text, an historical text, allegorized by none other than the best of OT exegetes, the Apostle Paul (Galatians 4:21-31). This allegory leads us at this juncture to make a qualification of what was said earlier about the meaning of a text. We said that the meaning of a text is the intended meaning of the original author (See page 3 of your Hermeneutics notes). This is generally a good rule to follow—almost with no exceptions.

Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. <sup>24</sup> This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." <sup>28</sup> And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also. <sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." <sup>31</sup> So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman. (Gal. 4:21-31 NASB)

We also said that Moses, the original author, could not have intended this story to be an allegory of the Old and the New Covenants, the last of which had not appeared in history. This means that God, the divine author, had more than one meaning in mind when He inspired the story of Sarah and Hagar. Notice that one main point is being made in the allegory—the difference between the offspring of the old covenant and the offspring of the new covenant. The first produces slaves; the other produces free children. Those Israelites who trusted in their obedience to the Law to be right with God were slaves while those who put their faith in the promises made to Abraham and his descendants were free.

Liberal theologians have taken Paul's allegory in Gal. 4 as an opportunity to cast doubt upon much of his teaching elsewhere in the NT. If Paul used the illegitimate hermeneutical method of allegorizing to prove a point of doctrine, should we not examine his other writings for error? (Virker, p.175) But as Virkler is quick to point out, Paul is not sanctioning allegorizing as a method of interpretation. Paul did not allegorize the text. He said, "This is **allegorically speaking**, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar" (Gal. 4:24 NASB). Paul recognizes the actual history of the events surrounding

Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. The allegorical method would consider these historical events to be unimportant to the “deeper” meaning of the text.

Secondly, Paul alerts the reader to the fact that he is about to present an allegory; but with the allegorical method, *every* text is interpreted as an allegory. By telling the reader in advance, Paul indicates that he is not giving an exposition (explanation) of the text as it is to be understood from Genesis. In other words, when we read the text from Genesis, we are not to read it as an allegory, but as an historical account with a literal meaning (Virker, pp. 177-178). We conclude, therefore, that Paul is not sanctioning the allegorical method, a conclusion which is certainly warranted from an examination of his other NT writings.

The question which comes up is this: Are non-inspired interpreters of Scripture justified in interpreting other OT historical texts allegorically even if they are not identified as such in NT texts? It is one thing for the Apostle Paul to treat an OT text as an allegory, but is this legitimate practice for today’s interpreter? This question does not imply the interpretation of OT texts *primarily* as allegories, as if the hidden meaning is the only meaning, but may they be used allegorically to present a meaning other than that of the intended author? Paul interprets Gal. 4 in a way other than the intended meaning of Moses. Can we do the same with other OT texts? John Frame answers this question in the affirmative.

Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?<sup>8</sup> I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?<sup>9</sup> For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He?<sup>10</sup> Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*.<sup>11</sup> If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? (1 Cor. 9:7-11 NASB)

Reflecting on 1 Cor. 9: 9 and Gal. 4, Frame says, (*Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp. 198-199).

Thus, we find Scripture itself sometimes uses Scripture in surprising ways... We would be perplexed by these uses of the Old Testament if we followed the principle of asking, What did the text mean to the original (human) author or audience? That question is important and useful, but it doesn’t always tell us what we need to know. Most likely, Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 25: 4 did not (consciously) occur to Moses, nor did Paul’s use of Genesis 21. At least we could not use any hermeneutical method of which I am aware to determine that such ideas occurred to Moses. Thus, unless we wish to accuse Paul of misusing the Old Testament at those points, we must find some other principle at work.

The relevant principle, I think, is simply this. The Old Testament texts that Paul used are capable of being used in the ways he used them. Whether or not Moses conceived of Genesis 21 as an allegory, it happens that the text is *suited* to being used that way. Since it is suited to such a use, we know that this usage was in the mind of the divine author, even if it was not consciously intended by the human author. God knows and predetermines all the uses that are proper for His inspired Word. And surely the unique double-authorship of Scripture must influence our interpretation of it. The principle, then, is that we may use Scripture in any way that it is suited to be used. And the meaning of any text, then, is the set of uses to which it is suited.

This sort of approach opens the doors of our creativity! It encourages us to make allegories out of other passages too! That is well and good; there is nothing wrong with that. But our governing principle must be to present the gospel clearly and cogently. If an allegorical illustration helps to that end, then no one may forbid it. But obviously we are not warranted to turn theology into an allegorical flight of fancy as did Origen. (Origen’s mistake was not that he allegorized Scripture but that he misused his allegorical

interpretations to try to prove substantive theological propositions. That is not what Paul is doing in Galatians 4, where he uses his allegory only as an *illustration* of, not as the basis for, his theological point. Paul's basis for his argument, he makes clear, was his own private revelation from God—Gal. 1: 1, 11f.) [emphasis his].

Milton Terry urges more caution in the use of allegory, but his position, written over a century ago, is not much different from Frame's. Commenting on Paul's allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Gal. 4, he says (pp. 322-323):

Here arises the important hermeneutical question, What inference are we to draw from this example of an inspired apostle allegorizing the facts of sacred history? Was it a fruit of his rabbinical education, and a sanction of that allegorical method of interpretation which was prevalent [common] especially among Jewish-Alexandrian writers, at that time?

That Paul in this passage treats historical facts of the Old Testament as capable of being used allegorically is a simple matter of fact. That he was familiar with the allegorical methods of expounding the Scriptures current in his day is scarcely to be doubted. That his own rabbinical training had some influence on him, and coloured his methods of argument and illustration, there seems no valid reason to deny....But its [Paul's use of allegorical argument in Gal. 4] position, connexion, and use in this epistle to the Galatians gives no sufficient warrant for such allegorical methods in general. Schmoller remarks: "Paul to be sure allegorizes here, for he says so himself. But with the very fact of his saying this himself, the gravity of the hermeneutical difficulty disappears. He means therefore to give an allegory, not an exposition: he does not proceed as an exegete, and does not mean to say (after the manner of the allegorizing exegetes) that only what he now says is the true sense of the narrative." Herein especially consists the great difference between Paul's example and that of nearly all the allegorists. He concedes and assumes the historical truthfulness of the Old Testament narrative, but makes an allegorical use of it for a special and exceptional purpose....

But he never for a moment loses sight of the historical basis, or permits his allegorizing to displace it. And in the same general way it may be allowable for us to allegorize portions of the Scripture, providing the facts are capable of typical significance, and are never ignored and displaced by the allegorizing process. Biblical characters and events may thus be used for homiletical purposes, and serve for "instruction in righteousness;" but the special and exceptional character of such handling of Scripture must, as in Paul's example, be explicitly acknowledged. The apostle's solitary instance is sufficient admonition that such expositions are to be indulged [used] most sparingly.

Notice that Terry says that the historical facts of the passage should not be displaced and must be "capable of typical significance". This was the error of the ancient "allegorists" among the Alexandrian fathers. The historical facts of the passage were deemed unimportant and subordinate to the hidden allegorical meaning. Terry's position and Frame's is just the opposite of Origen's. The allegorical illustration of the passage is subordinate to the grammatical-historical meaning which serves as the only legitimate foundation of the allegory. Both scholars hold to the position that we do not have to have a NT example of an allegory to justify allegorizing an OT passage, provided there is **typological** warrant for doing so.

I have often used the story of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9) to illustrate the message of the gospel. Mephibosheth, grandson of Saul who was the archenemy of David, is summoned to the king's court. He expects David to execute him as an enemy of the throne and a political threat which was the common practice of eastern kings in the consolidation of their kingdoms. Twice in the story it is mentioned that Mephibosheth is **lame in both feet**. He is also destitute. In other words, he has nothing to offer David in terms of labor or money. Instead of having him executed, David honors his promise to Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan (1 Sam. 20: 12-17), to be good to his descendants. He feeds Mephibosheth at his own table. I personally believe that this is a picture of what God does

with repentant sinners. We are His sworn enemies and opponents to His kingdom, deserving nothing but wrath. We are likewise “lame in both feet” because we are helpless and hopeless in the presence of this all-powerful, holy God who has life and death power over us; we have nothing to offer Him in exchange for our lives. Instead of executing us, He adopts us into his family and takes care of us. Why? The reason is that God honors His promise to Abraham to give him descendants who number as the stars of the heavens (Gen. 15; Gal. 3: 29). This promise is fulfilled to the singular “seed” of Abraham, even Jesus Christ and all those who are joined to Christ by faith (Gal. 3: 16). Abraham believed God and his faith was accounted as righteousness, not for his sake only but for the sake of anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4: 22-24).

In the allegorical interpretation of 2 Sam. 9, I have not used the text to prove a “substantive theological proposition” (Frame’s terms). That is, I am not using the text to establish a doctrine of scripture which must depend on this text and cannot be demonstrated more conclusively from other texts. I have only used the text to *illustrate* the doctrine of salvation by grace which is demonstrated in many didactic (teaching) texts of Scripture. I have also not displaced the historical factuality of the passages which is fundamental to the allegory. Without the historical fact of the events, the allegory ceases to have any significance. Nevertheless, we must be careful in the use of allegories so that we do not develop formal theological doctrines from them. They are illustrative of established doctrines from more perspicuous (clear) passages. One can see, however, that allegories are enjoyable, and the limited and wise use of the method does open “the doors of our creativity”, as Frame suggests.

#### ***D. Parables***

The word “parable” literally means to “place along side of” for the purpose of comparison. Studies as far back as 35 years ago have shown that the word can also mean “ ‘a saying by the wayside, a proverb, a maxim’ ” (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 276). A parable is a metaphor or simile (see above) taken from common, ordinary events of life. There is enough strangeness or interesting material about the parable to stimulate the attention of the hearer and enough information left out to leave the hearer in some doubt about its specific application to life. It is not a fable, myth, or legend which is taken from popular folklore—that is, it is not some fanciful story which is unbelievable. Although Jesus uses an element of the supernatural in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, most parables, as I indicated above, use ordinary events from everyday life to accomplish their purpose.

In our study of parables, we will be following Bernard Ramm (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 276-287) and Milton S. Terry (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 276-301), with additional analysis from Knox Chamblin (*Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus, pp. 95-96).

##### ***1. The Importance of the Parables***

Of the parables of Jesus found in the gospels, Luke has the most and John the least. They represent a major section of the teaching in the gospels which makes their proper interpretation very important for the student of the Bible. Furthermore, their content is didactic (instructional) and includes teaching about “the progress of the gospel in the world, the results of its propagation [its spread], about the end of the age, the dealings of God with the Jewish people and the Gentiles, and the nature of the kingdom of God. Any doctrine of the kingdom or eschatology [future things] which ignores a careful study of the parables cannot be adequate (Ramm, p. 277). Ramm indicates that parables teach the Christian “not to be depressed at the apparent failure of the gospel or the corruption of the



gospel; others tell him not to be ambitious beyond which the gospel promises; and still others tell him not to be discouraged because the success of God is secure” (p. 278).

## 2. *The Purpose of the Parables*

The purpose of parables is given by Christ in Matt. 13: 11-17; Mk. 4: 10-12; and Lk. 8: 8-10.

Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.<sup>12</sup> "For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.<sup>13</sup> "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.<sup>14</sup> "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;<sup>15</sup> FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'<sup>16</sup> "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.<sup>17</sup> "For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*. (Matt. 13:11-17 NASB)

First, Christ uses parables to *instruct* the *responsive* disciple, the one who listens well with the purpose of learning and obeying, the one who has “ears to hear” (Ramm, pp. 277-278). According to Lk. 8: 10, knowledge of God and His kingdom is a gift which is bestowed upon some by grace and withheld from others because of their persistent unwillingness to hear.

"Other *seed* fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."<sup>9</sup> His disciples *began* questioning Him as to what this parable meant.<sup>10</sup> And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is* in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND. (Lk. 8:8-10 NASB)

Christ did not begin His ministry by teaching in parables. The Sermon on the Mount was not in parables, but straight-forward ethical teaching. He begins to teach in parables because of the unwillingness of the multitudes to hear the straight-forward truth. Chamblin draws attention to the distinction between the audience, the condition of the audience, and Jesus’ response to the audience.

There is, first of all, a distinction between the “crowds” and the “disciples” (cf. Matt. 13: 2, 10). Secondly, the disciples are in a favored condition in comparison to the crowds because they have responded favorably to what they have heard so far, resulting in a firm commitment to Jesus as their master. Not so with the crowds who have listened to His teaching with much resistance.

Thirdly, Jesus responds to the disciples and to the multitudes differently on the basis of their response to Him. “For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” The disciples have responded favorably to His teaching, and now they will be given more. (They specifically requested Jesus to explain them, and He complies with this request.) For them, the parables will serve to illustrate and deepen the truth they have already believed. They not only hear the parables but also the explanation of the parables (Matt. 13: 18-23; 13: 36-43). On the other hand, parables only obscure or hide the truth from the crowds who have resisted the plain-spoken truth of Christ earlier. What they may have had will now be taken away as a means of judgment (*Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus, p. 97).

The second purpose of parables, then, was to hide the truth from those who were *unresponsive* to what they had already heard. The parables, in part, are a judgment for unbelief consisting of the judicial hardening of men's hearts much the same as God hardened Pharaoh's heart following his stubbornness in refusing the nation of Israel to go free (See 7: 3; 8: 15, 19, 32; and 9:12). The reader will notice from these passages that Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God hardened it. Thus, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart by God came as a judicial judgment upon Pharaoh. However, this does not remove the difficulty of the passage since it had always been God's plan to harden Pharaoh's heart in order that the power of God on behalf of Israel might be known throughout the world (Ex. 4: 21; 7: 3; 9: 15-16 with Rom. 8: 17-18; see also Prov. 29: 1). Once again we are faced with the difficulty of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

In Matthew, Christ quotes Isaiah 6: 9-10 which is directed toward unbelieving Israel before their defeat by the Babylonians. Just as Pharaoh had hardened his heart, Israel had hardened their own hearts against the continuing messages and warnings of the prophets (See Isaiah 5: 1-7; Jer. 7: 12-15, 25-34; 13: 8-14; 29: 19, 20; 35: 16, 17). Christ now faces the same opposition and hardness of heart. He quotes Isa. 6 not from the Hebrew but from the Greek translation of the OT called the Septuagint (LXX) (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p.556-557). It is worthy of note that the passage in Matthew emphasizes the responsibility of the people in hardening their own hearts while the passage in Isaiah emphasizes the sovereignty of God in hardening their hearts. In this there is no contradiction. It is precisely because the people have hardened their own hearts to the truth that God will continue to harden them. God is simply giving them what they wanted from Him—nothing.

By understanding this, we can understand Jesus' statement in 13: 12, "For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." In other words, those who have already received Christ' teaching, repented, believed, and begun to obey, will receive more and more understanding. But those who continue to hear Him and refuse to accept His teaching, even the understanding they have will be taken away from them. Their light will be turned into darkness. The judicial hardening which we find in Matthew is the fulfillment of the prediction of the hardening in Isaiah which became a "terrible reality" during Jesus' ministry (See Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp.554-556, including footnotes.)

For many months, Jesus had been preaching about the kingdom of God and the righteousness of His kingdom, but for the most part, the people had continued in persistent unbelief. So the question is, if they refused to receive His plain teaching, what use was it to give them anything more? Christ was simply practicing what He had preached in the Sermon on the Mount, not to throw what was holy to dogs and swine (i. e. unbelievers who are entrenched in unbelief) lest they simply trample it under their feet (Matt. 7:6). Consequently, He begins to teach the multitudes only in parables, partly as a judgment against them and partly as a special measure of His common grace to all sinners so as not to increase the guilt of their unbelief and their punishment in hell (Lk. 12: 47-48). The true disciples of Jesus, on the other hand, would from time to time receive the additional instruction which came through Christ's interpretation of the parables.

"And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,<sup>48</sup> but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Lk. 12:47-48 NASB)

### ***3. The Elements of a Parable***

A parable consists of four parts (Ramm, pp. 278-279).

**a. The *earthly element*.** Parables are about “farming, marriages, kings, feasts, household relationships, business arrangements, or customs of the peoples.” Every parable paints some kind of familiar visual picture in the minds of the audience, which makes them particularly effective for instructional purposes.

**b. The *spiritual element*.** Every parable intends to teach a spiritual lesson or theological truth. (e.g. the value of the kingdom of God, the need for persistence in prayer, etc.)

**c. The *analogical element*.** There is always a relationship between the earthly element and the spiritual element. This analogical relationship gives the parable the ability to illustrate and to argue a certain theological position.

**d. The *interpretive element*.** Every parable has two levels of meaning which requires its interpretation. The different earthly elements of the parable (the people, actions, etc.) must be identified if the parable is to make sense. Much care must be taken in this identification to avoid “allegorizing” the parable. When a parable is allegorized, it is made to mean far more than it was ever intended to mean. However, it must be admitted that all parables have an allegorical element or they would not be parables. It must also be admitted that sometimes many parts of the parable represent significant elements of the story. For example, in Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matt. 13: 3-9), there are several key elements in the story. The seed is the “word of the kingdom”; the “evil one” is represented by the birds which snatch away the seed; the rocky soil represents those who receive the word at first but quickly fall away in unbelief when affliction or persecution comes; the soil with thorns represents those hear the word but become unfruitful because their lives become entangled in worldly living and the deceitfulness of riches; the good soil represents true believers who receive the word and persevere in it, producing various degrees of Christian fruit (Matt. 13: 18-23).

The question arises: How far may the interpreter go in discerning the meaning of each separate element in the parable? For example, in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25: 1-13), who are the ten virgins and where is the bride? Should we see some significance in the fact that they all went to sleep or that there were ten? No answers to these questions are forthcoming from the text, and the meaning of the parable may be sacrificed if we try to force answers to these questions. At the same time, there may well be some significance in the oil which may represent the Holy Spirit and the fact that the oil may not be transferred from one person to the next—the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit in the individual heart. Considerations of this sort—which are reasonably drawn from other clear texts—actually enhance the meaning of the parable rather than obscuring it.

In the parable of the tares and the wheat (Matt. 13: 24-30; explained in 13: 36-43), Jesus gives no special significance to the men who were sleeping, the yielding of fruit, the landowner’s slaves or their questions. These elements are only incidental (minor) to the overall story. We may observe closely how Jesus interprets this parable and the parable of the sower to determine how we should go about the interpretation of all the parables (Terry, p. 284). Nevertheless, as Terry suggests, there are other lessons which Jesus does not mention which are worthy of note. Those seed which have no sufficient root in the first parable (13: 21) and those which are in danger of being rooted up with the tares in the second parable (13: 29), may offer important insights to the interpreter. Chamblin notes that the parable of the wheat and the tares “makes a prohibition against rigorism in church discipline....(J. Knox Chamblin, quoting Gundry, *Matthew*, unpublished syllabus, p. 100). Even though many in the church may show little proof of regenerating grace, unless they are guilty of serious, unrepented offense, they should not be disciplined out of the church (Matt. 18: 15-20).

Determining which elements have significance, and which do not, will not always be easy, and even an experienced interpreter like Terry admits the difficulty (p. 286).

No specific rules can be formed that will apply to every case, and show what parts of a parable are designed to be significant, and what parts are mere drapery and form [that is, those which merely fill out the story]. Sound sense and delicate discrimination are to be cultivated and matured by a protracted [long] study of all the parables, and by careful collation [gathering together] and comparison. Our Lord's examples of interpretation show that most of the details of his parables have a meaning; and yet there are incidental words and allusions which are not to be pressed into significance. We should, therefore, study to avoid, on the one side, the extreme of ingenuity [cleverness] which searches for hidden meanings in every word, and, on the other, the disposition to pass over many details as mere rhetorical figures. In general it may be said that most of the details in a parable have a meaning, and those which have no special significance in the interpretation, serve, nevertheless, to enhance the force and beauty of the rest....We may also add, with Trench, that "it is tolerable evidence that we have found the right interpretation of a parable if it leave none of the main circumstances unexplained.

Knox Chamblin cautions the interpreter not to force Jesus into a rigid parabolic method to the exclusion of allegories when it is evident that he used allegories extensively in his parables.

While it is helpful to distinguish "parable" from "allegory," we must be careful not to separate them as though a speaker or writer (especially one so free, creative and subtle as Jesus) is prohibited from interlacing them in his teaching. What we find, in fact, is that Jesus uses allegorical features as expressions of his pedagogical [teaching] artistry and within the framework and under the control of his chosen parabolic medium (*Matthew*, p. 96, an unpublished class syllabus).

[The following is a further analysis of the "interlacing" of parable and allegory found in Jesus' parables taken from Chamblin, *Matthew*, pp. 95-96. Additional comments are provided for illustration.]

A parable is an extended simile in which the word "like" is used. "The kingdom of heaven is *like* a mustard seed" or "The kingdom of heaven may be *compared to* a man who sowed good seed in his field." The noun, *parabole*, is composed of the preposition *para* ("beside, alongside") and *bole* ("to cast or throw"). Thus, in order to illustrate spiritual truth, Jesus cast alongside of it tangible pictures to provide concrete explanations. These pictures provide "hooks" on which the spiritual meaning can be "hung" or understood. The allegory, on the other hand, is an extended metaphor which does not use the words "like" or "compared to". The word *allegoreo* contains the prefix *allo* ("other") and the base *agoreuo* ("to speak") implying that when one speaks in an allegory he actually implies something "other" than what is said on the surface. Thus, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life", a metaphor which implies that Jesus sustains one's spiritual life, not that he is a loaf of bread. In Gal. 4, Paul treats the story of Sarah and Hagar allegorically, using Sarah as the representative of the New Covenant and Hagar as representative of the Old Covenant. The meaning of Sarah and Hagar is, therefore, hidden beneath the surface of the language.

In the allegory, each detail has meaning and importance for the interpretation. For example, in the allegory of old age in Ecc. 12, "the watchman of the house" which "tremble" are the old man's arms which were once strong defenders of the house but which are no longer any use in defending himself. The "mighty men stoop" is a reference to his legs which are bent from age and the "grinding ones" which "stand idle" are his teeth which are no longer effective in chewing his food. Each word of this allegory has a separate meaning which must be determined for the complete interpretation of the allegory—the need to worship and serve God in one's youth rather than waiting until old age. On the other hand, in a parable the details serve to fill out the story and make it as

realistic as possible. The “merchant seeking fine pearls” (Matt. 13: 45) is an ordinary activity during Jesus’ day. Further, all the details contribute to the *central thrust* of the parable, the one central meaning of the parable, without the necessity of having separate meanings of their own. For example, in the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13: 33), the leaven is the kingdom of heaven which spreads imperceptibly (invisibly) but thoroughly throughout the world, but there is no separate significance to the three pecks of meal or the woman. We should not allegorize the parable by saying that the three pecks of meal stand for the three persons of the Trinity or that the woman represents the church.

Nevertheless, we must recognize the allegorical elements in Jesus’ parables. In the parable of the sower, several elements in the parable are identified. The seed is the gospel or the words of the kingdom; the different soils represent people who have different responses to the gospel, the thorns represent the deceitfulness of riches, etc. Thus, in all parables there is an allegorical element which must be interpreted to gain the interpretation of the whole parable. Without these allegorical elements, the parable makes little sense. In the parable of the merchant (Matt. 13: 45-46), the pearl is the kingdom of heaven and the merchant is the person who hears the gospel of the kingdom and imputes to the kingdom its proper worth. He is willing to give up everything else in order to possess the kingdom. Unless the merchant and the pearl have allegorical meanings, the parable is incomprehensible. Yet, the allegorical elements do not stand alone by themselves as they can in an allegory, but contribute to the central meaning of the parable. This is clear from the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares in which there are many allegorical elements which exist in a dependent relationship to the main story and the central thrust.

#### ***4. Rules for Interpreting Parables***

Ramm gives us four general principles for the interpretation of parables (pp. 279-286).

##### ***a. Parables must be understood in relationship to the doctrine of Christ and the kingdom of God.***

Parables are intensely Christological in that they are always about Christ who, in turn, is talking about His kingdom. We should never limit the teaching of the parable to a simple moral truth. They teach moral truth, but not truth which exists independently of Christ and the kingdom He has inaugurated (brought into being). When reading the parables we should be asking ourselves the following questions: “How does this parable relate to Christ? Are any of the persons in the parable Christ? Does the parable concern the word or teaching or mission of Christ?” (Ramm, p. 280).

To illustrate this principle, consider the parable found in Luke 14: 15-24.

When one of those who were reclining *at the table* with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"<sup>16</sup> But He said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many;<sup>17</sup> and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.'<sup>18</sup> "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.'<sup>19</sup> "Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.'<sup>20</sup> "Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'<sup>21</sup> "And the slave came *back* and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'<sup>22</sup> "And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'<sup>23</sup> "And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel *them* to come in, so that my house may be filled.'<sup>24</sup> 'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'" (Lk. 14:15-24 NASB)

To understand the parable, we need to identify the man who is giving the dinner, the slave, and the people who received the invitation to the dinner. It helps us to know the historical and cultural

context of this parable. According to the prevailing Jewish idea, when the Messiah came there would be a huge feast prepared to celebrate His coming. The man in v. 15 is an invited guest in the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees. We learn this from the immediate context of this passage (Lk. 14: 1—Remember, the context can never be ignored even when we are studying special literary devices like parables.) This invited guest, who undoubtedly was a Pharisee himself (since he would not have been invited otherwise), thinks that when this feast is prepared he and all ““respectable Jews”” will no doubt be the people invited to attend. In response to his statement Jesus tells this parable which answers the question: Who will attend the Messianic feast when the Messiah comes? (See Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p.392)

Another little bit of historical-cultural context is also helpful. According to custom, when a big feast was to be given, the invitations were sent out in advance. When the time of the feast drew near, the host would send out a servant to remind those who had accepted the first invitation that the feast was about to begin. The host of the dinner in this parable is God who had invited His people the Jewish nation to come to the Messianic feast—the kingdom of God—when He arrived. Repeatedly in the OT God had sent out His messengers the prophets to prepare Israel to participate in His kingdom, but always they had refused His invitation. The feast, then, is to be identified as the kingdom of God and the promises of this kingdom which the prophets had foretold. The first invitation had gone out and now the feast was ready. Christ represents the servant who is sent out by the host to remind those who had been given the first invitation that the kingdom promised in the OT is now “at hand” and that they must make haste in entering this kingdom.

One by one they make excuses for not coming to the feast. None of the excuses are adequate and are merely pretenses for their lack of interest in coming. The Jewish people are truly not interested in the message which Jesus Christ is giving them. The host of the dinner (God) gets justifiably angry with them for their disinterest and sends his servant (Jesus Christ in the flesh) to go out and invite those who would not consider themselves worthy to come to such a lavish feast because of their low standing in life. This is why the host tells his servant to “compel” them to come in; otherwise, they would have felt uncomfortable coming to such a rich man’s house. The “poor and crippled and blind and lame” are those who are marginalized by the rest of society. They are social undesirables who could not possibly be eligible for the kingdom of God. Remarkably, Jesus teaches in this parable that these untouchables will make it into the kingdom of God instead of the Pharisees because they accepted His invitation of pardon for their sins while the Pharisees rejected it (so also Joel B. Green, *Luke*).

We can see, then, that this parable is all about Christ and His kingdom. Through Christ, who is acting as the Father’s subordinate servant, God is calling out once again to His people, the Jews; but just like in OT times, the Jews are not interested in God’s offer of grace. Nevertheless, the feast will not be wasted. The socially ostracized will readily accept the invitation and will come to the feast in great multitudes so that God’s house will “be filled” (v.23).

The kingdom perspective in the parable emphasizes four things about the kingdom of God. First, the kingdom *has already come*; it is “at hand” and can be entered by faith. Secondly, the kingdom *is continuing until the end of the age until the return of Christ*. Third, the kingdom *will come*. Even though the kingdom is already here, it has not come in its full power and completeness which is reserved for a future time (cf. Matt. 25 and the parables of the talents and the virgins). Fourthly, the kingdom recognizes no socio-economic status. It is **inclusive of the lower socio-economic segments of society** who accept the invitation by faith, those who would not expect to be included in the kingdom.

***b. Secondly, parables must be understood in their cultural setting or context.***

He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." (Matt. 13:33 NASB)

The parables are drawn from the real-life experiences of common people living in the land of Palestine. In general, most of the examples and illustrations are drawn from the lives of poor, agricultural peasants; and we will get much help in the interpretation of the parables if we spend time learning the cultural setting employed by the parable. For example, the "measure" in Matt. 13: 33 is about one-fourth of a bushel or eight quarts. Three such measures were 24 quarts or six gallons. Ramm informs us that one tiny speck of leaven was sufficient to make bread to feed 162 people (p. 282). This gives us a better idea of the "penetrating power" and influence of the kingdom of God even in light of its small, insignificant beginnings.

The parable of the flour was told in conjunction with *the parable of the mustard seed* in 13: 31-32.

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;<sup>32</sup> and this is smaller than all *other* seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES." (Matt. 13:31-32 NASB)

The mustard seed illustrates the *outward* growth of the kingdom of God while the parable of the leaven illustrates the *inward* growth of the kingdom (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 565; also Geldenhuys, *Luke*, pp. 377-378). The mustard seed is one of the smallest agricultural seeds which grows quickly into a tree reaching ten to fifteen feet. Hendriksen observes that the two parables must be understood as a pair and not separated from one another. "...one might say that it is *because of the invisible principle of eternal life*, by the Holy Spirit planted in the hearts of the citizens of the kingdom and increasingly exerting its influence there, that this kingdom also expands visibly and outwardly, conquering territory upon territory" (Hendriksen, p. 565, emphasis mine).

The Jews wanted a Messianic kingdom which would exert its military might as it did in the days of David and Solomon. Even the 12 disciples were confused on this point and demonstrated their confusion on a number of occasions when they argued among themselves who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18: 1; Lk. 9: 46). Christ could indeed have ridden into Jerusalem on a white horse instead of a donkey, and he could have mobilized a military force—even though He would not have needed one (cf. Rev. 19). If He had taken this strategy, the kingdom of God would have remained small. He was not interested in exerting His reign merely over the small land of Palestine; He was interested in nothing less than taking over the whole world! The history of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, as well as the history of Germany or the Soviet Union has proven that the whole world cannot be conquered by military power. All kingdoms that have risen to power through military conquest or terror have eventually failed and have been overthrown. But the kingdom of heaven begins first in the heart and "conquers" the person by changing his will and his desires. He is not forced into the kingdom against his will, but is wooed into that kingdom by a change of heart.

The kingdom of heaven changes the whole life, and by changing the whole life, the kingdom of God influences everything the person does. It influences his marriage, his family, his work, his relationships with people, and even the way he votes in national elections if he lives in a free society. The "leaven" of the gospel penetrates every aspect of his life. As the kingdom changes one person's life, it will have an impact on others who are close to this person, especially his or her children and immediate family. Statistics will verify that most of the people who become Christians do so before they are 18 years of age through the influence of one or both parents. Beyond that age, the root of

sinful self-centeredness has grown so deep that it is difficult, humanly speaking, to reach them for Christ. In 1 Cor. 7: 14, Paul says that an unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband, meaning that the leavening influence of the kingdom penetrates throughout a home in which even one member of the marriage is converted to Christ.

We also have an influence upon people we work with, people we work for, and people who work for us. This is the whole point of Paul's appeal in Eph. 6: 1-9 and Col. 3: 18-25. It does not matter in the least whether we have a high status in life or a low status in life; the important thing is that we exert a Christian influence wherever we are so that the kingdom of God continues to spread like leaven. As this inward influence of the kingdom penetrates deeper and deeper into the whole "dough" of society, the outward manifestation of this kingdom will become more and more visible to everyone else. Some will be drawn to this kingdom by the outward behavior of the kingdom citizens (true believers). Others will hate the kingdom all the more as it reaches every corner of society and threatens the existence of darkness. Whether loved or hated, the kingdom will grow like a mustard seed because, like leaven in a lump of bread dough, nothing can stop the leaven of the kingdom from completing its leavening influence. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." It is highly unlikely that Jesus would tell us to pray for something which had no possibility of happening, especially since all power is given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28: 18). Praying for the kingdom is a means of its coming, not a mere academic exercise.

These two parables are important for pastors who often get discouraged in their work. We long to see instant success and growth, but if we review the history of the Christian church, there are only a few periods of rapid growth. Most of the outward growth of the kingdom of God is slow and virtually invisible. Yet, the kingdom is growing and will continue to grow until its consummation at the end of the age. Nothing will be able to stop it. Pastors are also prone to minimize the importance of the small tasks of the kingdom—feeding the hungry, visiting the downtrodden, encouraging the spiritually weak, and correcting those who are caught in sin. These are also the virtually invisible tasks of the kingdom which will accumulate into the large mustard tree which is plainly visible. Most kingdom work is not very flashy and sensational, and much of it is distasteful, but when every Christian (including those who are not pastors) is involved in the work of the kingdom, the affects will literally change the world—in fact, they already have. But if we fail to do the little things of the kingdom that we don't want to do or things which are inconvenient to do, the church will be irrelevant to the problems which plague our world.

### ***The parable of the unrighteous servant (Lk. 16: 1-13)***

Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this *manager* was reported to him as squandering his possessions.<sup>2</sup> "And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'<sup>3</sup> "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.<sup>4</sup> 'I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.'<sup>5</sup> "And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he *began* saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'<sup>6</sup> "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'<sup>7</sup> "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'<sup>8</sup> "And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.<sup>9</sup> "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.<sup>10</sup> "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is



unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.<sup>11</sup> "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you?"<sup>12</sup> "And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"<sup>13</sup> "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Lk. 16:1-13 NASB)

This is a difficult parable that requires information about lending practices during Jesus' day. Therefore, it especially lends itself as an illustration of the importance of historical-cultural context. (The following historical background is taken from *The Parables—Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* by Simon J. Kistemaker, pp. 187-193.)

As we learn from the story of Joseph in Genesis, rich people commonly appointed managers over their vast estates and bestowed upon them great trust and full control. The same practice persisted during the first century AD 1700 years later. It is difficult to determine how closely rich Jews were held to usury laws from the Law of Moses, but the prohibition against charging interest to **poor** Israelites was well-published (Exodus 22: 25; Leviticus 25: 35-36 and Deuteronomy 15: 7-8; 23: 19). To get around such laws, unscrupulous creditors would simply mask the interest rates on the loans by including the interest payments with the principle payments as one large lump sum without distinguishing between how much of the loan was principle and how much was interest. For example, if a man owed \$1000 and \$250 interest on this amount, the amount of the loan would read \$1250, as if this was the amount he borrowed, when in fact he had only borrowed \$1000, not \$1250. In this way, the creditor would be exempt from usury laws.

It is difficult to see how laws against charging any interest to poor Israelites would apply in this case to farmers who were far from poor; nevertheless, the interest rates represented here were very high. Apparently, there were other laws against **excessive** interest rates, which is the current application of "usury" today. One olive tree farmer owed 100 measures of oil, almost 4000 liters. Such a harvest required 1500 olive trees, a large orchard reflecting the man's wealth. Because of the high risk involved in growing olive trees, the interest on olive oil during that day was 80% plus 20% insurance, totaling 100%. Thus, when the borrower was told by the manager to write down 50 measures of oil rather than 100, he was paying what he **actually owed** (the principle payment) excluding the total interest owed. One hundred measures of wheat equaled 1000 bushels requiring a farm of 100 acres, another sizeable farm. The interest on wheat was 20% plus 5% insurance, yet the borrower was told to pay what he actually owed without interest, 80 measures of wheat (perhaps the 5% insurance was still applied; otherwise, the amount would have been 75 measures).

The manager was doing nothing illegally by reducing the amounts owed; he was only removing the interest payments which he had personally applied to the loans according to common usurious practices mentioned above. The master, of course, had not objected to the high interest rates imposed by his manager since he would profit by them without incurring any of the legal risk of being prosecuted for usury. Should the excessive rates be discovered, the manager alone would be liable, and the master would be held blameless by the courts. By reducing the debts, the manager was actually doing something honorable, removing excessive interest payments. If we wonder, then, why the manager is called "unrighteous" in v. 8, we only have to remember that he was unrighteous before he changed the debt records. His unscrupulous theft of his master's money occurred before the debt reduction and was the reason he was being dismissed (v. 1).

When the master discovered what his manager had done, he praised him not for stealing from him before this incident, but for shrewdly assuring himself a place in the heart of his borrowers. When he finally dismissed the manager, the man would be assured the favors of those whose bills had been reduced. Because of cultural practices, such favors owed would not be conveniently forgotten, but would exist as obligations that must be repaid. The master, for his part, could not object to the

courts that he had been swindled and then demand payment of the interest. Otherwise, he could be prosecuted for usury. Besides, since the debtors believed the debt reduction occurred with the master's full approval, they now had a very favorable opinion of him which would serve as social currency in the master's favor. In other words, the "buzz" (gossip) around town would be that the master was a very generous man. At any rate, the master plays along with the whole thing by publicly praising his manager. If you can't beat them, join them.

Certainly, Jesus is not condoning (approving) immoral and illegal accounting practices, nor is He praising swindlers. What the master praises is not the manager's dishonesty, but his **shrewdness**; and it should be duly noted that Jesus refers to the thief as "the **unrighteous**" manager whose dishonesty had been discovered earlier by his master. However, Jesus does commend **one particular trait** of the manager, his **shrewdness** in winning friends during this lifetime (the present age, "this age") and his planning for the future. The manager could have demanded the full debt, pocketed the money, and headed out of town on a fast camel. Instead, he planned ahead without becoming a fugitive from the law. From this point on, each debtor, a man of considerable means himself, would be happy to provide him **substantial** help. Thus, his plan was a long-range plan projecting many years into the future. Rather than being fixed on the **present consumption** of ill-gotten riches, he believed that having many good friends for the rest of his life was more valuable.

Now for the application. If believers ("the sons of light") would be equally shrewd in their use of "unrighteous wealth" (see below), they would be more inclined to use it in ways which would enhance their enjoyment of the **future age**. Rather than selfish planning for an extravagant, short-lived retirement, they would be generous with others, give to missions, the poor, and develop businesses which employ others, thus preventing poverty. In other words, they would use their (?) money **to store up treasures in heaven** in the age to come rather than being preoccupied with present consumption in **this age**. When they die, the friends they have made on earth will welcome them into their eternal homes in heaven. Their generosity will never be forgotten and will reap eternal rewards. Besides, it's really not **their** money. The point made in the parable is that the manager is making friends for himself with **his master's money**. Analogously, our money is "**another's**". It's God's money which has been entrusted to us as stewards during our earthly sojourn in this world, a short-term venture. This money will soon be left behind when we die and will cease to have any relevance in the future age when economic life will not be regulated by currency and scarcity. Shouldn't we be wise by using that which is another's to ensure a warm welcome into the heavenly kingdom?

The people of the world know how to use worldly possessions and apply materialistic ways. At times they show remarkable shrewdness in handling financial assets. On the other hand, Christians who have learned the standard of God's Law are often inclined to relax and modify Christian principles. They want the best of two worlds: they want to have the Christian faith couched in the comfort of an affluent society; they want to be loved by God and at the same time be praised by man. Jesus said, "The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light." If the people who do not profess to serve God live by the standards of the world, should not those who profess to be his people uphold the Law of God and live by divine standards? Should they not practice what they preach, and show by word and deed that money will ultimately fail but heavenly riches will last forever? In his pastoral letter, James admonishes Christians who opt for a double life. "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4: 4) (Kistemaker, *Parables*, p. 193).

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rich man</li> <li>• manager</li> <li>• "this <i>manager</i> was reported to him as squandering his possessions."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God, who owns everything [Yet, the rich man's character is <b>antithetical</b> to God's]</li> <li>• people who handle God's wealth</li> <li>• one of the "sons of this age" who knows how the world works and how to use it to his advantage</li> </ul>

***Earthly Elements (continued)***

- "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness"
- "so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings."

***Spiritual-Analogical Elements (continued)***

- Use worldly wealth to make eternal friends
- Worldly wealth will fail, either because it is used up or lost or because it will cease to have any relevance or value in the future eschatological age. "Eternal dwellings" is contrasted with the earthly dwellings in the parable

Jesus provides an additional commentary in vv. 10-13.

- He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much
- he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much
- Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of unrighteous wealth*, who will entrust the *true riches* to you? (this statement is parallel to the next one)
- And if you have not been faithful in *the use of that which is another's*, who will give you *that which is your own*?

- Our management of God's money on earth for a short while is a "**little thing**" compared to eternal responsibilities entrusted to us in heaven
- If we are unfaithful in the use of "unrighteous wealth"—a little thing—then we would also be unfaithful in "much"—eternal responsibilities or eternal wealth.
- Why should God entrust us with true riches—eternal wealth and responsibility—if we have not been faithful in the use of "unrighteous wealth" while on earth?
- Therefore, "unrighteous wealth" is equated with "that which is another's"—that is, what God has entrusted to us *on earth*—earthly or worldly wealth. "**That which is your own**" is "**true riches**" or wealth and responsibilities given to us for

***c. Third, parables must be interpreted according to certain exegetical rules.***

Ramm gives us four specific, exegetical rules for interpreting parables (pp. 283-285).

***(1) Determine the one central truth which the parable intends to teach.***

This is the “golden rule” of the interpretation of parables. The typical parable gives us one single point of comparison, not two, three, or four. Notice we are saying one “**central**” point. Other lessons may be learned (see below) but generally the parable is spoken with one central purpose in mind, usually determined by the context.

All the details of the parable are important to a parable’s effectiveness, but not all the details have “independent significance”. Interpreters throughout the years have used a humorous analogy to help us remember this principle: “Don’t make a parable walk on all fours.” That is, don’t consider all the details of equal importance in the same way that all four legs of an animal have equal importance. Think of the less important details of a parable as the accessories of a bicycle. The bicycle cannot operate without the tires and the handle bars, but it can operate effectively without the reflectors and the horn.

***The parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk. 10: 30-37***

Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.<sup>31</sup> "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.<sup>32</sup> "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,<sup>34</sup> and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?"<sup>37</sup> And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same." (Lk. 10:30-37 NASB)

The main point of this parable is found at the end. The context of the parable is the conversation between Jesus and a lawyer.

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>26</sup> And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"<sup>27</sup> And he answered, "YOU

SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."<sup>28</sup> And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."<sup>29</sup> But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Lk. 10:25-29 NASB)

Jesus answers the question with this parable, and at the end He asks His own question, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" The answer to this question, and the application, was beyond dispute: "Go and do the same." In other words, go and become a true neighbor to anyone who needs your help, not just someone of your own race, religious persuasion, or socio-economic group.

This is the main point, but the main point is enhanced by the details given. For example, the man beaten beside the road was bypassed by two Jews—a Jewish priest and a Levite (of the tribe of Levi who served in the temple but were not priests). The man who came to his rescue was a despised Samaritan. While the two Jews were afraid of getting involved for fear of their lives or for fear of inconveniencing themselves, the Samaritan expended heroic efforts to save the man's life with no consideration of the victim's ethnic or religious background. The important thing was that the man needed help, not whether he was a Jew, Gentile, or a half-breed Samaritan like himself. We can see from this parable that the individual details, while important to the whole parable, cannot stand alone as having an importance all by themselves; they merely contribute to the whole. Interpreted in this way, the Jewish priest and the Levite may very well be singled out as representing the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders and experts in the Mosaic Law, among whom this lawyer was numbered. Knowledge of the law is nothing without obedient application.

### ***The parable of the Prodigal Son—Lk. 15: 11-32***

And He said, "A man had two sons."<sup>12</sup> "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them."<sup>13</sup> "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living."<sup>14</sup> "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished."<sup>15</sup> "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine."<sup>16</sup> "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him."<sup>17</sup> "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!'<sup>18</sup> 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;'<sup>19</sup> 'I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"<sup>20</sup> "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."<sup>21</sup> "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'<sup>22</sup> "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet;'<sup>23</sup> and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;'<sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."<sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing."<sup>26</sup> "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be."<sup>27</sup> "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.'<sup>28</sup> "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him."<sup>29</sup> "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends;'<sup>30</sup> but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'<sup>31</sup> "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.'<sup>32</sup> "But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.'" (Lk. 15:11-32 NASB)

It is clear that Jesus is telling the parable to rebuke the Pharisees and scribes for their hardness of heart and lack of compassion for sinners who repent. The Pharisees and scribes are represented by the elder brother. If we press the individual details of this parable too much, we would have to conclude that the kingdom of heaven still belongs to them even in their unbelief, for in v. 31 the father says to his eldest son, "...all that is mine is yours." Obviously, this is a conclusion not warranted from the parable. It does not teach that hard-hearted Pharisees like the elder brother will inherit the kingdom of heaven. They must first repent.

Although the central purpose of this parable was to rebuke the self-righteousness of the Pharisees, other important truths must not be ignored. It also teaches the true nature of repentance (the prodigal son) and the unrestrained love of the Heavenly Father who is eager to forgive us when we repent. It also teaches us that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents, and so should we. The same can be said of the parable in Lk. 18: 9-14 which teaches both the condemnation of self-righteousness and the forgiveness which follows from genuine repentance—both of which really constitute one central idea. At the risk of being too strict, I would recommend following Ramm's recommendation to look for the once central truth of the parable (See also Terry, p. 282).

***(2) Second, determine whether Jesus Himself provides an interpretation of the parable.***

Sometimes He does so for the sake of His immediate disciples. The parable of the sower is interpreted by the Lord in Matt.13: 18-23. The parable of the tares (weeds) among the wheat is explained in 13: 36-43. We should take note of the fact that in His explanation, Christ makes a one to one correspondence of the symbol and the thing symbolized. The one who sows the seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed refers to the sons of the kingdom and the tares or weeds to the sons of the devil. The one who sowed the weeds is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. All of these details are essential to the parable. However, Christ assigns the parable one primary meaning: at the end of the age, Christ will send His angels to weed out unbelievers from the field to reveal the glory of His people (v.40-43).

Some expositors have interpreted the field in this parable as the church, an interpretation which would lead us to believe that our conception of the church should include the inevitability of an unbelieving membership within it. While it is certainly true that there are unbelievers who are members of the church, this parable does not sanction the notion that unbelievers are part of the church **by definition**. *Ekklesia* (the Greek term for "church") means called out ones—that is, those who are **called out of the world**. Nor does the parable eliminate the responsibility of believers to "weed out" those members who are living in open disobedience to covenantal obligations (See 1 Cor. 5; Matt. 18: 15-20). Jesus never contradicts himself. Jesus does not say that the field is the **church**; He says that the field is the **world**. However, Chamblin's comments lend credibility to the idea that Jesus has the church in view (*Matthew*, unpublished syllabus, p. 99).

The **word** "church" (*ekklesia*) does not appear in the passage; but the **concept** of the church is present, as the community in which the Rule of God is realized during the time between the advents of Christ. Moreover, the church is here represented as a **mixed** company, consisting of true believers ("the sons of the kingdom") and false ("the sons of the evil one"). It is not enough to think of "the sons of the evil one" as standing in the world, outside (or alongside) the church; for the picture speaks of the sowing of tares **among** the wheat, and the explanation speaks of the angel's **weeding out of his kingdom** "all who do evil." (emphasis his).

John Calvin also includes the church within the scope of Jesus' words, and with his characteristic wit, offers this application (*Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. 2, pp. 121-122):

All that he [Christ] intended was to exhort those who believed in him not to lose courage, because they are under the necessity of retaining wicked men among them; and, next, to restrain and moderate the zeal of those who fancy that they are not at liberty to join in the society with any but pure angels.

[For other examples of parables interpreted by Christ, see the parable of the dragnet (Matt. 13: 47-48; explained in 13: 50-51), and the parable of the vineyard owner (Mk. 12: 1-9; explained in 12: 10-12).]

**(3) Third, study the context of the parable to determine whether the context provides clues for interpreting the parable.**

We can never get away from the importance of the **context**. Just as we must read the context to determine whether Christ interprets the parable for us, we must also read the context for the **occasion or reason** why Christ tells the parable in the first place. As we have seen, the parable of the Prodigal Son is told because some of the scribes and Pharisees were murmuring about Jesus' association with and acceptance of sinners (Lk. 15: 2). The story of the Good Samaritan is presented to the expert in Mosaic Law who was wishing to excuse his own apathy (Lk. 10: 25-29). The parables of the fig tree (Matt. 24: 32-34), the thief (Matt. 24: 43-44), the slaves (Matt. 24: 45-51), the ten virgins (Matt. 25: 1-13), and the talents (25: 14-30) are interwoven within the fabric of Jesus' teaching on His second coming in judgment (See Matt. 23: 37-24: 31; Matt. 24: 34-42; Matt. 25: 31-46; this last reference is also given in parabolic form). Their purpose is the same—to encourage readiness and alertness. The parable of the wedding feast (Lk. 14: 8-11) is given in response to the Pharisees seeking to exalt themselves by picking out the places of honor at the host's house (14: 7). Likewise, Jesus told the parable of the big dinner in response to the self-satisfied Pharisee seated with Him who probably believed that no respectable Jew would be left out of the celebrations when the Messiah came (Lk. 14: 15-24). Jesus warned him that the Messiah had already come, but Jews like him would be left out of the celebrations because they failed to recognize Him as their Messiah. The rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31) is told in the presence of the Pharisees who were "lovers of money" (16: 14). These same Pharisees were also demanding that Jesus produce a sign so they could believe in Him (Lk. 16: 31 compared with Lk. 11: 16, 29; Jn. 2: 18; 6: 3).

## Lesson Four Questions

1-22. Parallelisms: Choose the best answer to the question by placing an S or A in the blank. Is the verse synthetic parallelism (S) or an antithetic parallelism (A)? Do not write out the word.

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|----------------------|----------------------|
| ___ 1. Ps. 51: 5     | ___ 12. Prov. 12: 24 |
| ___ 2. Ps. 53: 2     | ___ 13. Prov. 12: 15 |
| ___ 3. Ps. 52: 2     | ___ 14. Ps. 68: 20   |
| ___ 4. Ps. 37: 21    | ___ 15. Ps. 69: 5    |
| ___ 5. Ps. 37: 23-24 | ___ 16. Ps. 69: 14   |
| ___ 6. Ps. 51: 4     | ___ 17. Ps. 21: 7    |
| ___ 7. Ps. 24: 1     | ___ 18. Prov. 24: 1  |
| ___ 8. Ps. 24: 2     | ___ 19. Prov. 23: 26 |
| ___ 9. Ps. 34: 15    | ___ 20. Prov. 13: 9  |
| ___ 10. Prov. 12: 1  | ___ 21. Ps. 1: 1-2   |
| ___ 11. Prov. 12: 2  | ___ 22. Matt. 7: 7   |

23-35. Similes and Metaphors: Identify the following verses as a simile (S) or metaphor (M) by placing these letters in the blank.

\_\_\_ 23. Matt. 13: 44

\_\_\_ 24. Matt. 13: 33

\_\_ 25. Matt. 13: 3

\_\_ 26. John 6: 41

\_\_\_ 27. John 10: 14

\_\_\_ 28. John 10: 9

\_\_\_ 29. Matt. 25: 1, 14

\_\_\_ 30. Matt. 24: 32

\_\_\_ 31. Luke 11: 34

\_\_\_ 32. Mark 4: 26

\_\_\_ 34. Mark 10: 15

\_\_\_ 35. Luke 9: 58

36. Explain the difference between allegorization and allegory.

37. What was Jesus' purpose of speaking in parables?

38. Why is the study of parable important?

39-82. Identify the spiritual-analogical elements of the following parables.

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<i>Matthew 13: 33</i>	<i>Matthew 13: 33</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• leaven</li> <li>• woman</li> <li>• hid in three pecks of flour</li> <li>• until it was all leavened</li> </ul>	
<i>Luke 13: 21</i>	<i>Luke 13: 21</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• leaven</li> <li>• woman</li> <li>• hid in three pecks of flour</li> <li>• until it was all leavened</li> </ul>	

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price—Matt. 13: 44-46

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<i>Hidden Treasure</i>	<i>Hidden Treasure</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• treasure hidden in the field</li> <li>• a man found and hid <i>again</i></li> <li>• from joy over it</li> <li>• he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.</li> </ul>	
<i>Pearl</i>	<i>Pearl</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a merchant seeking fine pearls</li> <li>• upon finding one pearl of great value</li> <li>• went and sold all that he had</li> </ul>	



## The Parable of the Dragnet—Matt. 13: 47-50

***Earthly Element***

- dragnet cast into the sea
- they (fishermen)
- gathering *fish* of every kind
- it was filled
- gathered the good *fish* into containers
- the bad they threw away

***Spiritual-Analogical Elements***

## The Parable of the Rich Fool—Lk. 12: 16-21

***Earthly Elements***

- The land of a rich man was very productive
- I will tear down my barns and build larger ones
- Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*
- take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry
- This *very* night your soul is required of you
- who will own what you have prepared?

***Spiritual-Analogical Elements***

## The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin—Lk. 15: 3-10

***Earthly Elements***

- a man
- a hundred sheep
- lost one of them
- go after the one which is lost
- When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing
- calls together his friends and his neighbors 'Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

***Spiritual-Analogical Elements***

## The parable of the big dinner—Lk. 14: 15-24

***Earthly Elements***

- man
- big dinner
- invited many
- he sent his slave

***Spiritual-Analogical Elements***

## *Lesson Five*

### *IV. Types and Symbols*

This is one of the most interesting studies in hermeneutics because it involves the study of Biblical Theology, the study of progressive revelation in the history of salvation. Since the Bible is the history of Christ and His relationship to His redeemed people, we should not be too surprised to see pictures (types) of Christ throughout the OT literature. Ramm's observation on this point is helpful.

The heart of typology is the similarity between the two Testaments. If the two covenants are made too dissimilar [*as in dispensational theology*] then the justification of typology is either weakened or broken....

It is also apparent that there is a fundamental harmony between the Old Testament theology and the New....It is shown by Paul that the act of faith is the same in both Testaments (Romans 4); that the process of justification is the same (Romans 4: 22-24); that the same basic system of sacrifice underlies both Testaments (Hebrews 9, 10); that the life of faith in the Old Testament is the model for the New Testament saints (Hebrews 11); that the doctrine of sin is the same...(Romans 3); that the Messiah of the Old Testament is the Savior in the New (Hebrews 1). It is this profound similarity of the two Testaments which makes predictive prophecy and typology a possibility (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 229, my note in brackets).

A type is basically a resemblance of some person, thing, place or event to some other person, thing, place, or event which occurs at a future time. Berkhof says this is one of the features which distinguish a type from a mere symbol. A symbol is a sign which represents something *past, present, or future*, but a type always represents something in the *future* (Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 144). But this distinction is sometimes difficult to determine. For example, when Moses lifted his staff above his head in the battle against the enemies of Israel, the Israelites prevailed. When he lowered his staff, their enemies prevailed (Ex. 17: 8-13). This event is obviously symbolic of the fact that the Lord was fighting their battles, and that His blessing was

necessary for their future well-being. But it appears also typical of the fact that God's people are delivered in the same way today, by God's power and not by human strength. However, I think we would be mistaken to find in this event a type of some moral mandate in the NT—for example, the lifting up of hands in prayer (1 Tim. 2:8).

Goliath, the giant Philistine who taunted the armies of Israel, could very well symbolize the strength of the enemies of God's people, and in that general sense he is also a type. When Moses struck the rock in the wilderness and water spilled out (Num. 20: 11), this was a type of Christ, who is the rock and the water of life (1 Cor. 10: 4). Other examples of types in the OT are the following:

1. The serpent in the wilderness (Num. 21: 1-9 and Jn. 3: 14)
2. King David (2 Chronicles 6: 16; 7: 18 and Acts 2: 25-36)
3. Solomon, the son of David chosen to reign over Israel (a type of Christ, the chosen son of God to reign over the world)
4. Moses, a type of Christ who delivered Israel from slavery (Dt. 18 and Acts 3: 22)
5. Moses, a type of all true believers who would rather suffer the afflictions of God's people than enjoy the pleasures of the world (Heb. 11: 24-25)
6. Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem (Gen. 14 and Heb. 7)
7. Samson (Judges 16: 30b; Samson is a type of Christ in one specific sense. As with all the other judges of Israel, he delivered Israel from their enemies. We must not stress the type too strongly to include the sinfulness of Samson and the sinfulness of the other judges. This principle must be followed in the interpretation of all the types.
8. Abraham, who is a type of all believers who are justified by faith (Rom. 4: 3 and Gen. 15: 6)
9. The Aaronic priesthood and the OT sacrificial system (Hebrews)
10. The wars of devotion against the Canaanites (a type of God's warfare against sinners— Eph. 6: 10-18)
11. The flood (a type of the total destruction of unbelievers—2 Pet 3: 1-9)
12. The nation of Israel (a type of the Church—Gal. 3: 29; 6: 16; Rom. 9: 6-8)
- Moses' intercession for Israel (a type of the intercession of Christ—Ex. 32 and Heb. 7: 25)
13. The peace of Solomon's reign (a type of the victory of Christ over His enemies—1 Kings 4: 24; Ps. 2)
14. The Law (a type of disciplinarian which leads us to Christ—Gal. 3: 24)
15. The physical creation (a type of the new creation in Christ—2 Cor. 5: 17)
16. Joseph who is rejected by his brothers and ill-treated (a type of Christ who is rejected by his kinsmen and put to death) (Note other types related to Joseph below).

These are only a few of the types we can find in the OT. A **type** is a picture in the OT of a future reality in the NT which is called the **antitype**. For example, Moses is the type of Christ who is the antitype. In all of the examples given above, notice that there is a NT reference which can be given which identifies the antitype of the type. A type always has a NT reference. Whether this NT reference must be explicitly stated in the NT is a matter of debate. If my understanding of the story of Mephibosheth is accurate, it is obvious that I do not believe that something has to be specifically mentioned in the NT as a type before it can serve this purpose. Mephibosheth is not mentioned in the NT as a type, but he serves this purpose very well in my opinion.

Note the similarities between Joseph and Jesus Christ. (Pascal, *Pensées*, 11.768, cited in Waltke, note 71, p. 142)

- |         |  |  |
|---------|--|--|
| christo | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loved by his father</li> <li>• Sent by his father to his brothers</li> <li>• Innocent</li> <li>• Sold for twenty pieces of silver</li> <li>• Becomes lord and savior of his brothers</li> <li>• The savior of strangers (Egyptians) and the world because of a plot to</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loved by His Father</li> <li>• Sent by His Father to His brethren, the Jews</li> <li>• Innocent</li> <li>• Sold for thirty pieces of silver</li> <li>• Becomes Lord and Savior of His brothers</li> </ul> |
|---------|--|--|

### ***A. Essentials of a Type***

Terry gives us three essentials for a type (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 337-338).

#### ***1. There must be some notable point of resemblance or analogy between the two.***

Terry goes on to say that there may also be dissimilarities (points of difference). For example, Adam is a type of Christ in that he is the federal head of the human race, and now Christ is the federal head of God's elect people (Rom. 5). This is the "notable point of resemblance." But this is the only point of similarity. Adam was a sinner and Christ is sinless. Also, in Adam, all die while in Christ all who believe in Him will live (1 Cor. 15: 45-49); therefore, the resemblance between the type and the antitype may be antithetical rather than synonymous. The dissimilarity can be as important as the similarity. We will also find in the antitype something higher and nobler than in the type. David was a good king, but he is nothing in comparison to Christ; nevertheless, David is a type of Christ. Solomon was the wisest man in all the earth, and was, thus, a type of Christ. But Solomon became unwise and built heathen altars in honor of his many foreign wives. Christ was tempted with idolatry in the wilderness, but held fast to the Law that forbade worshipping anything other than the true God.

#### ***2. There must be evidence that the type was designed and appointed by God to represent the thing typified.***

This principle is tricky, and I agree with it *only with qualifications*. As in our discussion of allegories, we must be cautious not to let our imagination run away with us and allow us to come up with fanciful comparisons. Otherwise, Biblical typology is lost and we see everything as a type. How do we avoid this error? We must ask the question: Does the Scripture itself indicate a typological relationship? I do not believe this requires a formal statement in the NT that something is a type, but it does require evidence from the NT which is "clearly apprehended" (Terry, p. 340). In other words, can the type be seen *clearly* without straining the typological relationship? Some types are clearly identified. The manna which the Lord gave the Israelites in the wilderness is a type of Jesus Christ who is the "bread of life" (Jn. 6: 26-58). But such an identification need not be so explicitly stated: "this is a type" (cf. Heb. 11: 19). The relationship can be more subtle (less explicit) and still be valid. For example in Col. 2: 11-13, Paul implies that circumcision in the OT is a type of regeneration in the new covenant, though this relationship is not expressly stated as a type/antitype relationship.

Some expositors, such as Marsh, have insisted that nothing can be considered a type unless the NT specifically designates it as a type. The strictness of this principle is unacceptable and has been

debated on the basis of the fact that the NT and the OT are interconnected (See Ramm's quote above, p. 54 in notes). On Marsh's terms, we would have to wait for the fulfillment of a prophecy in the NT before we could declare it to be a prophecy in the OT. Further, if the tabernacle of the OT is a type (something attested by Hebrews), then the different parts of the Tabernacle were also types. The golden lampstand of Ex. 26 and the seven lampstands of Rev. 2 are obviously connected. The one typifies the nation of Israel being the light of the world, something which is now a reality in local or regional churches (seven lampstands) so long as churches are true to their Lord, otherwise their lamps will be removed. However, Ramm warns us against an unrestrained imagination which interprets all actions of the priests and all elements of the sacrifices, etc. as types. Not all of these "have precise New Testament counterparts". He also warns us against using types to prove a point of doctrine. They are better used to "illustrate New Testament truth" (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 220-221, 230-231).

### ***3. The type must prefigure something in the future.***

In Col. 2: 17 Paul indicates that the food laws of the OT, the festivals, new moons, and Sabbath days are a "shadow" of what was to come in the new covenant while the "substance" of these things is found in or "belongs to" Christ. Therefore, a type is a shadow of a future reality.

## ***B. Classes of Types***

Terry gives us five principal classes of types in the OT (pp. 338-340). We will cover four of them here.

### ***1. Typical persons***

Adam, Abraham, Moses, Goliath, David, and Solomon have already been mentioned. To these two may be added Elijah who ascended into heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2: 1-11; v. 11 seems to imply that Elijah enjoyed the ride on a chariot of fire) thus typifying the ascension of Christ. Elijah was also a type of John the Baptist (Mk. 9: 13). One other typical function of Abraham is His depiction in Gen. 22 as a type of God the Father sacrificing His only begotten son. Joshua is a type of Christ in leading the Israelites into the land of Canaan, the land of promise, even as Jesus (the NT name for Joshua) leads His people into the new heavens and new earth. Solomon is a type of Christ because he was "wiser than all men" (1Kings 4: 29-34; at least, he was wiser until his foreign wives turned his heart away from God).

### ***2. Typical institutions***

This category includes all the sacrifices of the OT economy. Peter specifically attributes the redemption of God's people to the blood of Christ who is the "lamb unblemished and spotless" (1 Pet. 1: 18-19). Even the case laws of the OT have typological significance. The cities of refuge provide the person guilty of involuntary (accidental) manslaughter a place of protection from the revenge of family members (Num. 35: 9-34). In this function it is a type of the gospel which provides protection from the consequences of sin which is death. The Sabbath "is a type of the believer's everlasting rest (Heb. 4: 9)" (Terry, p. 339.) The OT Passover is a type of the Lord's Supper in which the Lord invites us to fellowship with Him in peace. He is not at war with His people as He was with the Egyptians and is now with all unbelievers. The theocracy of Israel is a type of the kingdom of God in the NT, a kingdom inaugurated by Christ, progressively realized in history, and consummated in the return of Christ and the judgment of the world.

### ***3. Typical offices***

All the prophets of the OT were typical of Christ in that they proclaimed the word of the Lord—“Thus says the Lord.” Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the entire line of prophets since He was the Word of God in human flesh (See Dt. 18: 15). The priests were typical of Christ as those who officiated at the altar, particularly the high priest who alone was allowed into the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of the atonement for the sins of the whole nation. When Jesus went into the Holy of Holies at His death, He entered with his own blood to make atonement for the whole elect people of God (Heb. 9). The kingly office of David is a type of Christ and the kingdom of Christ is its fulfillment. In fact, all the kings of the OT in the Davidic line were typical of Christ, those who were wicked included. If a king was righteous, his righteousness pointed to the righteousness of Christ. If he was wicked, his failure as king highlighted the success of the kingdom of Christ in displaying the honor and glory of God. God methodologically allowed many kings to fail so that the King which He was later to install on Mt. Zion would display His glory (Ps. 2). No king of Judah was perfectly righteous. David, a “man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13: 14) committed adultery and murder; and Solomon, the wisest man on earth, reverted to idolatry in his old age (1Kings 11: 1-8). The regal (kingly) failures point to the necessity of a king over Israel (the people of God) who is not merely a man beset with sin, but the God-man who is sinless. Christ unites all the offices of the OT into one person, the God-man Jesus Christ who is prophet, priest, and king.

#### ***4. Typical events***

The flood is a type of the eternal destruction of the wicked (2 Pet. 3: 3-12); the covenant made with Abraham in Gen. 15 is a type of the new covenant in Christ (Gal. 3: 6-9); the sojourn in the wilderness a type of the Christian’s sojourn on earth; captivity in Egypt is a type of our captivity to this present evil age, entrance into the land of promise is a type of the entrance into heaven; the conquest of Canaan is a type of the total victory of God over the world of sinners and the devil; Abraham’s call out of Ur of Chaldea is typical of the Christian’s call out of the world into the kingdom of God (Ekklesia means “called out ones”). Abraham’s inheritance of Canaan is typical of the Christian’s inheritance of the new heavens and the new earth. When Moses was hidden from the wrath of Pharaoh, this event was a type of Herod’s attempt to kill the infant Jesus. Mephibosheth, I believe, is a type of all sinners, hopeless and helpless, standing before the awesome majesty of God. Again, this is only a small sampling of typical events which could be cited.

#### **Lesson Five**

In each of the following types, who or what is represented? If Christ is the answer, tell me in what specific way Christ is represented.

1. King David
2. Moses
3. Abraham
4. The physical creation
5. The flood
6. Israel
7. Joseph
8. Conquering the land of Canaan
9. Adam
10. Manna
11. Circumcision

12. OT sacrifices
  13. Solomon
  14. The Sabbath
  15. Mephibosheth
  16. Abraham's inheritance of the land
17. What are the two most important essentials of a type?
  18. Must an OT type always be identified as a type in the NT? Explain.
  19. What are the four classifications of types and give three examples of each.

## ***Lesson Six***

### ***IV. Prophecy***

Prophecy is perhaps the most difficult genre (form) of Biblical literature to interpret, and one about which there is the most disagreement among evangelical scholars. Ramm highlights this difficulty in the following quotation:

The prophetic material of Scripture is to be found from Genesis to Revelation. To assemble each passage, to thoroughly digest its meaning, to arrange the passages in a prophetic harmony, would involve a prodigious [amazing] memory, years of exacting work, a masterful knowledge of Biblical languages, an exhaustive reading of prophetic literature, a keen exegetical sense, a thorough knowledge of the histories of many peoples and a knowledge of all relevant archaeological materials. And yet some claim that prophetic Scripture is as easy to interpret as the prose passages [ordinary form of written or spoken languages] of the New Testament! (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 245).

Berkhof has defined prophecy as “the proclamation of that which God revealed”. The prophets were ordained of God to explain the meaning of past events, clarify events which were taking place in the present, and predict what was going to happen in the future. Normally people think of the prophets as simply predictors of the future. Actually, most of the prophetic literature has little to do with predicting the future and mostly to do with admonition, rebuke, and warning to those who persisted in sin, as well as comfort and encouragement for those who were willing to forsake their sin and repent. In this more limited sense of the word—declaring the word and will of God rather than predicting the future—the prophetic gift continues.

#### ***A. The Institution of Prophecy***

Allan Harman (*Approaching the Psalms: Judges to Poets*, unpublished syllabus, pp. 68-69) mentions many heathen practices of the Canaanites in use when the Israelites entered into the Land of Promise:

- Passing through the fire, a practice connected with the worship of Molech (2 Kings 23: 10; Jer. 32: 35)
- Divination (Ezek. 21: 21; Gen. 44: 5: 15)
- Magic or sorcery (Dt. 18: 10, 14; 2 Kings 21: 6)
- Spiritists, mediums, or necromancers who spoke from within a person (Lev. 20: 27) and who got messages from the dead for the living (1 Sam. 28: 1-20)

In contrast to these illegitimate means of discerning the will of God, the Lord had promised Israel a prophet in whom He would put His words (Dt. 18: 9-22). Moses, who had received the will of the Lord through the Law given at Sinai, was the first of such prophets. The prophet coming after him would be like him. He would be an Israelite, not a foreigner (Judges 22: 24). God would put his words in his mouth, and the Israelites were commanded to listen to everything he says. This was the means of God communicating with His people and supplying additional information to them which Moses did not supply. All other forms of discerning the will of God were forbidden.

We know from Acts 3: 22-23 and Acts 7: 37 that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise of a prophet for Israel, but it is clear from the history of Israel that the promise of Dt. 18 applies to the entire institution of prophecy scattered throughout OT history. Every true prophet of Israel, including Moses, is a type of Jesus Christ, and every true prophet had something to contribute to the ongoing instruction from the Lord. In this sense, the prophetic institution was similar to the ongoing priestly institution. Just as the priestly institution pointed to the priesthood of Christ, all the prophets from Moses onward pointed to the prophetic ministry of Christ.

### ***B. The Function of the Prophet***

***1. As the priest represented man before God, the prophet represented God before man.*** He was God's spokesman (Amos 7: 14-16).

***2. Secondly, the prophets guarded the theocracy (the kingdom of God)—that is, they applied the Law of Moses to the contemporary situation of Israel.*** This can be seen in the way Amos preached against the oppression of the poor during the reign of Jeroboam II. There were many provisions for the poor in the Law of Moses, all of which were being neglected during the time of Jeroboam II. Harman makes a very interesting observation concerning the relationship between the prophetic office and the kingly office (pp. 69-70, emphasis mine).

Though the institution [of prophet] was promulgated [made known officially or publicly] in Deuteronomy 18, yet the prophets only came to the fore at the time when the theocratic kingdom received an earthly ruler. The idea of the kingdom was a dominant theme thereafter, and the task of the prophets was to keep it as a true representation of the kingdom of the Lord. The office of prophet was needed to keep Israel in a true covenant relationship. ***The presence of a king promoted the greatest possible source of breach [break] of covenant relationship, as a centralized bureaucratic office would seek solutions to problems in purely political terms.***

A corollary [a truth which follows from the one above] of this is that a clash between the kings and prophets was inevitable [certain to come]. This was because the prophet was a spokesman for the Lord, and constantly the prophets had to intervene in the life of the nation and advise the king on political matters. ***They were not content to accept the separation of religion from politics.***

Many examples of this adversarial (antagonistic) relationship between kings and prophets occur in OT history, the most notable being the strained relationship between Samuel and King Saul (1 Sam. 13). Later the theocracy is threatened by David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and God summons Nathan the prophet to remind David that he is not a law unto himself but stands under the



Law of God and subject to its demands (2 Samuel 13; in v. 13 the prophet seems to imply that failure to repent would have meant death). Another well-known example is the relationship between Ahab and Elijah, who challenges the prophets of Baal to a “duel” (1 Kings 18) and rebukes Ahab and Jezebel for murder and theft and pronounces their future judgment (1 Kings 21 compared with 1 Kings 22: 24-28 and 2 Kings 9: 29-36). Throughout the OT witness, the so-called “divine right of kings” to do whatever they wish is flatly denied. God alone was the absolute king under whose rule all earthly kings must submit (See also Dan. 4 and 5).

These examples prove that **the word of God is never subordinate to the rule of men**—even powerful men. The opposite is true; men are subordinate to the rule of God’s law. This principle has been a very important one throughout the history of mankind and continues to be today. The preaching of the word of God is not limited to private citizens, but must be applied to kings, presidents, senators, representatives, and members of parliament. No man is a law unto himself but must one day stand in judgment for the kind of public leader he has been, whether good or bad. He will be held more accountable than the average citizen for the privileges of rule he has been given. This heightened accountability is implied in the OT prophecies in which kings are addressed as “shepherds” who have led the people of Israel astray (Jer. 23 compared with Jer. 22).

Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish theologian of the seventh century, challenged the common opinion of his day that kings were absolute rulers who could operate outside the boundaries of the law of God (*Lex Rex*). His views were radical at the time (his book was ordered by the king to be burned), but they laid the groundwork for the future democracy of the United States. In the US, the misinterpretation of the first amendment to imply the separation of the state from religion has led to the radical secularization of society. The first amendment simply meant that the State (i.e. the federal state) had no right to establish a certain form of religion throughout the country. At the time it was written, several individual states or colonies already had established denominational forms of Christianity already in place. The New England states were primarily congregational while the southern seaboard states were primarily Catholic or Anglican. The framers of the Constitution of the United States did not wish to grant powers to the federal government to establish one form of religion throughout the nation to the exclusion of others. This is why the US has always had freedom of religious expression throughout its history. For the last several decades, however, the first amendment has been distorted by historical and legal revisionists (those who distort history) to mean the separation of the State from religion. When deciding legal and political issues, references to the Bible are censured as violations of the separation of church and state. The right to prayer and Bible reading in public schools is also hindered.

It should be obvious that there can be no absolute separation of religion from the state. Everyone is religious in one sense or another. If a person is an atheist, he is still religious; his god is man rather than the God of the Bible, and his views on politics, family, economics, and every other area of life will be influenced by his atheism. The claim that the state and religion can be separated is like saying that people can be separated from ideas and values—an impossibility since all people necessarily have ideas and values which influence their lives and which they use to influence others. The question is not *whether* religious values will be imposed in the realm of government and politics; the real question is *whose* values will be imposed. Secularism, the belief that religion should not influence public life, is itself a form of religion.

This was the battle that the prophets of the OT fought when they opposed the kings of Israel and Judah; it was the battle that Samuel Rutherford fought when he wrote *Lex Rex (The Law and the King)*; and it is the battle which Christians must continue to fight in our day. Either the law of God will give direction to the practical laws of society, or man’s law will be imposed without the checks and balances of the law of God, leading eventually to totalitarianism or anarchy (lawlessness).

History has already given us classic demonstrations of what happens to societies in which the rule of man reigns supreme—the French Revolution of 1789 in which thousands of political dissenters were beheaded; the former Soviet Union in which millions of people were executed or systematically starved to death by despotic rulers; and the thousands of other despotic regimes current today which have no standard of rule other than the rule of men.

The continual desire of fallen man is to be his own god, and it is within the halls of human government that this desire reaches its peak and appears within his grasp. Most commentators believe that the beast of Revelation 13 is the opposition of human government to the divine rights of Jesus Christ and the gospel. Throughout the history of the church, there has been no greater enemy of the church than powerful men in government who wish to say with the kings of Ps. 2, “Let us tear their [*the Lord’s and His Anointed*] fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!”

### ***3. Thirdly, the prophets wrote the history of the theocracy.***

The books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings were designated as “the former prophets” by Jewish readers. The prophetic authorship of these books helps explain the divine perspective presented throughout their contents—for example, “And he [*Jeroboam II*] did evil in the sight of the Lord...” (2 Kings 14: 24).

#### ***C. Periods of prophetic activity***

##### ***1. From the prophet Samuel (1050 B.C. [?]) to the time of the writing prophets of the eighth century (750 B.C.).***

During this time the prophetic message was only oral and not committed to writing. This would include the ministry of Samuel as well as Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, and anyone who belonged to the school of the prophets (1 Sam. 10: 5, 10-11; 1 Kings 18: 13). Their messages are simply embedded in the historical books of the OT.

##### ***2. From the eighth century (about 750 B.C.) to the end of OT history (about 425 B.C.).***

This was the major history of prophetic ministry which included oral and written prophecy.

- Prophets to Israel—Hosea, Amos
- Prophets to Judah—Isaiah, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel
- Prophets to reunited Israel after the exile—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Prophets to the Gentile nations—Jonah, Nahum, Obadiah

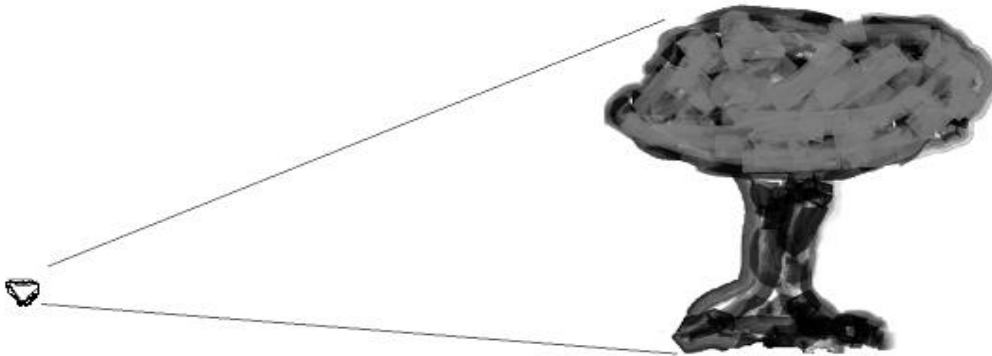
#### ***D. Characteristics of Prophecy***

Berkhof gives us several characteristics of prophecy in *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 148-151. (His headings and comments have been paraphrased, and as usual, I have provided additional detail and illustration.)

##### ***1. Prophecy has an organic character that is progressively realized in history.***

For example, we have the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah as far back as Gen. 3: 15, but this promise receives a more definite character progressively in the history of redemption. For example, Isaiah 53 is a much more definite and explicit promise of the Messiah, as is Micah 5: 1-4. Consider the illustration of the seed and the tree. The seed doesn’t look much like a tree, but all the genetic materials of the tree are present in the seed. Genesis 3: 15 doesn’t look much like the promise of

Christ, but in the mind of God, the whole promise is there in “seed” form, waiting to germinate and grow.



## ***2. Prophecy must be understood in its historical setting.***

As we have said before, context is one of the most important principles of Biblical interpretation. It continues to be important in the study of prophecy. To understand their prophetic message to us, it must first be acknowledged that their message was first of all to the audience living in their own day. The prophets were the watchman (guards) upon the walls of the city ready to warn the inhabitants when their enemies were coming (Ezek. 33: 1-11). However, the enemy the prophets were watching was the enemy already within the gates, namely, the enemy of sin and apostasy which threatened to destroy the people spiritually from within.

For the reader to understand Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he must consider the captivity of the Israelites in foreign lands, and Obadiah must be understood within the context of Israel’s relationship with Edom. Habakkuk prophesies the judgment of Israel by the Babylonians, a people more wicked than they, and it parallels the inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom of God. The Jews could not have comprehended either of these possibilities (Ramm, p. 248).

How are we to understand Haggai’s rebuke in Haggai 1: 1-11? What did the people of Israel do to deserve such a sharp rebuke on the first day (?) of Haggai’s prophetic ministry? The answer lies in the historical context of the book of Haggai. The year was 520 B.C. King Cyrus, who defeated the Babylonians in 539 B.C., had issued a decree in 538 B.C. His decree stated that the Jews could leave Babylon, the country of their exile, and return to the land of Judea to rebuild the temple (2 Chronicles 36: 22-23; Ezra 1). All of this had been prophesied by Jeremiah before the fall of Judah in 587 B.C. (Jer. 25: 12; 29: 10) and by Isaiah whose ministry ended about 100 years before the fall of Jerusalem and 150 years before the decree of Cyrus (Isa. 44: 28; 45: 1).

Some of the Jews had taken advantage of this opportunity and returned to the land to rebuild the temple. They had successfully laid the temple’s foundation when building progress stopped due to harassment and opposition from the people already living in the land (Ezra 4: 1-7; for a broader context, read Ezra 4—6). Sixteen years passed from the time the rebuilding started until Haggai began to prophesy along with the prophet Zechariah who began his ministry two months later (Compare Hag. 1:1 with Zech. 1:1). It is not known how long it took them to rebuild the foundation, so we don’t know how long the Jews were negligent in their duty to rebuild the whole temple. During that sixteen-year period, nothing was being done on the temple, but apparently the returned Jews were not doing so badly with their own building programs (Hag. 1: 4). They were able to build for themselves “paneled houses”, words which indicate homes embellished (decorated) with

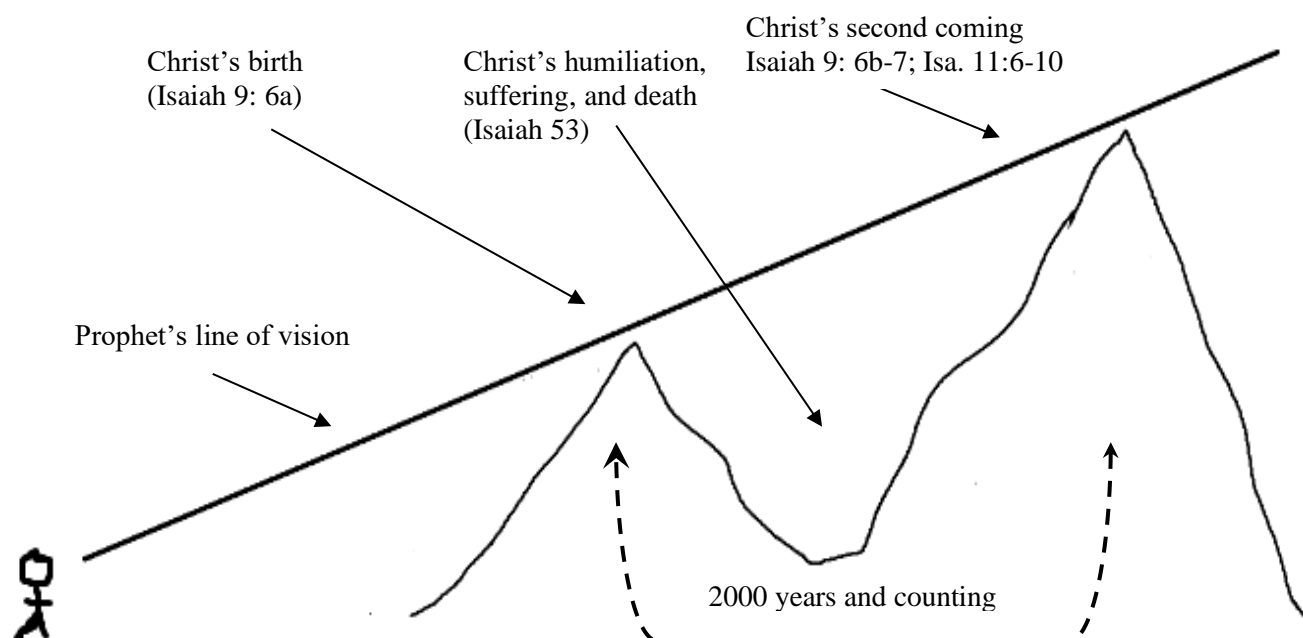
a large degree of elegance and luxury. These fine homes stood out in “disgraceful contrast with the unroofed, unwalled foundations of that house that ought to have been the noblest in the city” (T. V. Moore, *Haggai*, p.59).

The returned exiles used this opposition as an excuse to halt the building and concentrate on their own private kingdoms—their personal comfort and affluence (Hag. 1: 2). The Lord, on the other hand, was not impressed with their excuses and sent Haggai and Zechariah to command the people to commence work on the temple immediately. Their preaching was obviously effective, because the temple was finished in the short period of three and a half years. Haggai began to preach in the *second* year of Darius on the first day of the *sixth* month (Hag. 1:1). The temple was completed in the *sixth* year of Darius on the third day of the month Adar, which is the *twelfth* month (Ezra 6: 15 with Esther 3: 13).

### 3. It is difficult to determine the time-frame between the prophecy and its fulfillment.

Often, momentous historical events which will later occur over a large segment of time are seen by the prophet at a glance as if they occur in a short length of time. This is called the “**prophetic perspective**” or “**prophetic foreshortening**”. If we were to visit the Rwenzori Mountains in west Uganda, we would see the peak of Mt. Stanley at a huge distance. Several other mountain peaks which are shorter than Mt. Stanley would be seen in front of it which would appear only a short distance away from it. In reality, the several peaks would be separated by many miles with valleys in between which cannot be seen. When the prophet reported his visions or dreams, he could see the final event (the tallest mountain) along with several other events leading up to it (shorter mountains). All the events seemed to him to take place in short succession to one another, while in reality, they were separated by many years.

To illustrate this prophetic foreshortening, consider Isaiah’s prophecy in Isa. 9. In that chapter, he prophesies both the birth of Christ, His first advent (first coming), and the final consummation of the Messianic kingdom in which Christ reigns with power and glory (second coming). One would think by reading the passage that this child is born into a noble family, lives the life of a prince, and immediately begins to reign. No doubt this caused confusion among some of the Jews of Jesus’ day who were looking for a military king to deliver them from Roman oppression.



As it has turned out, the birth of Christ and the consummation of the kingdom in His second coming have been separated in time for 2000 years now and still counting. In between His birth and the final consummation (His return) are His humiliation, suffering, death, and resurrection, none of which are mentioned in the context of the passage. Consider Jesus' birth (v. 6a) to be the first mountain peak and the consummation attended by great power and might to be the last (tallest) mountain peak (vv.6b-7). In between these two peaks is the great valley of the death and resurrection of Christ which is not mentioned at all. On this occasion, Isaiah saw the two peaks as if they were not separated by the enormous valley which spans 2000 years (and possibly much more). He prophesied of the valley of humiliation and death later, as in Isa. 53.

In a spiritual sense the government is even now resting on Christ's shoulders as Christianity spreads throughout the world with its benevolent influence. This is the "now" of the kingdom of God. Yet, there is also a "not yet" to the kingdom in which the reign and rule of Christ will be consummated at His glorious return when He puts all His and our enemies under His feet.

#### ***4. Prophecies are often conditional.***

Sometimes the fulfillment of the prophecy depends on whether or not certain conditions are met by the people to whom the prophecy is directed. For example, in the prophecy of Jonah, the prophet declared that in 40 days the city of Nineveh would be overthrown because of its wickedness (3: 4). Then something unexpected happened. The inhabitants of the city actually repented (vv. 5-9), and God decided not to destroy the city. Could it be that the king and the people had already heard of Jonah's miraculous deliverance from the belly of the fish (1:17- 2: 10)? Was their repentance genuine? On the basis of their repentance, God relented of the disaster He was going to send upon Nineveh. Moreover, Jesus implied that it was genuine and used the story of Jonah to condemn the unrepentant Jews of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matt. 12: 41; see 11: 20-12: 45 for the broader context). How could a crowd of Ninevites condemn the unbelieving Jews if their repentance was not genuine?

Other examples of prophecies which were conditional upon a response are Jer. 26: 12-19; 1 Kings 21: 17-29; and 2 Kings 20: 1-7. See also Virkler's analysis of Jer. 18: 7-10 (p.198). A careful study of these cases, including Jonah, will reveal that conditional prophecies referred only to events in the *near* future and not to events which were to take place in the *distant* future (Berkhof, p.150). Prophecies of distant events obviously could not be contingent (dependent) on the actions of people who would not even be alive when the prophecy was fulfilled.

The story of King Josiah presents us with interesting questions about the conditionality or non-conditionality of OT prophecies. When Hilkiah the high priest found the lost book of the law (the Law of Moses), he sent it to King Josiah by Shaphan the scribe who read the book in the king's presence (2 Kings 22). When King Josiah heard the law of God, he was horrified and tore his robes as a sign of repentance. He then sent for Huldah, one of four prophetesses mentioned by name in the OT, to inquire of the Lord what wrath was in store for Judah for sinning against the Law. Huldah gave Josiah the grim picture of what would happen to Judah. Judah would become desolate, just like Israel, but because Josiah had showed humility and repentance, the destruction of Judah would not come in his days, but later in the history of Judah. Josiah reigned from 640 B.C. to 609 B.C. and during his reign many reforms took place which eliminated idolatry from Judah and restored the true worship of God (2 Kings 23). But the harm had already been done, and the judgment against Judah was irreversible. During the reign of King Hezekiah (716-687 B.C), ending 47 years before the beginning of Josiah's reign, Isaiah the prophet had already predicted that all the treasures of Hezekiah's house would be taken away to Babylon (See 2 Kings 19-20 for context). This prophecy was the implied judgment upon the nation of Judah. If his treasures were to be taken away to Babylon, then Judah would fall to Babylon. Was this a conditional prophecy or an

unconditional one? Hezekiah was a good king (2 Kings 18: 1-6). Why then, was Isaiah pronouncing judgment upon Judah?

Manasseh, Hezekiah's son and Josiah's grandfather, was possibly the most wicked king of Judah. He practiced witchcraft, used divination, and even made one of his sons pass through the fire (human sacrifice). He seduced (tempted) the people of Judah to do more evil even than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed. As a consequence of his wickedness, the prophets of the Lord prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 21). Josiah's good reforms, recounted in much detail in 2 Kings 23, do not succeed in reversing the judgment that had already been pronounced upon Judah earlier during the reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh. By reading the story, we can see that Isaiah's prophecy of implied judgment (20: 17) was grounded upon the certainty of Manasseh's apostasy and Judah's participation in it (21: 9-16). Thus, in spite of Josiah's reforms, the "fierceness of His [God's] great wrath" was not turned away from Judah, and it was judged and taken away into Babylonian exile (23: 26-27). Judah's destruction, prophesied by Isaiah (2 Kings 18), was conditioned upon the reign of Manasseh whose apostasy sealed the guilt and destruction of the nation (23: 26). Of course, in the mind of God, everything is certain, but God generally works through means, sometimes sinful means, including the apostasy of a king. He will not judge the nation upon a whim (a sudden, unreasonable fancy), but because the nation has broken His covenant (Dt. 28).

The ultimate fate of a nation, any nation, is not the result of good luck or bad luck, but each nation is judged according to faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the moral law of God.

Quoting Girdlestone, Ramm remarks, "It is probable that hundreds of prophecies, which look absolute as we read them were not fulfilled in their completeness because the words of warning from the prophet produced some result, even though slight and temporary, on the hearts of the hearers. God does not quench the smoking flax" (Ramm, p. 250).

***5. Symbolic language is common in prophetic literature, but it is not used throughout the prophecies.***

Therefore, it is a grave mistake to think we can discover some kind of prophetic formula for certain words or phrases which is consistent throughout any particular prophecy. Berkhof gives the negative example of Fairbairn (who is usually a sound exegete) who says that "nations" are a common word for worldly kingdoms in the OT prophets and the Revelation to John. "Stars" represent ruling powers. Nations in political upheaval and turmoil are "roaring and troubled seas". "Trees stand for the higher levels of society and "grass" the lower levels of common people, etc. (p.151). Such hermeneutics will quickly lead us astray into erroneous interpretations. It is better to consider locusts as locusts, the moon and stars as the moon and stars, unless there is compelling evidence to do otherwise. The context will usually indicate when something should be taken symbolically, as for example, the beasts in Daniel 7 which represent empires. Thus, the language of the prophets should be understood literally unless there is good reason to interpret it otherwise.

An examination of Haggai will reveal that the prophet speaks in prose and poetry but not with symbolic language. His contemporary, Zechariah, on the other hand, uses a mix of language in his prophecy, much of which is symbolic visions difficult to interpret. For example, compare chapters 1—6 with chapters 7—8.

There is much disagreement among evangelical scholars concerning the issue of literal versus non-literal (spiritual or mystical) interpretation. Ramm helps us to put the issue in proper perspective (pp. 243-244).

If we may provisionally define the spiritual as the non-literal method of the exegesis of the Old Testament we may further state that the issue is not between a completely literal or a completely spiritual system of interpretation. Amillennial writers admit that many prophecies have been literally fulfilled, and literalists admit a spiritual element to Old Testament interpretation when they find a moral application in a passage, when they find a typical meaning, or when they find a deeper meaning (such as in Ezekiel 28 with reference to the kings of Babylon and Tyre). Nobody is a strict literalist or a complete spiritualist.

Virkler agrees with this analysis by providing the humorous illustration of the woman on seven hills in Rev. 17: 9. Either these are very small hills, he suggests, or this is a woman of a “very unusual figure” (p. 196). Are we to conclude from Revelation 19: 12 and 15 that Jesus is some kind of monster who has a sword coming out of His mouth and flames of fire flickering out of his eyes? Even literalists do not believe this. Jesus is a man like us, and His divine nature does not alter His physical appearance. The whore (prostitute) of Babylon in Rev. 17 is not a literal woman. What she symbolizes may be debatable but her non-literal meaning is not. The “weeks” in Daniel 9: 24-27 are admitted by both literalists and non-literalists interpreters to stand for something besides literal weeks. Either they are weeks of years (e.g.  $7 \times 7 = 49$  years) or they stand for “the fullness of a specified time” (R. J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p.65) or some other “symbolical number” (E. J. Young, *Daniel*, p. 206).

The above observation leads us to the sixth character of prophecy enumerated by Berkhof.

**6. *Biblical prophecy uses forms, terms, and events which would have been familiar to the audiences of their day.***

The prophets did not speak or write, first of all, for 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans or Africans. They prophesied for Israel, or in the case of Jonah, for the Ninevites. They therefore used language and terms which were familiar to their audience; otherwise, the communication would have been incomprehensible. If the visions given to the prophets had been clothed in symbols familiar to the modern mind, it would have been incomprehensible even to the prophet. If it turns out that prophecies have a distant fulfillment (for example, prophecies pertaining to the end of this age) we should expect their actual fulfillment to look quite different from the prophetic picture given in the Bible. For example, if there is a *physical* battle to take place at the end of the age at Armagedon, a debatable issue, it most likely will not take place with horses (Rev. 14: 20).

When Isaiah predicts the coming of the Messiah in Isa. 11, he prophesies his reign as the signal of the deliverance of Israel from all of its then-known enemies. At the time he wrote, Assyria was the greatest threat to Israel, and the reader will notice that Assyria is mentioned first on the list (v.11). The description given is the dispersion (scattering) of Israel to many foreign lands, a dispersion which had not yet happened. Thus, Isaiah is predicting the future of Israel when it will be scattered all over the then-known world as a result of her apostasy. But he is also predicting the re-gathering of Israel into one unified nation which is no longer divided between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah (v.13).

When was Israel gathered together from all the nations of her dispersion? There was a partial re-gathering in the land of Palestine when the Jews returned from Babylon (Ezra), but this receives a broader fulfillment in Acts 2. Shortly after the ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples who then began to preach the gospel to thousands of Jews who had come from distant lands to celebrate the Passover (vv. 9-11). Many of these were converted and united under the rule of their one true King, Jesus Christ (vv. 41-47). Gone was the enmity (hatred) between Israel (represented by Ephraim) and Judah. Under the “banner” of Christ at Pentecost, they are now one in Christ Jesus.

So far, the interpretation given would satisfy the literalistic demands of many dispensational scholars. The dispersed Jews are *literally* brought together on the Day of Pentecost. But then what are we to make of the other figures given in the chapter which describe the Messiah's reign as a military victory (Isa. 11:14-16)? Certainly, during and after the ministry of Christ on earth there was no such military victory, and Christ expressly said that His kingdom was not of this world and that no such violent uprising should be expected of His disciples (Jn. 18: 36). Isaiah is clothing his prophecy in terms which would be meaningful to the fearful Jews of His day who dreaded the onslaughts of enemies like Assyria and its old enemy, Philistia. Many OT prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel and Judah have spiritualized fulfillments in the NT.

All these figures are drawn from the existing condition of things. The people of God had been surrounded by external foes, which had been conquered by David, and which had rebelled and at one time or another had vexed Israel and Judah. The picture is of complete reversal of conditions, not to take place in Palestine, but in the greater field of the world, a reversal which would consist in the people of God reaching out to bring all men and make them captive to Christ (E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, p. 399).

Young's emphasis upon the mission to the Gentiles is striking throughout his interpretation of Isaiah 11. In v. 12, he applies the re-gathering of Israel not primarily to the physical nation but to all of God's elect people.

And He will lift up a standard for the nations  
And assemble the banished ones of Israel,  
And will gather the dispersed of Judah  
From the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah 11:12 NASB)

The Messiah would be the standard to which the Gentiles might rally. Here also we learn that the Lord will lift up a sign for the heathen, and through the work of Christian preaching and Christian missionaries He will draw them unto Himself....

Great has been the dispersion! To the four corners of the earth the people have been scattered....Our Lord was reflecting upon this passage when He said, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24: 31) (Young, pp. 396-397).

It is clear that Young, representative of many Reformed OT scholars, does not approach this passage with the hermeneutic of a wooden (rigid and inflexible) literalism in which the chronology of events in Isaiah 11 are linear (happening one after another). Indeed, we will get into a quagmire (difficult position) of interpretive problems if we do. For instance, how do we interpret Isa.11: 6-10 which describes a world of perfect peace and harmony in which wolves and lambs lie down together, cows and bears graze together, lions eat grass, and infant children play with cobras and not get hurt? Such imagery describes a world which is untainted by sin, a world in which the effects of Adam's fall and God's curse are no longer in operation. It is a restored universe as described by Paul in Romans 8: 18-25 and not the world of the returned exiles in Jerusalem or even the world of the victorious risen Christ at Pentecost. It would seem safe to say that Isaiah mixes the figures of several periods of history and the final world to come (and not in exact order) to give us a full description of the consummation (completion) of Christ's kingdom. It includes the return of the Jews from exile to Palestine (v.16); it also includes the Day of Pentecost and the conversion of many Jews to Christ (Acts 2); and it also includes the total restoration of the universe (vv. 6-10) which, not incidentally, comes first in the picture Isaiah presents us. The picture he gives us is the kind of picture common in the prophets which is true to the progressive revelation of the Bible in the historical narratives. What the prophets do, which the historians don't do, is give us telescopic views of where history is going and how it will end. But the views they give us conform to the world of their day and not ours.



The prophet Micah does the same thing in Micah 5: 1-6. The Messiah, born in Bethlehem, will deliver the nation from the siege of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian attack upon Judah takes place about 700 years before the birth of Christ during the reign of Hezekiah. In Hezekiah's reign, God promises and accomplishes a mighty victory (2 Kings 19) typical of the victory of Christ against the real enemy of God's people, sin.

***7. Occasionally, the prophets transcended (moved beyond) the limitations of their times and cultures to speak in ways characteristic of the new covenant in the future.***

The more spiritual blessings of the NT church are evident in these prophecies, such as that found in Jer. 31: 31-34. As we should expect, they occur more often in the later prophets than the earlier prophets. God is revealing more and more of His plan of redemption as the day of Christ's coming approaches.

***8. Sometimes the prophets communicate their message through the use of actions and not just words.***

Isaiah is told to strip naked and walk barefoot through the streets of Jerusalem (Isa. 20). The command is not as radical as it sounds. Most likely, Isaiah still had on his undergarments (cf. 2 Sam. 6: 20; Jn. 13: 4; 21: 7), but his appearance was uncovered sufficiently enough to draw attention to his message. At the time, Judah was trusting, not in God, but in the help of Egypt and Cush (modern-day Ethiopia) to protect them against the power of Assyria. Isaiah's actions were designed to demonstrate in vivid fashion the "nakedness" of their hope in these two countries. As an additional meaning, he wished to show that the king of Assyria would lead away the inhabitants of Cush and Egypt naked and barefoot.

Ezekiel is told to take a brick, write the name of Jerusalem upon it and lay siege against it to symbolize the siege which is coming upon the city by a foreign power (Ezek. 4). Other symbolical acts follow such as digging through the wall and carrying his luggage through the hole to signify Judah going into exile (Ezek. 12: 1-7).

Hosea is told to marry Gomer the prostitute, an action so radical that some commentators prefer to interpret this action as a vision and not an actual fact. However, the action loses its impact if it is only a vision. But we must let God be God in such cases and realize that He is not subordinate to His law, but above it. God alone is absolute and sometimes He allows special provisions for the broader interests of His kingdom. In this particular case, Hosea is a symbol of Yahweh and Gomer is a symbol of Israel who prostitutes herself to all the false gods of the nations. In the end, Gomer's illegitimate lovers fail to care for her or protect her from slavery, and Hosea must purchase her from the slave market and take her home. The picture is that of Israel who worships every god but the true God and ends up destitute and barren. But God is merciful and constantly restores her to favor.

Agabus, a NT prophet, binds his feet and hands with Paul's belt to show that he would be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem (Act. 21: 10-11).

Through the dramatic actions of the prophets, God's truth is impressed upon the Israelites (and now us) in ways which capture the attention and aid the memory.

***E. Rules for the Interpretation of Prophecy***

In addition to the special characteristics of prophecy, Berkhof gives us five rules for its interpretation (pp.152-153)

***1. The words of the prophets should be taken in their usual literal sense, unless the context or the manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicate that they have a symbolical meaning.***

For example, the locusts in Joel do not refer to a heathen people. See “Characteristics of Prophecy” above.

Ramm encourages the interpreter to pay careful attention to “proper names, events, references to geography, references to customs, references to material culture, references to flora [plants] and fauna [animals], references to climate.” The use of Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, or commentaries is advised to sort out the precise meanings of these references. They must be taken in their literal meaning unless the context of the passage indicates a symbolic or figurative sense of the word. On the other hand it must be admitted by all that prophetic literature contains many figures of speech and much of it is in poetic style and not prose (everyday speech used in ordinary conversation). Further, the symbolism of Daniel, Ezekiel, et al, is obvious to any reader (Ramm, p. 246). We may not insist on either complete literalism or complete symbolism in any given prophecy, and this is what makes its interpretation so difficult.

***2. In studying the figurative descriptions that are found in the prophets, the interpreter should make it his aim to discover the fundamental idea expressed.***

We have already discussed Isa. 11 with its descriptions of wild and domesticated animals grazing together and children sticking their hands in cobra pits. The fundamental idea in the passage is the perfect peace which will be obtained in the new heavens and new earth, a world without sin and the effects of sin.

The main focus of Joel 2: 28-32 is the coming of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, an interpretation which is given to the passage by the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 14-21). The other details of the prophecy (vv.30-31) may have occurred during and after the crucifixion of Christ seven weeks earlier (Lk. 23: 44-45; Matt. 27: 45, 51-53). Immediately after His death, the sky turned dark during the middle of the day and the moon could have appeared blood red (Leslie C. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p. 103, citing F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p.69). However, these details may have a future fulfillment, and their absence at the time did not prevent Peter from announcing that the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit.

***3. In the interpretation of the symbolical actions of the prophets, the interpreter must proceed on the assumption of their reality, i.e. [that is] of their occurrence in actual life, unless the connection clearly proves the contrary.***

In other words, when the Bible tells us that Isaiah walked naked through the streets of Jerusalem (probably with his undergarments) and that Hosea married a prostitute, we have no reason to believe that these were only visions.

***4. The fulfillment of some of the most important prophecies is germinant, i.e. they are fulfilled by installments, each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow.***

Prophecies do not have two or three meanings or senses, but they may have a two or three-fold fulfillment. Consider the predictions about the second coming of Christ in Matt. 24. A careful examination of this passage will reveal that Jesus is answering two questions at the same time (vv. 1-2). The disciples want to know (1) when the temple will be torn down and (2) what will be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. They figured that the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the end of the age must be the *same* event. As it turns out, they are not the same event. Jesus describes two separate events, one of which is the destruction of the temple by Titus

in 70 A.D. during the siege of Jerusalem by Roman armies. Before the siege, believers, who are given previous warnings in this chapter (vv. 15-20), flee Jerusalem and are saved. But Jesus also tells of events surrounding His second coming, events which are very similar to those which occurred during the destruction of the world by the flood.

Terry insists that all the events of Matt. 24 must have occurred when Jerusalem was destroyed (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 451-453)—a preterist interpretation of Christ’s second coming held by some scholars today. But this interpretation is very doubtful since the return of Christ in judgment is likened to the flood. Unless we are willing to admit that the flood was a local catastrophe instead of a world-wide catastrophe, the analogy does not hold up. Besides the description of the second coming given by Jesus, we have that of Peter in 2 Pet. 3: 10-13 which hardly describes a local event, but rather, the destruction of the whole world akin to that of the flood (2 Pet. 3: 1-9). (For other arguments against the preterist interpretation see G.K. Beale, *Revelation*—if you have time to read 1,157 pages!).

The best way to understand Matt. 24 is to reason that many of the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem were similar to what will happen at the end of the world. Jesus treated the two subjects together, but He was not obligated to give exhaustive details.

***5. Prophecies should be read in light of their fulfillment, for this will often reveal depths that would otherwise have escaped the attention.***

We are now able to read Joel 2: 28-32 in light of its fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. If Peter said that Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled, who are we to say that it wasn’t? We may read Isaiah 53 in light of the suffering and atonement of Christ. Psalm 2, a messianic psalm, may be read in the light of the consummation (fulfillment) of the kingdom of Christ when all the enemies of Christ and His people will be finally vanquished (conquered) and the kingdoms of the earth will become the kingdom of God and of His Christ (Rev. 11: 15).

There is need for caution in this matter however. Not all prophecies refer to specific historical events. Sometimes they refer to general principles which are fulfilled in a variety of ways (cf. the idealist interpretation of Revelation by William Hendriksen). In the interpretation of Revelation, we err when we attempt to specifically identify each symbol or vision; rather, we must discover the general principles of good and evil, warfare, etc. which could refer to hundreds of historical events which bear a resemblance to the prophecy. To narrow the fulfillment down to one single event would severely narrow the scope of the Book of Revelation, as well as the scope of many OT prophecies. Also, as we noted above, the prophet used terminology which was familiar to his audience. Therefore, prophecies are not always fulfilled in the same way that they are uttered by the prophet. In our study of Isa. 11, the reign of Jesus is described in terms of an earthly kingdom akin (similar) to the Davidic kingdom. This kind of kingdom will come at the *consummation*—the fulfillment of the kingdom of God at the end of human history—but until then, Jesus reigns in a different way in the hearts and minds of His people.

#### ***F. Additional Principles of Interpreting Prophecy***

I have taken several interpretive principles from Ramm (pp.249-269) which complement those of Berkhof. The numbering of these principles is not the same as his, and I have provided additional illustrations for each principle.

***1. Determine whether the prophecy is cited in the OT or NT as fulfilled.***

We have already cited the prophecy from Joel which is found in Acts 2. Other examples include the prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5: 2 with Matt. 2: 6); the death of the Israelite children during the time of Herod (Jer. 31: 15 with Matt. 2: 18); the preaching of John the Baptist (Isa. 40: 3 with Matt. 3: 3); the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (Isa. 9: 1 with Matt. 4: 15-16); the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9 with Matt. 21: 5); Jesus' announcement of His ministry to the downtrodden (Isa. 61: 1 with Lk. 4: 18-19); the coming of a Redeemer to save the nation of Israel (Isa. 59: 20-21 with Rom. 11: 26-27); the session of Christ at the right hand of God the Father (Ps. 110: 1 with Acts 2: 34-35).

I found all these fulfillments of prophecy just casually flipping through the Bible. A good *study Bible* is very helpful because OT prophecies are indented in the text or set apart from the other script in such a way that the quotations are easily identifiable. The reader can then find the OT reference in the margin.

Much of the time, we will find the fulfillment of prophecy within the OT era. For example, God promised Abraham that his seed (descendants) would become as numerous as the stars of the heavens (Gen. 15: 5). He also promised him that he would give him the land of Canaan (Gen. 15: 18). All of these promises were fulfilled in the multitudes of Israelites coming out of Egypt and the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua (Joshua 21: 45). Many dispensationalists are still waiting for the fulfillment of these promises during the millennial kingdom of Christ. The fact is, these prophecies have already been fulfilled, and we don't need to wait for their fulfillment.

Jeremiah prophesied that Shallum, one of the sons of Josiah, would be led away into a foreign land and would never return to Jerusalem, but would die away from his homeland (Jer. 22: 11-12 with 2 Kings 23: 30-34; 1 Chron. 3: 15). Micaiah the prophet predicted the death of Ahab (1 Kings 22: 27-28 with 1 Kings 22: 34-37). Isaiah predicted the rebuilding of the temple according to the decree of Cyrus 150 years before the event (Isa. 44: 28-45: 1). The seventy years of Babylonian captivity is prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25: 11) and fulfilled during the time of Daniel (Dan. 9: 1-3).

## ***2. Find out what prophetic passages parallel each other.***

Several prophetic words and phrases are repeated in different prophecies: “the day of the Lord”, the remnant, the shaking of the nations, the outpouring of the Spirit, the re-gathering of Israel, and the millennial blessings...” (p. 249). An exhaustive concordance is indispensable for tracing down parallel passages. Two prophecies which immediately come to mind are Isa. 2 and Micah 4.

## ***3. Determine whether the prophecy is predictive or whether it deals with moral, ethical or theological truth.***

As we have said earlier, the prophets spend most of their time providing moral instruction for their hearers. This instruction can occur right in the middle of passages which are predictive in nature. Notice that the first six verses of Zechariah are didactic (moral instruction) but beginning in v. 7 through the rest of the chapter, a vision is received by him. The prophecy of Amos is a scathing denunciation of the wicked life-styles and idolatry of the nation of Israel during a time of economic and political prosperity. He also includes the predictive element of Israel's demise (See your notes on “Historical-Cultural Context”).

## ***4. Observe carefully how the NT writers use the OT scriptures***

### ***a. Sometimes the NT writers use the OT to prove a point.***

In Stephen's sermon before his accusers in Acts 7, he gives a summary of the OT wilderness wanderings and Israel's rebellion against Moses, God's appointed leader. At the end of the sermon, Stephen uses the history of Israel to illustrate the same rebellion of the Jews in his day. "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing **just as your fathers did**" (Acts 7: 51; See also vv. 52-53). His point? The Jewish people had not improved from the time of their forefathers. After years of judgment and exile, they still didn't understand the truth and repent.

***b. Sometimes the NT writers use the OT to clarify or illustrate their teaching.***

The writer of Hebrews uses the awesome and fearful thunder and lightning of the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai as a contrast to the more favorable conditions of the new covenant (Heb. 12: 18-24). Paul uses a case law of the OT to support his argument that those who preach the gospel are entitled to be paid by the congregations they serve (1 Cor. 9: 9). This is a very interesting use of the OT and it proves that much of the value of the OT in providing illustrations of moral principles is lost if we do not allow this typological element (See the discussion of "Allegories" above).

No doubt many would say that we cannot do the same kind of typologizing that Paul did, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is true that Paul had insight unique to Him as an inspired apostle. And granted, we must exercise extreme care in this matter. However, the NT provides us with so many examples of typological uses of the OT that we are warranted from this methodology to look for additional OT illustrations with moral instruction not found in the NT. If we fail to use the OT this way, it simply becomes a history book of redemption without practical usefulness for Christian faith and practice. This naturally leads us to the third topic under this heading.

***c. The NT writers recognize a clear continuity (continuation) between Israel and the church.***

Paul formally recognizes this relationship in his parting words to the Galatians, "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (6: 16). Paul is not speaking to ethnic Jews or even Jews who had become Christians. He is speaking to all believers regardless of nationality who have embraced Christ as their savior. This is obvious from the broader context of Galatians which denies any merit in circumcision (a Jewish rite) and instead places the importance where it belongs, saving faith in Christ—"this rule." If Paul had wished to single out the ethnic Jews from the Gentiles in this statement, he would have contradicted his whole argument (Ramm, pp. 263-264). (For further study of this point, see Gal. 3: 29 and Rom. 9: 6-8; 2: 28-29).

One of most convincing texts of the analogy between the church and Israel is found in 1 Cor. 10: 1-13 in which Paul explicitly makes use of every event of the wilderness wanderings as a moral object lesson for Christian behavior. "Now these things [namely, the sinful history of Israel and its consequences] happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved" (v. 6). He says it again for emphasis in v. 11, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

Much of the weakness in modern evangelical preaching today is its unwillingness to take seriously the analogy which the NT writers make between the nation of Israel and the church. By separating the NT church and Israel, as if they are completely separate people with distinct purposes in the plan of God, they fail to reckon with the covenantal responsibilities of the NT church and the curses which fall upon it through persistent and unrepentant sin. Indeed, the consequences of sin demonstrated in the nation of Israel had already been demonstrated in the church at Corinth before Paul wrote his letter. Just one chapter later in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul informs the

Corinthians that some of their number had died because of their immoral, careless participation in the Lord's supper (vv. 17-34).

This should be enough to convince us that the God of the NT and the God of the OT are the same, a God who is a consuming fire and not to be trifled with. The greater grace and benefits of the new covenant do not imply that God is now obligated to overlook sin. The same covenantal obligations of obedience apply today; the difference is that we are given more ability through the indwelling Spirit and a regenerate heart to comply with those demands. The eventual demise (downfall) of the seven churches in Asia Minor (even the few good ones) is testimony to the ongoing requirements of covenantal faithfulness (Rev. 2—3). Asia Minor is now modern-day Turkey. I have a good friend now living in Turkey who tells me that Christians there are scarce. The once thriving church of Asia Minor is no more.

After being a Baptist for many years, my study of the prophets convinced me that there was more continuity between the church of the OT (Acts 7: 38—*ekklesia* or “church”) and the church of the NT than I had previously realized. The church today, seen as a whole, can be just as formally religious and institutionally blind as the nation of Israel, putting more emphasis in ritual and formal worship than practical obedience. Consequently, I became a Presbyterian, a position which takes more seriously the alarming similarities between Israel and the church, although beset with some of the same problems as Baptists. One cannot read the prophets without seeing an accurate picture of his own local church—and even more frightfully, himself, assuming he has any real discernment. As I have attempted to demonstrate with the prophets Jonah, Isaiah, and Haggai, the prophetic material is just as relevant today as the day the prophet strolled into Israel proclaiming his message from the Lord.

At the same time, the encouragement and hope given by the prophets to the believing remnant of Israel—who were looking for the hope and consolation of redemption in their Messiah—are also relevant for the NT believer. Their message was not merely gloom and doom for the impenitent, but blessings and salvation for the OT believer which applies equally to the NT believer (Rom. 15: 4). Take for example the prophecy of Jer. 31: 27-34. This same prophecy is quoted in Heb. 8, and the blessings of the new covenant mentioned throughout Hebrews are applied to NT believers. In fact, the old covenant made with Israel is superseded (surpassed) by the new covenant and is made obsolete. This does not mean that Jeremiah was mistaken in applying the new covenant to Israel and Judah. Since Israel and Judah may also partake of the new covenant blessings through faith in Christ, the prophecy belongs to them as well. In fact, salvation is of the Jews and is first offered to the Jews by Christ and the apostles (Rom. 1: 17). Clearly in Heb. 10: 15, the blessings of the new covenant made with “them” (the Jews) are addressed to “us” (vv. 15-16), believers in the NT era who are warned in this epistle not to go backwards to the types and shadows of the old covenant. There is only one new covenant for everyone, not two—one for the church and one for Israel. Whenever we partake of the Lord's Supper, we partake of the new covenant in His blood (Lk. 22: 20) (Ramm p.264).

In Isaiah 2, we read of the prediction of universal peace brought about through the teaching of God's ways (v.3). All the nations of the earth will stream to the mountain of God, Mt. Zion (v.3), and there will no longer be hostility and war between the nations (v.4). Strict literalists would apply the blessings to the Gentiles in this passage to a future millennial age when Christ is sitting on His throne in Jerusalem (Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 134.) It is more accurate to apply the passage to the “last days” which include the first and second advents of Christ, His first and second coming (See Acts 2: 17; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pet. 1: 5, 20; 2 Pet. 3: 3). After the first coming of Christ, the nations (the Gentiles) begin to hear the gospel (the “ways” of God) as never before in the history of the world. They begin to stream to the mountain of the house of the Lord

to hear His word—a mountain which is not the literal Mt. Zion of Jerusalem (as the dispensationalists maintain), but His spiritual church, the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3: 15a).

Remember that the prophets often saw events which were separated by many years, even hundreds of years, as if they were the same event (prophetic foreshortening). The first and second advents of Christ are often seen as one event and are described as such. The same is true of this prophecy which is why Christ is presented as a ruler who will judge between the nations (v.4), something He did not do in His first advent but will do in His second advent. This is a very similar depiction of the coming of Christ found in Isa. 11 in which the prophet sees the first and second coming of Christ as one event. Truly, when the kingdom of Christ is consummated in the second coming, He will put an end to war, and universal peace and righteousness will prevail throughout the whole world. At any rate, if one recognizes the continuity between Israel and the church, he will admit the possibility that this and many other such passages refer to the triumph of the gospel through the church rather than through the presumed thousand year physical reign of Christ in Jerusalem. (For a thorough treatment of this passage from an amillennial perspective, see E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, from which much of the above discussion is taken).

### Lesson Six Questions

1. Why was prophecy instituted in the OT?
2. What were three functions of an OT prophet?
3. What were the two periods of prophetic activity?
4. What is the meaning of the following statement: Prophecy has an organic character that is progressively realized in history.
5. Explain the meaning of this statement: Prophecy must be understood in its historical setting.
6. Give an example of the following characteristic of prophecy: It is difficult to determine the time-frame between the prophecy and its fulfillment.
7. Are all prophecies unconditional, or may God relent upon the repentance of the people? Explain.
8. Will prophesies in the OT be fulfilled exactly as predicted in the OT or may their fulfillment take a different form? Explain.
9. Give an example of the following rule of interpreting prophecy: Prophecies should be read in light of their fulfillment, for this will often reveal depths that would otherwise have escaped the attention.
10. What does 1 Cor. 10: 1-13 indicate about the relationship between the church and Israel? Must the church be concerned about the curses threatening Israel for disobedience? Explain.

## ***Lesson Seven***

### ***IV. Interpreting the Psalms***

One of the principles for interpreting the psalms has already been covered under “Parallelisms” (See above). There are other considerations which must be covered to give us a well-rounded approach. Some of these will be taken from Berkhof’s *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 154-157. Others have been gleaned from two excellent sources on the Psalms, *How to Read the Psalms* by Tremper Longman, III, and the unpublished class syllabus *Approaching the Psalms* by Alan Harman who now has a book published on the Psalms.

#### ***A. The Character of the Psalms (Berkhof, pp. 154-155)***

The lyric poetry (poetry suitable for singing) of the psalms has an individual element in which the author expresses personal experiences of joy, sorrow, expectation, disappointment, trust, confusion, etc. This personal element is revealed in many of the superscriptions of the psalms or headings such as that found at the beginning of Ps. 3, “Morning Prayer of Trust in God”, or Ps. 6, “Prayer for Mercy in Time of Trouble.” What must be understood, however, is that the personal content of the psalms becomes the property of all of God’s people throughout the ages. They belong to every believer as much as the first letter to the Corinthians belongs to every believer. This is the “representative character” of the psalms in which the writer is aware of his solidarity or connection with the rest of mankind. His struggles are in a very real sense the struggles of every human being, and particularly the struggles of every believer. The psalms, therefore, go beyond their personal and historical setting and become universal in scope. Berkhof expresses this eloquently.

And in view of the fact that this communal life has its fountain-head in God, the lyrical poet descends to still greater depths, or mounts to ever loftier heights, until he rests in God, in whom the life of humanity originates and who controls its joy and sorrow. Arising out of these depths, his song is, as it were, born of God.

#### ***B. Strategy for Interpreting the Psalms***

##### ***1. Study the historical setting of each psalm.***

One of the most helpful rules for interpreting the psalms is to interpret them in light of their historical context (Berkhof, p. 156).



Psalm 3 was written when Absalom, David's son, rebelled against him and sought his life. Psalm 32 was written after Nathan the prophet rebuked David of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. All the elements of this event seem to be present: his attempt to cover it up (v.3), and his open repentance after Nathan's rebuke (v. 5). Psalm 51 is a more detailed account of David's repentance concerning his adultery. It makes good sense when interpreting these psalms to go back to the appropriate passages in Samuel and study their historical context.

Psalm 90 is written by Moses. When we recall the life of Moses and the many difficulties he faced leading the rebellious people of Israel, many of his laments in Ps. 90 make more sense to us. For example, "For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your Wrath we have been dismayed...For all our days have declined in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh" (vv. 7, 9). When we remember God's description of Himself to Moses in Ex. 34: 6-7 in which He emphasizes His "lovingkindness," we can better appreciate Moses' plea in vv.13-15 of Ps. 90, "Do return, O Lord; how long will it be? And be sorry for Thy servants. O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, and the years we have seen evil."

The difficulty in doing this is, of course, that the psalms are not like the prophets whose writing is more easily dated. When Isaiah wrote his prophecy, we can pinpoint the general time-frame of the prophecy and what was happening on the national and international scene. Not so with the psalms which are written by many writers each of whom had multiple personal situations they were experiencing when they wrote. Therefore, the historical situation of each psalm has to be considered separately from the other psalms (Harman, p.10).

## ***2. Understand the theology of the psalms***

Harman points out that the psalms reflect the practical theology of the Old Testament. In a variety of ways, the religious convictions of the people are placed on display in the psalms. This is a "popular theology" and is not written by theologians in abstract propositions but in concrete, down-to-earth ways. It is this aspect of the psalms which make them appealing to so many people.

He also maintains that the grouping of the psalms may have important significance theologically. Psalms 3 and 4, 42 and 43, 142 and 143 have similarities and are placed together; and Psalm 9 and 10 may have originally occurred as a single psalm.

The theological theme for the whole Psalter (Book of Psalms) is found in Ps. 1 and 2. Psalm 1 establishes the basic distinction between the righteous and the wicked, the blessedness which belongs to the righteous, and the judgment which will come upon the wicked. These are the "two ways" which Christ also teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, one way leading to life and the other leading to death (Matt. 5-7—particularly 7: 13-14). The two ways are also found in Ps. 2, the way of rebellion and refusal to acknowledge the Lord as king (vv. 2-3), and the way of obedience for those who "worship the Lord with reverence" (v. 10-12) (Harman, pp. 10-11). In these two ways we may distinguish the covenantal framework of the psalms even though the word "covenant" occurs only 14 times in the Psalter (Harman, p. 22). The distinctions between the righteous and the wicked in Ps. 1 transport us back to Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal in Dt. 27 and 28, in which the blessings for obedience were pronounced on one mountain and the curses for disobedience on the other. We cannot ignore this covenantal context when interpreting the psalms.

## ***3. Pay attention to the grouping of the psalms***

The Psalms have been arranged in a certain order, but this order is not chronological (according to the time they were written). For example, Ps. 90 was written by Moses who lived slightly less than 300 years before David. Psalm 126 and 137 are written during the period of the Babylonian exile, but there are other psalms found at the end of the Psalter which were written before them. Generally speaking the psalms of David occur in the first half of the Psalter but one psalm of David (Ps. 138) occurs after the psalm of exile in Ps. 137.

Five separate books have been combined to make the whole Psalter which may be an imitation of the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). These five divisions are given in various study Bibles.

- Book One—Psalms 1-41
- Book Two—Psalms 42-72
- Book Three—Psalms 73-89
- Book Four—Psalms 90-106
- Book Five—Psalms 107-150

Each of the divisions ends with a doxology (See Psalms 41: 13; 72: 18-19; 89: 52; 106: 48). This pattern is different in the last book in which the entire Ps. 150 serves as the doxology for Book Five (Harman, pp. 17-18).

#### ***4. Pay attention to the collections within the psalms***

The collections were brought together before they were combined with each other in the whole Psalter. They were made over the span of centuries and were put together in their present form after the exile. The stages in the development of the Psalms are suggested by the preference of one name for God over another. Yahweh, the covenant name for God, is preferred in Book One while Elohim is preferred in Book Two (Harman, p. 19).

Davidic Collections	Psalms 3-41
Korahite Collections	Psalms 42-49; 84-85; 87-88 (2 Chron. 20: 19)
Elohistic Collections	Psalms 42-83 (using the name of Elohim for God)
Asaphite Collection	Psalms 73-8 (a singer during David's reign; 1 Chron.15: 16-19)
Kingship Psalms	Psalms 93-100
Praise Psalms	Psalms 103-107
Songs of Ascent	Psalms 120-134 (used on pilgrimage to Jerusalem or on return from exile)
Hallelujah Psalms	Psalms 111-118; 146-150 (beginning or ending with "Hallelujah")

#### ***5. Notice the Different Genres of the Psalms***

This is similar to the reference to "collections" in the Psalms but we will go into more detail following the work of Tremper Longman in *How to Read the Psalms*, pp. 19-36. A genre is a "group of texts which are similar in their mood, content, structure or phraseology" (p. 20). In the Bible as a whole, we have many genres of literature such as the historical narrative of Kings and Chronicles, the prophetic genre of the major and minor prophets, the didactic (teaching) genre of the letters of the apostles in the NT, the gospel accounts of Matthew and Mark, and the genre of poetry found in Psalms and Proverbs.

In the Psalms there are many different types or genres having a specific purpose and style. Determination of the genre of a specific book will help us in interpreting the book. For example,

we need to read the *Revelation to John* differently from John's epistles; otherwise we come away from the book with the mistaken notion that at the end of time, there will be numerous violent struggles involving monster-like creatures. Proper interpretation of the psalms is no less dependent upon the identification of different genres within the Psalter. For example, what are we to make of the psalmist's statement in Ps. 73: 3-5; 12-14? Are we to believe his statement literally? Are all the wicked prosperous, and are their lives trouble-free and easy as the psalmist suggests? If so, his statement is a direct contradiction of Ps. 1: 4 and 37: 1-2. To avoid contradiction, we must read this psalm differently from Pss. 1 and 37.

There are seven genres of Psalms.

### **a. The Hymn**

Recall the discussion of the collection of psalms above. One collection is known as the praise hymns. These are characterized by joyful praise of the Lord (Ps. 103). The basic structure of the hymn includes the following:

- (1) a call to praise—Ps. 103: 1
- (2) reasons why God should be praised—Ps. 103: 2-19
- (3) further calls to praise—Ps. 103: 20-21.

The same pattern can be seen in Ps. 105. The call to worship appears in vv. 1-5, the reasons why He should be praised are found in vv. 5-45a, and a further call to praise appears in v. 45b.

The praise hymns are not limited to the collection mentioned above from Pss. 103-107. Notice that Ps. 113 is also a praise hymn with the same structure. The call to praise is found in vv. 1-3, the reasons for praise in vv. 4-9a, and a further call for praise in v. 9b. The same can be said of Ps. 115 with the call to praise in v. 1, the reasons in vv. 2-16, and further call to praise in vv. 17-18.

The reasons God is to be praised are not vague (hard to understand), “abstract qualities” but for his mighty acts of creation and providence (Ps. 104: 2-30) and the ways He has intervened in the lives of individual believers (Ps. 103: 3-6) and in the corporate life of His people (Ps. 106: 4-46; Ps. 105: 5-44).

By way of application, the psalmists are calling upon us, the Church, to praise God for the many things He has done and the kind of God He is. Most of the content of the psalms of praise is taken up with giving reasons why He should be praised. In other words, an appeal is made to the mind of the believer. Giving praise is the most reasonable thing we can do in light of His attributes of power, love, justice, mercy, grace, etc. and in light of the exercise of His attributes in creation, providence, and the new creation in Christ Jesus. Failure to do so is unreasonable.

In Romans 12: 1, Paul exhorts us “to present [our] bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is [our] *spiritual* service of worship.” The word used in the Greek text for “spiritual” is *logikos*, from which we get the word, “logical”. The *New King James Version* (see the *Reformation Study Bible*) translates the word “reasonable” which is a better translation than the *NASB*. We cannot dispute that the presentation of our bodies as a holy sacrifice is a spiritual service, but that is not what Paul is emphasizing here, and it is not the word he uses here. John Murray makes this observation (*Romans*, Vol. 2, p. 112).

Reasonable or rational is a more literal rendering. No doubt the presenting of the body as a living sacrifice is a spiritual service, that is to say, a service offered by the direction of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1

Pet. 2: 5). But there must have been some reason for the use of this distinct term used nowhere else by Paul and used only once elsewhere in the new Testament (1 Pet. 2: 2). The service here in view is worshipful service and the apostle characterizes it as “rational” because it is worship that derives its character as acceptable to God from the fact that it enlists our mind, our reason, our intellect. It is rational in contrast with what is mechanical and automatic....The lesson to be learned from the term “rational” is that we are not “Spiritual” in the biblical sense except as the use of our bodies is characterized by conscious, intelligent, consecrated devotion to the service of God.

The words, “Praise God!” seem to flow naturally off the lips of most Ugandan Christians, and this desire to praise Him should be appreciated. However, a word of caution may be offered here. We should be careful that we are not using the words flippantly or tritely (worn out by common usage) as a normal greeting or as a means of inspiring enthusiasm in a church gathering without consciously reflecting on the attributes and works of God which enlist our praise. “Praise God!” should not become another “Hello” or “Goodbye” unless we really mean what we say.

### ***b. The Lament***

The opposite of the hymn is the lament. While the psalmist is on top of the mountain in the hymns of praise, he is in the bottom of the valley in the lament. But this is proof that the psalms are realistic of their expression of the lives of believers. One moment we may exult in praise for what the Lord has done for us, but the next hour, or even the next moment, we may be “down in the dumps” over something that has just happened or over a lingering problem which comes back to our consciousness. Perhaps this is why David reminds us in Ps. 103: 2 to “forget none of His benefits.” Longman draws our attention to three kinds of laments found in the Psalms (p. 26).

#### ***(1) Three Kinds of Lament***

##### ***(a) The psalmist may be troubled by his own thoughts and actions.***

Neither Longman nor Harman include Ps. 73 as a lament in their texts, but it has the marks of a lament over the seeming disparity between the righteous and the wicked. (See also the comments below on “Combinations”.) It appears to the psalmist that the righteous have the worst of life and the wicked have the best of it. He even comes to the point of saying that his belief in the Lord appears to have been in vain (vv. 13-14). Such thoughts about the vanity of serving the Lord deeply trouble him as is clearly seen in vv. 2, 15-16, and 21-22. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we have had similar thoughts. The magazines and newspapers are strewn with stories of the rich and famous, some of whom are publicly known to be scoundrels; yet many of the righteous whom we know personally appear to barely get by in life. We are deeply troubled when we are tempted to believe that our faith is futile. Happily, the issue here is resolved in the same Psalm when the psalmist comes into the sanctuary of God for prayer. Through prayer he is reminded that the prosperity of the wicked is a short-lived and fleeting thing and that their permanent end is destruction (vv. 17-20). He is also reminded that the primary blessing of God consists not in the material wealth He gives us, but the gift of Himself (v. 25-26, 28).

Psalm 51 is a well-known lament of David concerning his adulterous actions with Bathsheba followed by the encouraging hope of forgiveness for the sinner who has a broken and contrite heart (vv. 16-17). Psalm 38 would also fall within this category.

##### ***(b) The psalmist may complain about the actions of others against him (the “enemies”).***

One of the best-known laments is Ps. 22 in which David complains about being surrounded by his enemies (vv. 12-13, 16-17). It is immediately apparent that this psalm is also a prophecy about the

crucifixion of Christ with descriptions of the physical torture not even in use at the time this psalm was written. Other examples of this kind of lament are Ps. 35; 36; 42: 10; and 41.

*(c) The psalmist may be frustrated by God himself.*

Psalm 60, as the superscription indicates, is a lament over the defeat in battle followed by words of encouragement that God would once again lead the armies of Israel into victory. As Christians, we are often confused when the enemies of church seem far more powerful than God's people. This psalm, typologically, is about the ultimate victory of the church (See v. 12 and also Matt. 16: 18). Psalm 44 is similar and demonstrates in greater detail the feeling of the psalmist that God has forsaken his people without cause (vv. 17-21).

It is possible for a psalm to contain all three of the elements listed above. Psalm 42 and 43 very likely are a single psalm. Evidence for this is found in the common refrain found in both psalms (42: 5, 11; 43: 5). The psalmist is troubled by his own thoughts and actions in the three verses just mentioned. He complains about his enemies in 42: 3, 10; 43: 1, 2b; and he feels abandoned by God in 42: 9; 43: 2a (Longman, pp. 26-27).

*(2) Elements of a lament*

Seven elements may be found in laments though seldom will all seven be found in the same one (Longman, p. 27). These may not occur in the order they are listed here.

- (a) Invocation
  - (b) Plea to God for help
  - (c) Complaints
  - (d) Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence
  - (e) Curse of enemies (imprecation)
  - (f) Confidence in God's response
  - (g) Hymn or blessing
- [(a) and (b) may be considered together]

Curses upon one's enemies are called *imprecations*. Their explanation will be treated in a separate place below. Notice that at times the psalmist confesses his guilt (Ps. 51: 3), and at other times he protests his innocence (Ps. 44: 17-22). It is important to note that all laments include some expression of hope in God's deliverance and mercy, even in those where guilt is acknowledged (Ps. 51: 7-17). The sorrow of the psalmist is turned to joy because of the kind of God he worships. The focus of the lament is the complaint before God which motivated the psalmist to pray (Ps. 22) (Longman, p.28-29).

Other laments may be found in Pss. 3, 7, 13, 17, and 26, which are individual laments, while Pss. 12, 44, 60, 74, and 83 involve the community of God's people as a whole (Harman, p.29; Longman, p. 29).

Laments serve a very important function for the child of God. They teach us to be honest before God with our feelings, and that our honest feelings should motivate us to pray. Somehow we have learned to be very guarded before the Lord with feelings of forsakenness and anger for fear of dishonoring God. Surely God is holy and must be approached with awe; yet, we have clear examples in the laments of complaints to God about treatment which is considered by the psalmist as undeserved. He honestly does not understand why God is doing something, and he is troubled and perhaps even angry about it. We can sense the anger of the psalmist in Psalm 73 when he says, "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been

stricken all day long and chastened every morning.” The modern American equivalent of this would be, “What’s the use! I might as well grab whatever good I can get out of this miserable life because unbelievers have it better than God’s people!” But after he gets this “off his chest” he checks himself and says, “If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’ behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children.” In other words, “I would have put a stumbling block in front of other believers. My words would have been scandalous and damaging to sensitive souls.” But it was good to get it off his chest (in private prayer) and admit his feelings to God. God already knew his feelings anyway, so why not go ahead and admit them? This is precisely what we ought to do. Admit our feelings of confusion, forsakenness, and anger, and then let the Holy Spirit speak to our feelings by reminding us of forgotten truth—for example, the inevitable justice of God and the eternal portion of the believer in the presence of God (Ps.73: 17-28).

### *c. Thanksgiving psalms*

In many laments, the psalmist makes a promise to God that he will give thanks to Him if God will hear his prayer and deliver him from the present distress (Ps. 6, 13). The thanksgiving psalm is the psalmist’s response to answered prayer, so there is a close connection between the lament and the psalm of thanksgiving. In the thanksgiving of Ps. 18, there is a restatement of the lament found in vv. 4-5 along with the acknowledgement that his lament was heard and his prayer answered (vv.6-19) (Longman, pp. 30-31).

Other examples of thanksgiving psalms are Pss. 32 and 34 which have the following structure (Harman, p.29).

- a) praise of the Lord or a blessing
- b) testimony to God’s goodness in his life
- c) restating of the lament (often)
- d) description of God’s salvation

If we are honest (and we often are not) we will admit that much of our prayer life consists in asking for things rather than thanking God for what He has done for us already. The psalms of thanksgiving remind us to thank God for the many benefits received. All of us like to be thanked for favors we have given others, and we are often offended when we fail to receive it. We feel that we have been taken for granted. We should not be surprised, then, if God is offended by our inattentiveness to the many answered prayers which we have received from Him. Ingratitude is one of the glaring characteristics of the wicked (Rom. 1: 21), and it is a sure way of quenching (or grieving) the Holy Spirit (1 Thes. 5: 18-19).

### *d. Psalms of trust or confidence*

Psalms in this category would include Ps. 11, 16, 23, 27, 91, and 125 (Harman, p. 30). Longman adds Ps. 121 and 131 (p. 31). Harman includes four common features of psalms of trust (p. 30).

- a) while their structure is not the same they share a common content
- b) in the face of enemies there is a calm trust in the Lord
- c) their declarations have a ring of certainty about them
- d) they use a variety of metaphors to describe God (‘refuge’, ‘rock’, ‘shepherd’, ‘help’).

The value of the psalms of confidence for the believer is obvious. No matter what the circumstances are, God can and should be trusted. Notice that in all of these psalms, the element of danger is present. Our trust in God is not that He will remove us from danger or eliminate the danger. He

has never promised us freedom from danger in this life, therefore, we are ill-advised by some health and wealth preachers to trust him for something He has never promised. Our trust is that we will be *finally and ultimately protected* from whatever danger confronts us. But how can we claim this protection when it is blatantly obvious that believers are persecuted and killed? There have been more Christians persecuted and killed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than all the combined centuries since the first advent of Christ.

The answer lies in the ultimate hope of the Christian to rest secure in the presence of God. Note the following passages from the psalms of confidence: “The Lord is **the portion of my inheritance** and my cup....Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me” (16: 5a-6b). “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for **Thou art with me**....Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and **I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever**” (23: 4a, 6). “One thing I have asked form the Lord, that I shall seek; that **I may dwell in the house of the Lord** all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple” (27: 4). The hope of the psalmists (in seed form) is the same hope (as a full-grown tree) of the Apostle Paul who said, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us from the love of God**, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8: 38-39). Paul’s hope was not that the Lord had made him *indestructible*, but that he and the Lord were *inseparable* even in his death (See 2 Tim. 4: 6-8).

#### *e. Psalms of Remembrance*

Psalms of this type were used to commemorate (celebrate the memory of) certain historical events in the corporate life of Israel. As such they have a “specific historical setting” (Longman, p.32). They recount in story form the wonderful deeds of the Lord in Israel’s behalf and consequently they include some of the longest psalms in the Psalter including Pss. 78, 105, 106, 135, and 136. The distinguishing features are the following (Harman, p.29):

- (a) retelling the great events in Israel’s history
- (b) focusing attention particularly on the Exodus from Egypt
- (c) stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises
- (d) doing this to call forth praise or to encourage future generations to trust in the Lord

Two other features should be added to these four:

- (e) covenantal *unfaithfulness* of the Israelites.
- (f) stressing the *faithfulness* of God to his covenant curses

God is not only faithful to his promises of blessing, but he is equally faithful to his warnings of covenant curse for disobedience (see my commentary on 2 Tim. 2: 13, *Pastoral Epistles*).

Not all the psalms of remembrance contain these two elements, but only a sketchy reading of Pss. 78 and 106 will reveal that their primary content is the rebelliousness of the Israelites in the face of God’s faithfulness.

The purpose of these psalms was not to provide history lessons, but to ensure the praise of God in present and future generations of Israelites (78: 5-7) in contrast to the forgetfulness of past generations (78: 8-58). The refrain (repeated words) of Ps. 136 gives evidence of this purpose, “For His lovingkindness is everlasting” (Longman, p. 32).

These psalms bring us face to face with at least two needed corrections in the corporate worship and education of the Church. First, there is the need for corporate repentance of unfaithfulness. We are much too busy with our own personal kingdoms to pay attention to the pressing concerns of the kingdom of God despite the Lord's command, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." The way we frivolously spend money God has given us to manage will be a witness against us on the Day of Judgment. It is common liturgy in PCA churches to make a corporate confession of sin after which the pastor pronounces comforting words of forgiveness from the Scriptures. Confession is made in generalities which *generally* are not too uncomfortable for most concerned. What is missing are the particulars of our sin which would cause true conviction. What we notice in Pss. 78 and 106 is that the psalmist does not speak in generalities but drives the sword where it hurts, mentioning the specific shortcomings of the Israelites for which they were severely judged.

Second, there is the need for the teaching of church history which would help us celebrate the mighty acts of God, not only in Biblical history, but throughout the history of the Christian Church. God did not stop acting in behalf of his corporate people when the Bible was completed. He continues to act to this very day, but Christians are often ignorant of the grand motions of providence between the first century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The famous quotation, "Those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them," applies to the Church as well as the general society. There are many errors being made in the church today which were made hundreds of years ago simply because the lessons have not yet been learned. I would contend that the church's emphasis upon hyper-institutionalism and professionalism (ministry by a few) rather than the organic functioning of the whole body of Christ (ministry by every member) expressed in spiritual gifts is one of those errors we keep repeating.

### *f. Wisdom psalms*

This category of psalms shares some of the same features as the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and the Song of Solomon. Harman includes four characteristics of these psalms (pp. 29-30).

- a) a concern for the practical issues of life
- b) a clear distinction between the two ways which face us in life
- c) a struggle with the problem of why the wicked seem to prosper as compared with the righteous
- d) hints that the final solution lies in the life to come

Psalms 73 and 37 are two such psalms (though Ps. 73 has also been included in the category of the lament). We have already seen how Ps. 73 would demonstrate all the characteristics listed above. Ps. 37 deals with the same question of the prosperity of the wicked, but unlike Ps. 73, the answer to the question is given at the beginning of the psalm rather than toward the end (vv. 2, 9a, 10, 13, 12-15, etc.). On the surface of things, the wicked seem to have it better than the righteous, but we should not be fooled by appearances. In due time, the wicked will be no more, and even if we make strenuous efforts to find him, we won't be able because he will be cut off from the blessings of the righteous (vv. 10, 13, 20, 36, etc.).

Throughout this psalm the promise is made to the righteous of "inheriting the land" or "dwelling in the land" (vv. 3, 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34). Because of its repetitive emphasis we should be alert to this concept and seriously inquire into its significance. The answer is not difficult to find since the land represented all the covenant promises which God had given to His people, beginning with Abraham. Yet this emphasis is not without its problems since it is patently (clearly) obvious that many of the world's righteous live in poverty, not owning so much as a square foot of ground, and there are



many true believers who are poor. Commenting on v. 25 when David says, "...I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread", a friend of mine once remarked, "David ought to get out more often."

The seeming contradiction found in Ps. 37 has challenged the best of Christian minds that cannot help but notice the disparity (difference) between David's comment and what is often observed first hand in the harshness of real life. Charles Spurgeon (the most famous preacher in England during the 1800's) said of v. 25, "It is not my observation just as it stands, for I have relieved the children of undoubtedly good men, who have appealed to me as common mendicants [*beggars*]. But this does not cast a doubt upon the observation of David. He lived under a dispensation more outward, and more of this world than the present rule of personal faith. Never are the righteous forsaken; that is a rule without exception. Seldom indeed do their seed beg bread..." (*The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1, p.176).

A fuller answer lies in the eschatological and typological significance of the psalm. The land promised to the seed of Abraham did not represent merely a piece of real estate in the Middle East, as much as current events would lead us to believe. It represented (typified) the future and final inheritance of all the people of God, the new heavens and the new earth. This is clear from the epistle to the Hebrews in which Abraham's sojourn throughout the land of promise is described as the wanderings of a pilgrim who was looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11: 9-16). It is in the new heavens and earth that we find this city which is reserved for the people of faith who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 21-22, especially 22: 14). "Outside [this city] are the dogs and sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying" (Rev. 22: 15). "And nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21: 27).

The contrast in Revelation between the righteous and the wicked is the same in Psalm 37 in which the wicked will be "cut off" from the land of the inheritance (vv. 9-10, 22b, 28b, 34b, 38). Notice in Ps. 37: 11 that the "humble will inherit the land," which brings to mind the promise of Christ in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5: 6). Thus, the comment by David in v. 25 will withstand the test of time. The righteous will never be forsaken for they will inherit eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth restored to its intended glory at the restoration of all things described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8: 18-25.

We will spend more time later with the interpretation of the wisdom literature of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon which can seem quite confusing and apparently self-contradictory (See Proverbs 26: 4-5). As we have seen with Ps. 37: 25, the contradictions are only apparent and not real, but they do require some serious study. If the student wishes to further his understanding of the future inheritance of believers, he may (and should) read the classic work of Patrick Fairbairn, "The Inheritance Destined for the Heirs of Blessing", *Typology of Scripture*, Vol. 1, pp.329-361).

Other examples of wisdom psalms include Ps. 119 which extols the wisdom of the Law of God and also Ps. 1 which sets forth the "two ways" of the wicked and the righteous, the theme for the whole Psalter.

### ***g. Kingship psalms***

As the title indicates, these psalms speak of God as the king. Psalms in this category would include Pss. 20, 21, 29, 45, 47, 93, 95-99 and have the following characteristics (Harman, p. 30, Longman pp. 34-35).

- (a) the assertion that the Lord ('Yahweh') reigns
- (b) that this rule was from of old
- (c) that this rule is not only over Israel but the whole world
- (d) in Zion the God of Israel is extolled as universal king

In Ps. 29, the word *Yahweh* (Lord) occurs 18 times in only 11 verses. In Ps. 47, the emphasis is shifted from the name of *Yahweh* to *Elohim*, the latter name being used eight times and the former only once by itself and one more time in combination with *Elyon* (God Most High). Notice that the word "king" (*melek*) occurs three times in the space of nine verses. The emphasis is placed upon the exalted God as king of the nations and the whole earth. Notice also v. 5 and its similarity with 1 Thes. 4: 16 which speaks of Jesus Christ the Messiah, the king, "descending" (rather than "ascending") with a "shout" and "the sound of a trumpet"—further evidence of the identification of Yahweh in the OT with the Lord Jesus in the NT. The student is advised to use a study Bible which will indicate which name for God is used in each verse.

#### ***h. Imprecatory Psalms***

I have saved this category for last because of its difficulty. Harman and Longman do not include the imprecatory psalm as a separate category although Longman mentions imprecations as one of the seven elements of a lament (See p. 81 of your notes, "Elements of a Lament"). It could, therefore, be argued that they do not constitute a separate genre of psalms although Pss. 35, 69, and 109 would surely merit close attention for this possibility. Whatever view we take, they are troublesome for many Christians and have to be reckoned with one way or the other.

An imprecation is the act of calling down a curse upon someone. This fact is especially troublesome for African Christians who have grown up in a culture filled with stories of witch doctors being employed to curse one's enemies. Africans who have been correctly taught by their Christian pastors and teachers to depart from such pagan practices and to love their enemies are then confronted with seemingly the same practice by no less than King David himself, a man after God's own heart. David said, "Let his [*the wicked man's*] days be few; let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children wander about and beg; and let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes....Let there be none to extend lovingkindness to him, nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children....[etc.]" (Ps. 109: 8-10, 12). Also attributed to David is the statement, "O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord" (Ps. 58: 6). How can this be reconciled with our Lord Jesus' command to "love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous....Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5: 44-45, 48)? And how can these words be reconciled with the admonitions of the Apostle Paul who told us to "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone....Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12: 17a, 19); and "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to *all* men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6: 10).

New Testament passages like these have caused many Christians to banish the imprecations of David to the dim and murky past of the OT when the saints didn't know any better and were not informed by the superior NT principle of loving one's enemies. But this explanation is much too

simple and drives a wedge between the Old and the New Testaments. For *one* thing, it fails to account for the same acts of charity which are evident in the OT even by the same person who utters the psalmodic imprecations. David spares the life of his mortal enemy King Saul on at least two occasions, and he shows kindness to Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, when the standard procedure at the time was to eliminate any potential enemies of the crown (1 Sam. 24 and 26; 2 Sam. 9) (See also L.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 18).

**Secondly**, it fails to reckon with the fact that the author of these imprecations was no hard-hearted sinner, but David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13: 14), a man who was spiritually capable of writing a large portion of the psalms of praise, thanksgiving, and wisdom. He was not perfect, to be sure, but his spirituality is not subject to serious scrutiny. Further, David was not having a bad day spiritually when he wrote these imprecations. In the *same* psalm in which he says, "Pour out Thine indignation on them, and may Thy burning anger overtake them," he also says, "For the Lord hears the needy; and does not despise His who are prisoners. Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them" (Ps. 69: 24, 33-34).

**Third**, this view fails to reckon with the imprecations of the NT. "It is rather surprising that the New Testament has striking points of similarity in the conduct of exemplary individuals, whose course of conduct has always been regarded as being model." Leupold mentions Paul's remark concerning Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim. 4: 14); his rebuke of Ananias in Acts 23: 3; and Peter's rebuke of Simon Magus in Acts 8: 20 (Leupold, p. 20).

**Fourth**, some of the imprecations in the psalms are quoted in the NT as predictions of what would befall the *enemies of Christ*. Peter applies the imprecations of Ps. 69: 25 and Ps. 109: 8 to Judas in Acts 1: 20. In Matt. 23: 38, Jesus applies the same imprecation of Ps. 69: 25 to the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem. Likewise, Paul condemns the unbelieving Jews of his day with the imprecation of Ps. 69: 22-23 (Rom. 11: 9-10). If the imprecations were beneath the dignity of the NT Christian, it is doubtful that Peter and Paul, and Jesus Himself, would have employed them to make their point.

It is this last point which moves us toward a solution to the interpretation of imprecatory psalms. The imprecations are not to be interpreted as the personal vendettas (personal acts of revenge) against one's enemies. When David (or another psalmist) called upon the Lord to punish his enemies, he should be understood as the *spokesman for Christ* or *for the corporate people of Christ*. The imprecations of the psalms are not in any sense comparable to the curses which are called down upon one's *personal* enemies by a local witch doctor (or priest) working for hire—a purely selfish venture. Speaking of this practice in his day John Calvin laments,

How detestable a piece of sacrilege is it on the part of monks, and especially the Franciscan friars, to pervert this psalm by employing it to countenance [approve] the most nefarious [wicked] purposes! If a man harbour malice against a neighbor, it is quite a common thing for him to engage one of these wicked wretches [the friars] to curse him, which he would do by daily repeating this psalm. I know a lady in France who hired a parcel of these friars to curse her own and only son in these words (*Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. 6, Psalm 109, p. 276).

By employing another human being to avenge the evil against us, we take matters into our own hands, quite the contrary of what Paul does with Alexander the coppersmith by saying, "The **Lord** will repay him according to his deeds" (2 Tim. 2: 14). This is the same spirit in which Paul speaks when he says, "Never take your *own* revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, **I** will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12: 19). Paul's imprecation against Alexander was not a prayer of personal vengeance, but a prayer against him as the enemy of a chosen instrument of God in spreading the gospel—Paul, the Apostle. When Alexander

persecuted *Paul*, he persecuted *Christ*. This observation leads me to the following conclusions below.

The imprecatory psalms are *prophetic* of all the enemies of Christ who persecuted Him while He was here on earth and who persist in persecuting the people of Christ to this very day (Acts 9:4). The persecutors of Christ are the *enemies of God*, a fact which is clear from Ps. 69: 9, “For zeal for Thy house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach *Thee* have fallen on *me*.” When Jesus cleansed the temple of the money-changers, His disciples realized that His actions were a fulfillment of this psalm (Jn. 2: 17). They did not sufficiently understand the second half of the verse. Those who reproached God and the house of God would also reproach Christ by rejecting His message and nailing Him to a cross, the agony of which is prophesied in the same psalm (vv. 4, 7-8, 20-21, 26). But the persecutors of Christ would not be satisfied in putting Jesus to death, but would persist in harassing and putting to death the followers of Christ: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (Jn. 15: 18; see also Rev. 12: 17). But they will not prevail against God’s people any more than they were able to prevail against Christ Himself. They crucified Him, but He rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God until the Father makes His enemies a footstool for His feet (Ps. 110: 1; Matt. 22: 44). This is precisely why personal vengeance is condemned. The real offense is not against us, even though we are always tempted to take it personally and often do so. If the offense is real rather than imagined, it is first and foremost an offense against God, and He will deal with it in His own good time and in His own way. This gives us the psychological and spiritual freedom to love our enemies and to pray for those who mistreat us. Rather than calling down fire from heaven (Lk.9: 55), we should fear for their safety and pray for their repentance knowing that our heavenly Father takes serious offense at their mistreatment of His children.

Given what has been said above, what is the present application of the imprecatory psalms for Christians today? I have already said that they are not relics of an age long-past, but were employed by Jesus and His apostles in the NT, and they should be employed today when the honor of Christ is at stake, when the gospel is hindered, or when the actions of wicked men threaten the Church, the people of God, etc. Many scenarios could be imagined in which such psalms would be appropriate, but three examples, one from Scripture, one from history, and one current example may be sufficient for explanation.

When Peter and John healed the man who was lame from birth (Acts 3), they were apprehended by the priests and Sadducees who put them in prison (Acts 4: 3). The next day as they appeared before the Council, they were told to speak no longer in the name of Jesus, or they would suffer the consequences (4: 17-18). They replied to this threat by saying, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (4: 19-20).

Fearing the repercussions of a popular uprising, they let the disciples go. When Peter and John came together with other disciples, they reported everything that had happened, a report which elicited a quotation from Ps. 2, a psalm of imprecation against anyone—particularly leaders—who would dare lift a hand against the Lord or against His Anointed One (4: 25-26). Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Gentiles, the people of Israel and their religious leaders had fulfilled the prophecy of Ps. 2 by gathering themselves together against Jesus Christ and putting Him to death (4: 27). But they did not know that this was all part of God’s plan (4: 28).

What follows in v. 29 is an imprecation, “And now Lord, **take note of their threats**, and grant that Thy bondservants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thy dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus.” The phrase,

“take note of their threats,” is a reference to Ps. 2: 3 which is the threat of all religious and political leaders against the rule and reign of Christ whom they repudiate, the same threat being made by the Council against Peter and John. The disciples were not concerned about their personal safety. They were concerned that their work as heralds of the gospel would be hindered by wicked men. In response to these threats, their fellow disciples repeat the imprecation of Ps. 2 which is a warning to all not to challenge the authority of Christ. In the same way, we have the privilege, indeed the duty, to call upon God to “take note of the threats” of godless men who would dare stand in the way of the gospel of Christ and our work as messengers. What God does to the wicked in response to our request is His business. He may choose to remove them by death, or He may choose to allow us to die a martyr’s death as He did in Stephen’s case (Acts 7). Whatever He does, the end result will be the same, the progress of the gospel (See Acts 8: 1-4 in which the persecution of believers resulted in their dispersion to different places, preaching the gospel as they went.)

Using an historical example, we all remember the trail of death and destruction left by the regime of Idi Amin, a man who attempted to convert Uganda to the Muslim faith by torture and execution. (Of course, his motives were not religious, but purely political with his nefarious connections with Mohamar Qadafi in Libya.) Christians living during this holocaust would have been obliged to pray for his removal. How God chose to remove Him, whether by a bullet between his eyes or by conversion to Christ would be left to Him, but his removal was necessary for the survival of the Church and the progress of the gospel in Uganda. God chose to dislodge Amin through popular resistance and the aid of Tanzania, and though he lived to old age, God “took note of his threats” against His Church, and Amin was never again a danger to God’s people. He has now received the “reward” for all his labors, an eternity in hell. He did not heed the warning of Ps. 2: 10-12 to “kiss the son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way.”

For a current application, Christians in the US could be praying for the removal of all the Supreme Court justices who support the wicked practice of abortion and for them to be replaced by God-fearing men and women who are pro-life. How God chooses to do that (or if He chooses to do that) is His business. I am hoping that they may get converted, change their views, retire from office, get sick, or even die a natural death or by a car accident if that is what it takes to give millions of unborn babies the chance to live. I would never advocate murder. Such people must be placed into the hands of God, not men. He will do with them as He wishes. This may sound radical to many Christians, but it is not as radical as the first degree, premeditated murder of unborn children.

Christians in Uganda must likewise be clear about *who* are the enemies of Christ and His church, and pray that God would remove them—either by giving them repentance and faith (for this is one way to remove them), or by popular election, or by sickness or death. In no sense am I suggesting taking matters into your own hands through violent means. The *Lord*, not individual Christians, will choose what to do with such people. Our responsibility is to *pray*—through *imprecations* like those of Peter in Acts 4—that the gospel is not hindered.

The conclusion, then, is this: the imprecatory prayer is still appropriate and useful to the child of God, and still more useful and appropriate for the corporate church to employ as a means of God’s protection of His Church and His gospel, to the end that King Jesus might reign wherever the sun shines, that God’s will be done, and His kingdom come, on earth, as it is in heaven.

### *i. Combination of Categories*

As we have seen above, it is often the case that a psalm may be classified in more than one way. Psalm 73 has the marks of a lament but is also a wisdom psalm. Psalm 78 is a wisdom psalm and a psalm of remembrance. Psalm 45 is a kingship psalm, a wisdom psalm, and a hymn. As Longman

notes, “Genres are not written on tablets of stone; they are flexible. Psalms may be profitably studied under more than one of our stated genres” (p. 35).

### ***Conclusion***

Much more could be said about the interpretation of the psalms, but this would go beyond the scope of this brief course. The student is advised to read the works of Harman and Longman on the psalms, as well as good commentaries.

### **Lesson Seven Questions**

1. Why is it helpful to pay attention to the historical setting of a psalm if it is given in the superscript? Give an example.
2. Why is it not absolutely essential to know the historical context of a psalm?
3. What is the covenantal context of the psalms?
4. Name seven out of the eight different genres (literary forms) of the Psalms?
5. Name three kinds of lament.
6. What kind of Psalm is a hymn?
7. What is the basic structure of the hymn?
8. Identify the call to worship in Ps. 113 (which verses?).
9. Identify the reasons for worshipping God in Ps. 113.
10. What is the psalmist complaining about in Ps. 73?
11. What is an imprecatory psalm? Is it appropriate for a Christian to use such a psalm? Explain.
- 12-19. Match the following psalms with the genre of the psalm.

\_\_\_Ps. 16  
 \_\_\_Ps. 103  
 \_\_\_Ps. 32  
 \_\_\_Ps. 37  
 \_\_\_Ps. 69  
 \_\_\_Ps. 22  
 \_\_\_Ps. 135  
 \_\_\_Ps. 93

A. Lament  
 B. Thanksgiving psalm  
 C. Psalm of Remembrance  
 D. Psalm of Confidence  
 E. Wisdom psalm  
 F. Imprecatory psalm  
 G. Hymn  
 H. Kingship psalm

## *Lesson Eight*

### *V. Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes*

We have already discussed the wisdom Psalms, but much more needs to be said about the wisdom literature of the OT which often presents the interpreter with many enigmatic (confusing) statements. One reason for this confusion is that wisdom literature has its foundation more in the general revelation of creation rather than the special revelation of redemption and prophecy which includes law. In the Law and the Prophets we are confronted with absolute truth in the form of “Thus says the Lord,” while in the wisdom literature we find simply the observation of human experience which needs the explanation and corroboration (further support) of other Scriptures (See also Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message*, p. 235; R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, p.89; and especially Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom: Israel’s Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life*, pp. 74-76).

Furthermore, the lens of human experience through which reality is seen and through which much of the wisdom literature comes to us is often jaded human experience worn out from the trials and disappointments of life. For example in the book of Ecclesiastes we are bombarded with the constant refrain, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Well, is it? Surely the Christian cannot believe this. Even in light of all our difficulties, not everything is vain and absurd (the meaning of the word is closer to “meaningless”—see McNeill, *Ecclesiastes*). As a matter of fact, through His providence God works **all things** for our good (Rom. 8: 28). But care must be taken how we read the book of Ecclesiastes. The writer did not have the benefit of the full revelation of Christ or the NT scriptures, and we must not impute this NT theology into his worldview. He lived and wrote with the knowledge he had as an OT believer who was honest with himself about life’s struggles. (And he *was* a believer. Just read the end of the book.)

Nevertheless, even disadvantaged by partial revelation, the book of Ecclesiastes strikes a responsive chord in all of us who are not living in the denial of an unrealistic Christianity in which everything comes up smelling like roses—or at least we claim that it does. The truth of the matter is: life is tough and often confusing, and sometimes it doesn’t seem worth living. It takes a book like Ecclesiastes to convince us that God understands our darkest moments, and that we are not forsaken in the midst of them.

In the book of Job, we actually learn wisdom from the opposite of what is being preached by Job's friends. This is not to say that they are not correct in much of what they say, but that their "wisdom" of retribution theology—a person *always* gets what he deserves in this present life, whether good or bad—is mistaken. Suffering, though often the result of personal sin, is not always God's payback for being sinful; and it is often true that godly people suffer more in this life than the wicked. Job's friends thought they had God in a neat little box which could easily be explained if only Job would listen to their superior wisdom. But God's actions, it turns out, are not always explainable, nor does God feel in the least bit obligated to explain them, something which Job found out the hard way. For a good introduction to wisdom literature, the student is directed to the work of Graeme Goldsworthy. From this work, as well as the other works cited, we will now develop a strategy for interpreting Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

### A. *Proverbs*

[Note: See my concise commentary on *Proverbs* in *Wisdom Literature*.]

A proverb is a "clear, memorable statement of truth learned through the distillation [condensing something to its essence] of extended human experience" (Dorians, p. 234). Terry defines proverbs as "short, pithy sayings, in which a wise counsel, a moral lesson, or a suggestive experience, is expressed in memorable form" (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, p.329).

***Proverbs do not have the force of moral absolutes which allow no exceptions, but are general principles for godly living gathered from human observation.***

Proverbs 16: 3 may be used to illustrate this point. "Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established." This is a general rule, and we can take comfort as Christians knowing that we have the resources of prayer in asking for God's guidance in planning for the future. The verse also gives us the admonition of committing everything we do to the glory of God. But does it promise us success in every venture we take? If I go into business, is God giving me a guarantee of financial success? If this were true, most of the world's wealth would be controlled by Christians, something experience proves otherwise. Every Christian has had multiple experiences of making plans and committing those plans to the Lord only to find those plans turned upside down through unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances. Jim Eliot, famous missionary to Ecuador in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spent years establishing a school for the Indians only to see it swept away by a flood. He made his plans, and he committed those plans to the Lord, but they were *not* established—at least not during his lifetime. The Apostle Paul planned to take the gospel to Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit wouldn't let him. Did he not pray enough about it? Was he going with the wrong motives? Nothing from the text seems to indicate a lack of prayer or misplaced motives. God simply wanted him to go to Macedonia instead of Bithynia (Acts 16: 7-9).

Nevertheless, the *general principle* must not be lost in the exceptions. Committing our works to the Lord by seeking His guidance and desiring His glory is a strong preventative to failure. Furthermore, the ultimate hope of every Christian is to be pleasing to God, so if our plans get turned on their head in favor of God's better plans, our ultimate plan has indeed been accomplished. "Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37: 4). The important thing for us to remember is to avoid easy, simplistic interpretations (and conclusions) to the Proverbs.

Another example would be Proverbs 10: 3, "The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger, but He will thrust aside the craving of the wicked." As a general rule, God's people are the continual recipients of His kind providence, and all of us have had the experience of seeing His material provisions of food and money arrive in the brink of time to deliver us out of some tight spot. But



is this a guarantee that none of God's people will ever starve to death, and should the victims of starvation always be classified as "the wicked"? If we take this proverb as an *absolute*, we will force ourselves into this corner. We will also be at odds with the teaching of Scripture elsewhere. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it was Lazarus, the poor man who we may presume to have died of starvation or exposure, who is said to have gone to heaven (Lk. 16: 19-31). There are also laws in the OT which provide for the hungry along with many NT scriptures which encourage mercy to the poor.

Looking at the second part of the verse, is the craving of the wicked *always* thrust aside? Have we not all seen the "prosperity of the wicked" which troubled the psalmist (Ps. 73)? People get filthy rich from selling illegal drugs and running prostitution rings, and dictators get rich by stealing money in the millions from the public coffers and executing opponents. (Fidel Castro, brutal communist dictator of Cuba, is estimated by *Forbes* magazine to be worth \$500 million [cited in *World* magazine, April 2, 2005, p. 11].) And does not the Bible itself teach us that God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5: 45) and that we as believers should "do good to *all* men, and especially [but not exclusively] to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6: 10)?

Proverbs 10: 4 says, "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." Who can deny the wisdom of this statement? Much poverty is directly related to sloth (laziness), and prosperity is the direct result of energetic work. There are countless millions in the world who aimlessly waste away precious hours on the street corners when they could be working or looking for work. There are many who envy the rich and claim that their riches are the questionable fruit of exploiting the poor, but if the truth was known and admitted, many of the rich, and perhaps most of them, have earned their riches through eighty-hour-work weeks and wise investment of the profits. But again we are confronted by a proverb which has exceptions in this world. There are many rich people who have scarcely lifted a finger for their money, inheriting it from more productive parents or grandparents. There are others who have exploited the poor for their riches and still others who could have paid their deserving employees better wages and better benefits, but instead chose to increase their personal profits and the profits to their investors. Many people in the US and Africa work difficult, long hours to make the little that they have. Their diligent labor is hardly making them rich but only barely getting them by from day to day. Once again, we could throw up our hands in confusion and skepticism, drawing the conclusion that this proverb does not "work." But this would be mistaken for the reasons we have already mentioned. Besides, even the book of Proverbs gives us an exception by praising the **poor** man who has integrity (Prov. 19: 1). Thus, even Proverbs recognizes the exceptions.

In Proverbs 16: 7 we read, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with Him." Again, this is a general principle outlining the wisdom and practical advantage of being obedient to the Lord. Certainly one's moral integrity is a strong deterrent to being falsely accused by people who would enjoy bringing a good man down but can find no credible accusation against him. However, even good men are often slandered. Naboth was accused of blasphemy and stoned to death (1 Kings 21), and David was hounded unmercifully by King Saul. Many pastors know what it is like to have their words twisted and distorted to such an extent that they bear little resemblance to what they originally said. Small wonder that the average stay of a US pastor in the local church is only two years. Of course, pastors often deserve poor treatment, but Jesus stands as the ultimate example of the perfect man who was pleasing to the Father in every sense, but also one who was despised and rejected by men and maliciously slandered. He also told us that even as He was hated, we too would be hated and persecuted. Yet the general principle remains inviolable (indestructible), and we do well to imitate the attitude of the Apostle Paul who did his "best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and

before men” (Acts 24: 16). The problem arises when we fail to recognize the exceptions and burden ourselves with unnecessary guilt when men and women, even Christians, despise us.

We can see that a rigid interpretation of the proverbs as *absolutes allowing no exceptions* in this life will get us into trouble hermeneutically. Better to accept them as general principles of human observations which make no attempt to cover the exceptions. At the same time, we may well ask whether Doriani states the matter well when he says,

Proverbs are not promises. Proverbs describe life as it is in brief, graphic bursts, using figurative language to catch the attention and remain in the memory. They make their mark by being bold, without stating exceptions, qualifications, or nuances [variations of meaning]. Consequently, proverbs articulate [state] probable truth, not absolute truth; general truth, not automatic rules; tendencies, not guarantees from God. They are the way of wisdom, even shrewdness, in the world, not the way of guaranteed success (*Getting the Message*, pp. 234-235).

Doriani says that “The book of Proverbs describes wisdom for a *sunny* day, a normal day. They say, ‘Live this way and life will, *ordinarily*, go well for you’” (emphasis mine).

Goldsworthy goes even further toward the edge by saying, “The appeal of the simple, practical nature of Proverbs may be *deceptive*” (*Gospel and Wisdom*, p. 74; emphasis mine). He illustrates this warning with the comic book story of a young bookworm named Basil who was always reading books of great learning and then testing their wisdom in practical ways. Basil comes upon the statement, “Still waters run deep” and reasoning that swift waters must be shallow, he confidently walks into a the current of a rapidly flowing creek, only to be swept under.

The proverb contains wisdom distilled from one or a number of actual experiences, but the way it is constructed may give it the appearance of being a general law of nature or rule of life. Ironically it is this apparent generality which appeals to us, and yet the proverbial form was *never intended to function in this way* (p. 75, emphasis mine).

Part of the problem we have with wisdom literature, Goldsworthy maintains, is the way we often interpret the verbal inspiration of the Bible. A “rigid” view of inspiration fails to reckon with the fact that the humanness of the authors was not suspended or temporarily disconnected from the real world as they wrote scripture. The exceptions to this rule would be those relatively rare occasions in which a prophet would be caught up in a trance or immersed in a dream, but most of the scriptures, including the wisdom literature, were written while the author was in full control of his mental faculties and fully susceptible to the physical, societal, and psychological forces which affected his thinking and writing. Unlike the prophet who proclaimed, “Thus says the Lord,” the wisdom writer was not conscious of the fact that God was speaking through him. Qohelet, the preacher, was not putting words in God’s mouth when he said, “All is meaningless,” and Job was not conscious of being quoted when he said, “...I desire to argue with God.” Both of these men were at the time broken with the circumstances confronting them. At the same time, their words were inspired by the Holy Spirit who governed what they wrote and influenced them to say exactly what God intended them to say. However, we must not ignore the context of their words which always give us a clue to their meaning.

The same is true of the more positive wisdom statements, “Where there is no guidance, the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory” (Prov. 11: 14). In making this observation, the writer is not laying down a commandment requiring multiple opinions before making a decision, he is simply drawing from years of experience, his own and others, that two or three points of view are generally better than one. The wisdom sayings, says Goldsworthy, are not “laws given by direct revelation from God but rather are human observations from life’s experiences.” I would qualify

this statement by saying that the wisdom sayings are not in the genre of “law”, although they *are* the direct revelation of God in the genre of wisdom which includes human observations which must be interpreted through the lens of other Scriptures, including law. This is one reason it is ill-advised, says Goldsworthy, for Christians to treat the Proverbs as practical details of “the ethical content of the ten commandments.” They were never intended as a substitute for the Ten Commandments, but as illustrations of the *way* wisdom is learned. “Wisdom is presented as both a human task and a divine gift....” (p. 76).

They could be said to supplement the priest’s instruction in the law. Thus, while the law says: ‘You shall not commit murder’, wisdom means learning from experience and wise counsel how to avoid the multitude of situations that could conceivably lead to murder....Wisdom learns from the experience of the multiplicity of life’s situations so that we are better able to cope with their subtleties [things which are not obvious or easily discerned] (p. 76).

The overall emphasis of wisdom is that we do not become passively dependent when we trust the Lord. Wisdom is telling us that not all our knowledge comes from direct revelation (p. 80).

Wisdom tells us that God has spoken and acted with sufficient clarity for us to perceive the nature of reality when we humble ourselves before a gracious God. God will not enter into our lives to do our thinking for us. He shows trust in us by giving us the equipment and then leaving us to learn about life (p. 86).

Waltke, on the other hand, takes issue with some evangelical interpretations of Proverbs (and other wisdom books) which seem to mitigate (lessen) their practical usefulness by mitigating the reliability of their claims. The following quotation is provided here as a balance to the previous discussion of Goldsworthy and Doriani.

[“Does Proverbs Promise Too Much?”, *An Old Testament Theology*, pp. 910-913, Bruce K. Waltke; bold italic emphasis, except for “***I AM***”, and bold italics in brackets are mine. I have interjected some clarification of Waltke’s statements.]

These heavenly promises of life, health, prosperity, and honor seem detached from earth’s harsh realities. The promises seem false to human experience under the sun, as Job (9:22-23) and Qoheleth (Eccl. 9: 2-3) complain, and contrary to sound doctrine.

[Job 9: 22-23 reads, “It is *all* one; therefore I say, 'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'”<sup>23</sup> “If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent.” Ecclesiastes 9: 2-3 reads, “It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.”<sup>3</sup> This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.” Thus, Job and Qohelet interpret life in contradiction to Proverbs as if God’s treatment of the righteous and the wicked is all the same.]

Eliphaz resolves the conflict by the doctrine of original sin (Job 4: 17), but the narrator of Job disallows the argument (1: 8), and so does ***I AM [Yahweh]*** (42: 7).

Eliphaz interprets Job’s troubles as the consequence of his sin, but at the very beginning of the book, God declares that Job is a righteous man, disallowing Eliphaz’ argument that Job’s suffering is deserved. Moreover, at the end of the book, God disapproves of the way Job’s friends have handled him. He justifies Job and puts his friends at his mercy to pray for them.

Solomon, however, adds to the covenant obligation in Proverbs 3:1-10 that **I AM** disciplines those he loves (Prov. 3: 11-12), probably to motivate a person to keep his covenant obligations to make him or her fit to experience covenant blessings. If anyone should reckon that Solomon and other sages [*wise men*] are dullards [*stupid people*] who cannot see or think straight, let them recall that keen observation and cogent reflection mark the sage. Kenneth Aitken takes an exceptional misstep when he suggests the sages were too optimistic in their promises: “There is a strong suspicion here Israel’s sages have confused their belief about what *ought to be the case with what actually is the case.*” Von Rad goes further, suggesting Qoheleth accuses the sages of so-called “old wisdom” of becoming “entangled in a single false doctrine.” James G. Williams shares that opinion: “His [Qoheleth’s] primary mode of presentation of contrasting proverbs... is in order to contradict traditional wisdom.” These solutions deconstruct with Proverbs, which calls for truthful speech, and the canon, and so undermine Christ’s and his apostles’ claims that all Scripture is inspired of God, who does not author confusion, and that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10: 35; 1 Cor. 14: 33; 2 Tim. 3: 16).

[In other words, the idea that the Proverbs misrepresent the truth is inconsistent with the belief that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for instruction and training in righteousness. If the writers of the Proverbs are “too optimistic” in their promises, this cast doubt upon the rest of Scripture.]

The popular evangelical solution that these are *probabilities*, not promises, though containing an element of truth, raises theological, practical, and psychological problems by *stating the matter badly*. According to this wording the human partner is expected to keep his obligation perfectly (Prov. 3: 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9), but God may keep his imperfectly (3: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10). In truth, however, “if we are faithless, he will remain faithful” (2 Tim. 2: 13). Moreover, a sober person would like to know the probabilities, and a psychologically well person could scarcely trust the **I AM** with all his heart (Prov. 3: 5), knowing God *usually, but not always*, keeps his obligations.

[In other words, should we read the proverbs from the point of view that we must “hedge our bets” if the promises don’t work out? How much incentive will we have in keeping His commandments if the promise of long life applies only to life on earth in the here and now?]

Other steps, however, can be taken toward a resolution. First, the promises are *partially* validated by experience. The sober, not the drunkard (cf. Prov. 23: 29-35), the cool-tempered, not the hothead (15: 18; 19: 19; 22:24; 29: 22), and the diligent, not the sluggard, *usually* experience health and wealth.

Second, the epigrammatic nature [short and to the point] of the proverbs often cause the audience to overlook the counterproverbs that qualify these promises. “There are many proverbs,” says Raymond Van Leeuwen, “that assert or imply that the wicked prosper...while the innocent suffer.”...The wicked has treasures gained by wickedness for a season (10: 2a), but they will not deliver him from death (10: 2b). At that time the wicked’s craving will be frustrated (10: 3b). In contrast, the righteous one who is afflicted at death will be delivered from death (10: 2b) and be fed (10: 3a). The several “better-than” proverbs assume the reality that *at present* the wicked have material presents and the righteous do not: “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice” (cf. Prov. 16: 8, 19; 17:1; 19: 1, 22; 21: 9, 19; 22: 1; 25: 24; 28: 6; Ps. 37: 16; Eccl. 4: 6). *Without these qualifying sayings, one could legitimately accuse Solomon of being guilty of spouting half-truths.*

[Waltke acknowledges that the Proverbs are only “partially”, not completely, validated by corporate experience. As a general rule, they are accurate; but they allow for some exceptions. Moreover, the “counterproverbs” provide documented evidence that the writers themselves acknowledge such exceptions. The “better-than” proverbs at the outset admit that some of the wicked have “great income” while the righteous have “little” (16: 8). Some of the righteous are “lowly” while the wicked enjoy the “spoil” (16: 19). The peaceful house of the righteous may have only a “dry morsel” to eat while the house of the wicked, full of strife, partakes of a feast (17: 1). A poor man walking in his “integrity” is superior to a rich man (implied in the text) who is “perverse in speech and is a

fool” (19: 1). If all these counter-proverbs are taken into account, it can hardly be said that the Proverbs are unrealistic and promise too much.]

Third, the genre effect of being a primer [a basic reader] on morality for youth cause Proverbs *to focus on a future when the righteous rise, not on a present when they fall*: “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down in calamity” (Prov. 24: 16). “Seven” symbolizes completeness, like the “count of ten” in boxing and the proverbial “nine lives” of a cat. In a word, “the righteous are regarded as knocked out for good.” Yet the saying throws away the harsh reality in a concessive clause for the greater reality that the righteous will rise. By contrast, the genre effect of *empiricism* causes Job and Ecclesiastes to focus on the sufferings of the righteous *before* they rise.

[Regardless of what happens to the righteous, they will rise again. On the other hand, the wicked fall but ultimately do not rise. Naboth appears to fall, but the retribution against Jezebel and Ahab imply that his fall was not permanent since God vindicated him in the judgment against the king and queen. In this section, Waltke is getting closer to his conclusion that the promises of Proverbs must transcend the expiration of earthly life or what he calls “clinical death”. When viewed as promises transcending this present life, the proverbs are not “probably true” but absolutely true apart from empirical verification; and they give us all the incentive we need for absolute obedience and trust. Job’s and Qohelet’s statements mentioned earlier focus on the righteous when they fall, but ignore the righteous when they rise—a fact not always susceptible to empirical verification. Only at the end of both books to we see resolution and balance.]

Finally, as pointed out above, the righteous rise in a blessed future that *outlasts death*. In addition to the exegetical arguments presented there, Proverbs’ concept of justice *demand such a hope*. Like so much of the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs is a masterpiece of indirection, preaching its message through the theological reflection of those with ears to hear. Instructively, the opening situation depicted in the father’s first lecture resembles the first situation of humanity outside of the Garden of Eden. Even as Cain murdered righteous Abel, sending him to a premature death, after which Cain lived out a normal life span, so the father represents a traveler’s “innocent blood” (Prov. 1: 11-19) as being dispatched to a premature death by venal sinners who walk on top of his grave and plunder his house. *These initial situations discredit the popular interpretation that life and death in Proverbs refer respectively to living to an old age and to a premature death. For justice to be done, as Proverbs assures it will be (e.g., 3: 31-35: 16: 4-5), Abel and the innocent traveler must be vindicated and delivered from death in a future that lies beyond their clinical deaths.* If clinical death is the last word for the waylaid innocent, then the father’s first lecture, along with other biblical stories about the deaths of martyrs, *deconstruct the Bible’s claim that God upholds justice*. Kathleen A. Farmer rightly comments: “One either has to give up the idea of justice or one has to push its execution into some realm beyond the evidence of human experience.” Obviously that future is not accessible to verification, as Jerry Gladson notes critically, but without that kind of faith one cannot please God. *If these promises could be validated by experience, why does the father command the son to trust in the I AM (3: 5)?*

[Essentially, if God is a God of justice—and, of course, He is—then the innocent traveler’s blood (Prov. 1: 11-12) and the blood of Abel, who died young and childless while murderous brother Cain’s descendants built cities and established culture (Gen. 4: 17-22), must be avenged. If not avenged, the father’s promises to the son in chapter 3 are empty (e.g. 3: 2, 25). Thus, promises of long life in Proverbs must extend beyond clinical life. If they speak only of temporal life, they offer insufficient incentive for righteousness which may or may not pay off.)

If God rewarded virtue immediately, the son would *confound pleasure with piety*, using piety and ethics to satisfy his prurient [*lustful*] interests. He would substitute eudaemonism (i.e. the system of thought that bases ethics on personal pleasure) for the true virtues of faith, hope, and love. God develops the character of his saints by calling them to suffer for the sake of righteousness, while living in hope of eternal life. In this way he teaches them virtue while upholding justice (Rom. 5: 3-4; 2 Peter 2: 3-11).

In sum, Proverbs characterizes the wise as living by faith entirely (“with all your heart,” 3: 5), exclusively (“lean not on your own understanding”), and exhaustively (“in all your ways acknowledge him,” 3: 5-6a).

[This is the answer to believers who ask, “Why do Christians often have it so hard while the wicked have it easy?” Christians must be taught to “trust” God, “to walk by faith and not by sight”. As they trust, they become men and women of character who love God for unseen promises. If all believers had it easier than unbelievers, people would become “Christians” in name only because of its temporal benefits which are easily seen. But faith looks beyond empirical verification (visual “proof”). God is not a God to be worshipped to satisfy our every conceivable want. He is a God to be trusted when the waves of trouble flow over us like they did Job. In the end, he never cursed God. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and if our paths were consistently smooth, faith would become impossible because never needed.]

### **B. Job**

[Note: See my concise commentary on *Job in Wisdom Literature*.]

The book of Job is basically about *theodicy*, a justification of the ways of God with men. Technically, a theodicy is a vindication or argument which clears God of any blame for allowing evil to exist. Specifically, Job is about a theodicy which clears God of any blame for allowing the righteous to suffer. Notice that it is a book *about* theodicy; it is not being said here that it *is* a theodicy simply because no claim is being made in the book that God’s ways with men *need* to be vindicated. Christians seeking an answer to the question of why the righteous suffer or demanding an explanation of why God allows certain things to happen will certainly be disappointed with this book. At the end, Job does not receive such an answer, even though he often seeks it earnestly during his ordeal (Job 7: 20).

At the same time, the book is certainly not a rebuke to those honest but humble Christians who wish to ask, “Why?” As Goldsworthy notes, “We cannot suppose that the entire middle section of the book containing Job’s search for understanding is put there so that it can be ruled out of order. Here is a piece of true wisdom in which the search for an understanding of God’s ways refuses all trite [*simplistic*] answers which suggest either that we know it all or that we can know nothing” (p. 92). On the one hand were Job’s friends who thought they knew it all. For them, the reason for Job’s downfall was, beyond dispute, some personal moral failing (Job 5: 6; 8: 6, 20; 11: 13-14). On the other hand are the pantheists and eastern mystics who accept suffering without question as being an inevitable and natural part of life without any reference to human failure and man’s relationship to a holy God. The answer to human suffering, in their estimation, is that there *is* no answer and that there *need be* no answer.

But knowing *everything* and knowing *nothing* are both impossible and unacceptable alternatives for the Christian. It is impossible to know *nothing* about the ways of God because some knowledge is instilled in man by virtue of his being created in the image of God. Paul says “that which is known about God is evident within them; [*how?*] for God made it evident to them. [*By what means?*] For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1: 19-20). It is also impossible to know *everything* about the ways of God because man is created, which means he is not God. Adam wished to know everything independently of God, which is just the same as wishing to be his own God. To know everything about the ways of God is to be God. By God’s providence, Job was included in the canon of Scripture so that the believer can know something of how God deals with his people, though not

exhaustively. God wishes to make Himself known without going to the extreme of disclosing all of His mystery, a mystery which is too big for man in the first place.

It is not too far afield to say that the wisdom of Job's counselors was confined (limited) to a distortion of the wisdom of Proverbs. Remember that the wisdom of Proverbs does not cover every situation, and God never intended it to. Job's friends would have been correct in saying that suffering is *often* the consequence of personal sin, and prosperity is *often* the result of righteous living. These facts are affirmed in Proverbs and much of what these friends say is in total agreement with the Proverbs. Their mistake was taking the view that suffering is *always* the consequence of personal sin, and that life always sprouts roses for those who are obedient. They make the mistake of allowing no exceptions, something which Proverbs never does. By giving us the book of Job, God further balances the wisdom of Proverbs with the wisdom of Job (and the wisdom of Ecclesiastes). Life is often confusing because Proverbs doesn't always seem to "work" in our experience. Of course, this is not the fault of the Proverbs, but in the way it is often interpreted as fixed rules which have become "fossilized" (Goldsworthy, p. 96).

At the end of the day, this is a blessing in itself, because if Proverbs always "worked" and life were always predictable, we would worship God only for the benefits we could see and touch and not because of who He is and what He has done for us in redemption. God would become our magical servant whom we could command to bless us whenever we produced the prescribed behavior. However, if only the wisdom of Proverbs were operating in the universe, we would never be blessed by His grace whenever our performance was lacking. Every Christian has had the embarrassing experience of having a "beastly" day of sinning (Ps. 73: 21-22) only to be blessed abundantly at the end of the day. Some of my most blessed opportunities of sharing the gospel have come to me shortly after a ghastly outburst of anger when things were not going well at work. Thankfully, most of these were private explosions while I was doing carpentry or plumbing and no one else was blasted away. But the Spirit was grieved, and after repenting I walked slump-shouldered for some time wondering how God could love the likes of me. On days like this, when my self-sufficiency was at its least, the gospel meant the most, and I could explain it better than other days. Under a fixed system of retribution (the payback of good for righteousness and evil for unrighteousness), grace is not placed in bold relief against the backdrop of our unworthiness. God never intended Proverbs to tell the whole story, a mistake Job's friends made by "hardening the general patterns of retribution into a rigid dogma [doctrine] of cause and effect" (Goldsworthy, p. 106) contrary to the teaching of Proverbs.

To his credit, Job shuns the counsel of his foolish wife to curse God and die (Job 2: 9-10), and continues to hold on to his hope that one day he will share a future with the God who has afflicted him (Job 19: 25-26). Deprived of any of the insider information given to the reader in chapters 1: 1-13 and 2: 1-6, Job doesn't have a clue about what is going on, but he trusts God just the same. "Wisdom is aware of its limitations and it is ready to admit that there is much of God's order that is hidden from us" (Goldsworthy, p. 98). Job doesn't have to have the whole picture (See J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 91-93). This is true wisdom, the kind we need to imitate when life falls apart. His friends, on the other hand, thought they had the whole picture. To them life was a seamless tapestry of God's order easily discernible to those with the eyes and good sense to see it. Job was just acting like a dumb brute. By observing the predictability of a moral universe, they were able, they thought, to formulate a doctrine of God which could be consulted on any occasion and in any circumstance. Thus formulated, God was then obligated to conform to their understanding of who He was. As Goldsworthy notes (pp. 101-102),

It is a short step from seeing God as the creator and sustainer of order to thinking of God as himself bound to our simplistic notions of order. When we begin to give independent status to things like order,

justice, goodness and truth, it is not long before we also begin to insist that God should conform to them. We then build up a picture of a just and good God on the basis of the supposedly self-evident ideas of justice and goodness. The biblical picture is the opposite. God reveals what he is like and in so doing shows us what justice and goodness are. So with order; the revelation of God must define it for us. God is not a creature subject to a higher independent principle called order. Order is what it is because God is what he is, and because he made it so.

Job, then, learns of God as the God who is above the order which is perceptible to man....The knowability of God must never be stretched so as to eliminate the mystery of God's unknowability....We must always allow that God is infinitely greater than our understanding can grasp both in his being and in his ways.

This kind of wisdom is needed whenever we are confronted with the many mind-boggling sections of the Bible: Hosea being commanded to marry a prostitute, the book of Hebrews commending Rahab the harlot who saved the Israelite spies by telling a lie, etc. God does not always conform to our preconceptions of Him or of truth. Getting wisdom is the means by which we realign our conceptions to match the truth of who God is and what He requires of us.

At the end of the book, God rebukes Job's friends for their attempt to simplify Him and to put Him in a neat box (42: 7-9). It is striking that He does not rebuke them for accusing Job falsely, perhaps because that offense paled in comparison to the former. He also rebukes Job for demanding an explanation for his suffering from the God who created the universe. Job could no more understand why God does everything He does than he could understand how He made the world out of nothing. His wise providence over all things, people, and events would be no less incomprehensible than the latter. As a mere mortal, Job needed to know his limitations (Chps. 38-39; 40: 1-2, 6-24; 41: 1-34). Having much to say earlier and wishing to challenge God to a debate (13: 3, 15), Job is now speechless (40: 3-5) except to admit that he had been chattering on about things he knew very little (42: 3). Not wishing to argue any longer, he is ready to listen and be taught (42: 4). Up to now his knowledge of God had been too theoretical, but now he was just beginning to understand. He repents in dust and ashes (vv. 5-6) and has now begun his quest for true wisdom: to let God be God.

### ***C. Ecclesiastes***

[Note: See my updated commentary on *Ecclesiastes*]

Ecclesiastes is one of the most difficult books in the Bible. The reader will possibly testify that he can count on one hand (or one finger?) the number of sermons he has heard from this book. A brief reading of the book will reveal why this is so, and a careful reading of the book will confirm it. The author, most likely *not* Solomon, moves back and forth between statements which hold out a glimmer of hope that he is a believer and those which could be spoken by Hugh Hefner, the originator of *Playboy Magazine*, Maynard on the *Doby Gillis Show* (the disadvantages of hard work), or Bill Clinton ("It's the economy, stupid."). A few quotations will illustrate Qohelet's confusion and self-contradictions.

### ***Sex and money***

Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces, I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines....And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor (2: 8, 10).



He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity (5: 10).

Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun (9:9)

### ***Life's Labor***

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun....For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? (2: 18-20, 22).

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God (3: 12-13).

He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap....Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good (11: 4, 6).

### ***The Reward of the Righteous and the Wicked***

There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility (8: 14).

It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear (9: 2).

The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity" (2: 14-15).

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink ;and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to the one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind (2: 24-26).

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them."....The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (12: 1, 13-14).

It was the preacher's purpose from the very beginning of his journey to obtain wisdom (1: 12-13a; 17a; 7: 25). His conclusion at the end of his quest is that comprehensive wisdom is impossible to achieve, an admission he makes at the first of the book (1: 17b) and toward the end (8: 16-17). The reason for this admission is that there appears to be a "confusion of order" (Goldsworthy's terms) in contrast to the retributive justice (rewards for righteousness and punishment for unrighteousness) seen in Proverbs. According to his own personal observations, it is difficult to determine whether righteousness pays or not. Sometimes it clearly pays, but at other times there seems to be no

difference in the fate of the righteous and the fate of the wicked (See the verses quoted above; also Goldsworthy, p. 110).

We have seen this same dilemma before in Psalm 73. The difference there is that the psalmist finds his solution in the future salvation of the righteous and the final judgment of the wicked. Since God resolves everything redemptively in the future, the complexities and confusion of the present situation should not cause us to despair. The righteous man will be saved from this present evil world and the wicked will get what is coming to him. What happens to us in this life becomes almost irrelevant. However, the value of Ecclesiastes is that the writer does not immediately draw upon the future resolution of all things in the redemptive plan of God; and by not doing so, he refuses to take the edge off the tensions that we face in the present (Goldsworthy, p. 113). The “preacher” will not allow us to get away with the “pie in the sky” theology which masks over the deep trauma (hurt) that we all feel when we are earnestly seeking to please God, but everything we do seems to turn to mush. Added to this confusion is the seemingly simple life of those who have no inclination at all to please or worship the God who apparently awards their spiritual apathy (indifference) with sunshine and rain (Matt. 5: 45).

“Qohelet [the preacher] is a rebuke to the false optimism which comes from a simplistic view of wisdom’s goal” (Goldsworthy, p. 113). And what is this goal? The goal of wisdom is not to figure it all out and take the mystery and tension out of life. It is not to find “God’s perfect will for your life” and thus avoid all the pitfalls which less spiritual people suffer because they are too stupid to read all the directions. (And this statement is not an encouragement to be lazy in the scriptures or in keeping God’s commandments, something the preacher encourages us to do [12: 13], but only a recognition that keeping all the rules will not immunize us from all or even most of the ills of living in a fallen world.)

The student will find J. I. Packer’s analysis of Ecclesiastes very helpful (*Knowing God*, “God’s Wisdom and Ours”, pp. 89-97). In this chapter, Packer uses the analogy of the York signal box in England to illustrate the presumption of some Christians who believe that God takes the mystery and confusion out of a person’s life when they become Christians. In the signal box, which sits high above the tangled web of train tracks coming into York, England, the train controller can make sense of everything going on below him and give instructions to the hundreds of trains coming into the station at a given time. This is because he sees the whole layout of train tracks and the incoming and outgoing trains (represented by blinking lights on an electronic board) all at once. The spectator on the ground has a completely different experience, seeing only a mass of confusion and not being able to make sense out of any train movement going on simply because he does not, and cannot, see the whole picture at a glance. The mistake of many Christians, Packer laments, is that they believe that their faith in Christ puts them inside the signal box lifted up above the confusion on the ground. They can know with some measure of confidence and certainty what God (the Controller) is doing with their lives on a week by week or even a day by day basis. In this way, Romans 8: 28 (“God causes all things to work together for good...”) would not have to be a matter of *faith*, but of *sight* since they could actually see it all happening in front of them. We’ll let Packer explain in his own words where this kind of thinking leads (p. 92).

Such people spend much time poring over the book of providence, wondering why God should have allowed this or that to take place, whether they should take it as a sign to stop doing one thing and start doing another, or what they should deduce [conclude] from it. If they end up baffled, they put it down to their own lack of spirituality.

Christians suffering from depression, physical, mental or spiritual (note, these are three different things!) may drive themselves almost crazy with this kind of futile enquiry. For it is futile; make no mistake about that. It is true that when God has given us guidance by application of principles He will on

occasion confirm it to us by unusual providences, which we recognize at once as corroborative [supporting] signs. But this is quite a different thing from trying to read a message about God's secret purposes out of every unusual thing that happens to us. So far from the gift of wisdom consisting in the power to do this, the gift actually presupposes [assumes without proof] our conscious inability to do it. . . .

Wisdom, then, does not consist in the ability to discern God's purpose in everything that happens to us; it is just the opposite. It is the ability to know that much of what God is doing with us cannot be analyzed with any degree of accuracy. The kind of wisdom taught in Ecclesiastes is the kind which helps us do the right thing at the right time. Packer uses another illustration to make his point (p. 93). When driving down the road, the driver does not needlessly bother himself with questions which have no apparent answers: why the road suddenly takes a sharp curve or why the on-coming driver is taking his half of the road out of the middle (something Ugandan truck drivers enjoy doing, especially at night). Even if such questions could be answered, the answers would not help us survive to our desired destination. The good driver simply responds appropriately to the situation in front of him and does the right thing at the right time. He slows down in the curve and moves to the shoulder of the road to avoid hitting the truck driver who hasn't slept for the past two days. This is what Biblical wisdom is like. It realistically sees life as it is, which is sometimes not too pretty, and it enables us to respond to the many unforeseen difficulties and sorrows we are confronted with on a daily basis, trusting that God understands everything and has a purpose for everything even if we don't know what it is and possibly never will.

Having lived and worked in Africa for almost sixteen years, I have come to believe that Africans are far more inclined to accept difficulty and sorrow than Americans. It's simply part of life. Americans (including me) demand a reason for everything, partly owing to our philosophical Enlightenment past which optimistically and naively taught that man was going to come up with the scientific explanation for everything. Two world wars later, such explanations didn't materialize, but the roots of Enlightenment thinking die very slowly. Americans like to "fix" things and fix them quickly with simple solutions. When they fail, they simply go on to the next "fix." But life is not fixed so easily, and many people in America who have at one time professed faith in Christ have drifted into unbelief because God did not perform according to their expectations—like the man I talked to once who did not believe in God after his young son died of heart disease. Having seen many such children in the hospital ward suffering as his son did, he reasoned that with so much suffering among innocent children, God either did not exist, or if He did exist, He could not be a God of love worthy of our worship.

If Africans were so easily dissuaded from the Christian faith, there would be very few African Christians, many of whom have seen far more suffering than the average person both personally, economically, and politically. Based on my very limited observation and understanding of genuine African Christians, they hang on to the faith far more tenaciously than this man. Where Africans seem to fail is in accepting the will of God (His plan) without recognizing that man's responsible or irresponsible actions are included in this plan. God's plan is the ultimate cause of everything, but He generally works out His plan by means of secondary causes which include human involvement, both good and bad. While it is true that human suffering is part of "God's plan," it is also part of God's plan that we relieve much human suffering by keeping His commandments. When we fail to keep His commandments as individuals and corporately as a nation, more suffering is the result. If this were not true, we would be machines living in a meaningless, automated universe.

But Ecclesiastes purposely views life from the limited perspective of human observation and not divine providence; and the preacher's complaint, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" is to be expected. If we cannot discern the purpose in what we do, what profit is there in doing anything (1: 3; 2: 11, 22; 3: 9; 5: 16)?

It is to this pessimistic conclusion, says the preacher, that optimistic expectations of finding the divine purpose of everything will ultimately lead you (cf. 1: 17f.). And of course he is right. For the world we live in is in fact the sort of place that he has described. The God who rules it hides Himself. Rarely does this world look as if a beneficent Providence were running it. Rarely does it appear that there is a rational power behind it all. Often and often what is worthless survives, while what is valuable perishes. Be realistic, says the preacher; face these facts; see life as it is. You will have no true wisdom till you do (Packer, p. 95).

If wisdom is not the ability to figure everything out (8: 16-17), then what is it? Ecclesiastes provides the answer. It is recognizing that you are accountable to God for all your actions (11: 9; 12: 14). It is preparing yourself spiritually while you are still young so you will be able to enjoy old age with all of its inconveniences and so you will be able to look death in the face with confidence and courage (12: 1-7). It is enjoying everything as God's good gift, especially the work which He has given you to do (9: 7-9; 3: 12-13; 11: 1-6). Finally, and conclusively, wisdom is to "fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (12: 13). We may not understand the reason behind all the commandments either; but God does, and we will be wise to think dependently upon Him rather than trying to go it alone.

### Lesson Eight Questions

1. How does wisdom literature differ from the literature of the law and the prophets?
2. What was the error of Job's three friends?
3. What are we to make of the many promises of Proverbs which often seem contradictory to our experience?
4. If Christians always had it easy in this life, what would be the result?
5. How do the better-than proverbs (Prov. 16: 8, 19; 17:1; 19: 1, 22; 21: 9, 19; 22: 1; 25: 24; 28: 6; Ps. 37: 16) contradict the accusation that the proverbs promise too much?
6. Is it morally wrong to ask God why we are having so much trouble? Explain.
7. Should we give independent status to things like truth and morality? In other words, do truth and morality exist independently of God? Explain.
8. Explain this statement: Ecclesiastes is a remedy for false optimism about having exhaustive wisdom of God's will for our lives. Use J.I. Packer's analysis to illustrate your answer.
9. I expressed my concern that although Africans accept God's sovereign will as the final reason for everything, they tend to minimize the secondary causes of man's responsible action. Demonstrate your understanding of this statement by interacting with it.
10. What is the preacher's conclusion at the end of Ecclesiastes?