

Hermeneutics is the logical, analytical system of principles for the proper, objective interpretation of the Bible. The word "hermeneutics" is derived from the Greek word hermēneuō, which means "to interpret." A logical student who is guided by the Holy Spirit can discover the proper principles through experience; however, a good practical course in hermeneutics will save him much trial and error by laying the principles before him at the outset. More important, a study of hermeneutics will help the student who is not analytical avoid many ditches and potholes in the road to sound exegesis. ("Exegesis" means "critical explanation or analysis, especially, the interpretation of the Scriptures." It is derived from the Greek word exēgeisthai, which means "to guide, show the way.")

Peter admitted that the New Testament contains "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures unto their own destruction" (2 Pe. 3:16). Today, many twist the Scriptures to prove their errors, ignoring sound rules of interpretation out of a desire to protect their church's dogma.

The many circumstances behind the writing of the Bible require the expositor to study thoroughly and accurately. In other words, he must follow hermeneutical principles and be led of the Holy Spirit. (Exposition is essentially the same as exegesis, although exposition usually implies a fuller, more subjective treatment.)

The writers of the Bible were men of varied classes and educations. Ezra was a priest. Solomon was a king and a poet. Isaiah was a prophet. David was first a shepherd and later a king. Amos was first a shepherd and later a prophet. Daniel was a statesman. Moses and Paul were sages, whereas Peter and John were unlettered fishermen. The writings of these men included laws, history, psalms, proverbs, prophecies, biographies, and letters.

The penmen of the Scriptures wrote at different times and from varied locales. Moses, probably the first writer of Scripture, wrote about 1400 years before Christ. John, the last writer of Scripture, lived about 1500 years after Moses. These writers wrote from such diverse places as Asia, the deserts of Arabia, the wilderness of Judea, the porticos of Solomon's Temple, the schools of the prophets in Bethel and in Jericho, the royal palaces of Babylon, the banks of the Chebar River, and the capital of the Roman Empire. They employed literary figures, symbols, and expressions common to the times and places in which they wrote.

Thus, although the Bible is inspired by God, it includes a wide variety of persons, subjects, epochs, and places. In other words, the world of the Bible writers' day had an influence, not on the Divine truth, but on the language itself, which the preacher, the interpreter, and the expositor must understand.

Attitudes Necessary for the Profitable Study of the Scriptures

The Bible is a revelation from God and a permanent miracle of His grace. It is the Divine standard by which we are to be judged at the last day; it is the testament sealed with the blood of Christ. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing," says Paul, "because, when you received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Th. 2:13). We should treat the Scriptures with respect, for the Lord says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2). If one studies with humility, reverence, prudence, and patience, one will discover "wondrous things" in His Law (Psa. 119:18).

On the contrary, the stubborn person who tries to study the Bible will prove what Paul says concerning the "natural" man: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). To study as a teachable disciple, one must put aside preoccupations, preconceived opinions, and favorite ideas. Insolvable paradoxes and hopeless contradictions lie in the mind of the reader, not in the infallible Word of God.

Unregenerate man by nature possesses a heart that flees from spiritual truth and embraces error. Jesus accurately described man, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Furthermore, He said that man hates the light (John 3:20). In their growing blindness to the truth Jesus proclaimed, the Jews hated Him, persecuted Him, and finally crucified Him.

But the willing man can know God's truth. Peter described the requirement for knowing the truth: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pe. 2:1-2). A person who searches the Scripture with this desire will receive a "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17). Furthermore, God will reveal truth to the willing man: "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Psa. 25:14).

The longer a man looks for treasure, the more he appreciates it once he finds it. The same is true of looking for treasure in the Word of God. The Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians in that "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). This labor carries a reward in itself, as the psalmist declares: "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Psa. 119:162).

To study the Scriptures profitably, begin with the simple and proceed to the difficult. When the disciples of Jesus could not understand His words, they asked Him to elaborate (Mtt. 13:36; Mark 4:10). Jesus answered their questions: "When they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mark 4:34). Jesus took opportunities to reveal the Word of God: "Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

We Must Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

The Scriptures claim to be inspired by God: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Bible uses human language to convey Divine, spiritual, and eternal truths. Figures of speech in the Scriptures were written in different countries with different customs, separated by centuries of time. Naturally, the Bible contains obscure points, words, and passages that require careful study and interpretation. Such difficulties make it all the more important to follow the fundamental principle of hermeneutics: Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you receive a will that promises you wealth but is hard to understand, you should consult a good lawyer. A good lawyer will read the document, taking its words and phrases in the usual legal sense. When he comes to obscure points, he will carefully examine the surrounding phrases. He will then study the context (the text preceding and following the obscure point). If the context fails to clarify the point, he will consult the whole passage to determine its object, intent, or purpose. If the passage fails to help, he will seek light in other parts of the will, looking for similar phrases or paragraphs with more explicit treatment of the same subject. He will try to allow the will to be its own interpreter.

The Proper Use of Commentaries

If a legal document seems unclear, it may be wise to take it to a lawyer to interpret. (In our analogy, the document represents the Bible and the lawyer represents a commentator.) Consulting a lawyer may be necessary when you wish to make your own evaluation but find certain standard legal phrases and historical matters obscure because you are not familiar with them. But realize that lawyers are also subject to bias, and they are divided into different schools of thought. Therefore, our "lawyers" (Bible commentators) must be used with caution.

Of course, the lawyer analogy is not perfect, because we have the aid of the Holy Spirit when interpreting God's Word. The Holy Spirit does not, however, give us historical and geographical data or Greek and Hebrew word studies. Nor does He explain ancient customs or reveal archeological findings. Neither is the Holy Spirit to be used as a substitute for thinking and studying. God expects us to learn to read, write, count, and think with the brain He gave us. As we study the Scriptures applying all the faculties and information we have, the Holy Spirit brings Scripture to our remembrance and enlightens the passages. The spiritual tenor becomes clear. We then must add the facts of research to round out the total picture.

In short, reference books are valuable if used properly. We must not absorb the spiritual interpretations of the commentators like a sponge, but we should not consider all commentators void of any spiritual insight, either.

There is often safety in numbers. If a difficult passage involves doctrine, check it in many commentaries, and then return to the Word of God. Using a concordance and a Bible chain reference, restudy all the verses that apply to the given subject, asking the Holy Spirit to bear witness in your heart to the truth and make it clear to you. (This principle applies to teachers as well as commentaries.)

In general, commentaries are more valuable for background information than for spiritual understanding. Most commentators were highly educated in the mechanics of the original languages and in the history, archeology, and customs of Bible lands, but many were not filled with the Holy Spirit, which is necessary to understand the working of the Spirit.

In New Testament times, the Jews wrested Scriptures out of context to justify their rejection of Christ. Using the same approach, some Catholics find apparent support in the Bible for the errors of the papacy, the worship of Mary, the tortures of the Inquisition, and the massacres of Protestants, to say nothing of putting the interpretations of church councils above the Word of God. Likewise, spiritualists find apparent support for reincarnation, the Communists justify their repartition of goods, and skeptics find "contradictions" in the Bible.

Because of such abuses, some people claim that a person can prove any doctrine from the Bible. Indeed, with an evil will, unbelief, slothfulness, and ignorance one may seem to prove whatever he wants to prove—but the Bible will never actually prove what worldly minded men want it to prove. The Bible teaches only one truth. All other interpretations will break down when all the facts are known. "The law of the Lord is perfect" (Psa. 19:7). There is no error in God's Word. One cannot take away from the Word, impose on it, add to it, or suppress it without suffering harm or loss. God through His servants has made it clear: "Add thou not unto His words lest He reprove thee and thou be found a liar" (Pro. 30:6). "And if any man shall take away from the words of this book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life" (Rev. 22:19).

The Divine revelation, as a perfect law, "is given by inspiration of God...for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible declares that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pe. 1:20). It is no surprise, then, that in eminent writers of ancient times, we find expressions such as this: "The Scriptures are their best interpreters. You will understand the Word of God better by consulting one part with another, 'comparing spiritual with spiritual' (2 Cor. 2:13), than in any other way."

APPLIED HERMENEUTICS

Reference: The Five Basic Rules of Hermeneutics

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Always apply the fundamental principle that the Bible is its own interpreter. From this principle, other principles (called rules or guides of interpretation) are deduced. These rules are as follows:

FIRST RULE: INTERPRET WORDS IN THEIR ORDINARY SENSE

The writers of the Bible wrote with the object of being understood. Consequently, they used known words in their ordinary sense. Determining what is the ordinary sense is the first concern in rightly interpreting the Scriptures. So far as possible, interpret words in their ordinary sense.

The Bible is full of idiomatic and peculiar expressions, so keep in mind that the ordinary sense is not always literal. Every language has proper and peculiar expressions that are so different that, if literally translated, the true sense could be destroyed.

The writers of the Bible wrote in the language of the people, not in a language that only a few scholars could understand. Because of this figurative and popular speech, the Bible's language has much liberty, variety, and vigor. Rhetorical figures, similes, parables, and symbolic expressions are also used abundantly. Peculiar expressions of the Hebrew idiom are called Hebraisms. Take figures of speech into account to determine the ordinary sense of the words. Examples follow:

1. Genesis 6:12 says, "...All flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." If one takes the words "flesh" and "way" literally, the text loses the significance completely. But if one takes the words figuratively ("flesh" in the sense of person and "way" in the sense of manner of life), the text means that every person had corrupted his manner of life. Using literal language, Paul declares the same truth: "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12).
2. Prophesying of Jesus, Zacharias said that God raised up for us a horn of salvation in the house of David (Luke 1:69). The meaning of the verse is lost if taken literally. But knowing that a horn, as symbol and figure, ordinarily denotes "force" or "royal power and house, family, or posterity," the verse becomes clear. From David's descendants, God raised up in Christ a great power of salvation. Peter likewise said, "Him (Jesus) hath God exalted...to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).
3. Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Taken literally, this statement contradicts the precept to love others, even our enemies. If one realizes this statement is a hyperbole, the text makes sense. (A hyperbole is an exaggeration for effect.) Without using a hyperbole, Jesus expressed the same truth, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mtt. 10:37).

These examples demonstrate the necessity of being familiar with the idiomatic and peculiar expressions of the Bible.

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SECOND RULE: INTERPRET WORDS IN THEIR IMMEDIATE SETTING

The significance of words varies much according to the phrase or argument in which they occur. Therefore, interpret words in their immediate setting. Examples follow:

1. Faith: The word "faith" ordinarily signifies "confidence," but it also has other meanings. Paul noted the Judean Christians' reaction to his conversion: "But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed" (Gal. 1:23). The immediate setting of "faith" shows clearly that "the faith" in this verse signifies the body of doctrines derived from the Bible.
2. Salvation: The word "salvation" is frequently used of salvation from sin and its consequences, but it has another significance. For example, Moses thought that his brethren understood that God had sent him to "give salvation" by his hand (literal Greek in Acts 7:25). Guided by the context of the verse, we understand that the word "salvation" ("deliver" in the King James) occurs here in the sense of temporal liberty.
3. Flesh: Romans 3:20 says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight...." The immediate setting of "flesh" indicates that "flesh" here signifies person, because only man can be justified. Ezekiel 36:26 says, "...I will give you an heart of flesh...." All persons must have natural hearts of flesh to live; however, in this verse, the Lord is saying He will give the Israelites a yielded, teachable disposition. Ephesians 2:3 says, "...We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh...." "Flesh" signifies "sensual desires" in this verse. First Timothy 3:16 says, "...God was manifest in the flesh...." In other words, God was manifest in a human body. Paul asked the Galatians, "...Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). Paul was asking them whether they could be perfected by observing Jewish ceremonies, such as circumcision, a ritual affecting the literal flesh.
4. Body: Matthew 26:26 says, "...Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body." Jesus broke bread, not his body. Physically whole, Jesus gave them the bread, clearly not a part of his material flesh. The bread symbolically represents his body.
5. Keys: Jesus said to Peter, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...." The kingdom of heaven is not an earthly place that can be entered by using a material key. "Keys" must therefore be figurative. Keys signify authority, the authority to open and shut, or to remit or retain sins, which, on another occasion, Jesus gave to the rest of his disciples (Mtt. 18:18; John 20:23).

THIRD RULE: INTERPRET WORDS IN THEIR CONTEXT

Interpret words in their context (the verses that precede and follow the text).

Sometimes the immediate setting is not enough to determine the intended meaning of certain words. We should then begin the reading further above and continue further below to take into account what precedes and follows the obscure expression.

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In the context, we find expressions, verses, or examples that clear up the obscure word. Examples follow:

1. An obscure word may become clear by use of a similar or opposite word found in the context. For example, in Galatians 3:17 the word "covenant" is explained by the word "promise" in the same verse.
2. "For the wages of sin is death," says Romans 6:23. The profound sense of this statement is vividly portrayed by the following opposite statement, "But the gift of God is eternal life." Thus, death here is seen as being eternal.
3. A word expressing a general idea may be taken in a restrictive sense, according to some special circumstance determined by the context. When David, for example, exclaimed, "Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity" (Psa. 7:8), the context shows that David was protesting his righteousness only in relation to accusations railed against him by Cush the Benjamite.
4. Jesus presented the conduct of the deceitful steward as an example for our imitation, but the context limits that example to the prudence of the steward, not his dishonesty. In other words, we should be spiritually pragmatic as he was naturally pragmatic (Luke 16:1-13).
5. Jesus, speaking of the man blind from birth, said, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents." Jesus' statement does not mean that they had never sinned, because the context limits the sense of His statement. Blindness had not come as a punishment, as the disciples erroneously thought (John 9:1-7).

When looking at the context, remember that at times the flow of the argument or narrative is broken by a parenthesis, after which the writer resumes the argument. If the parenthesis is long, as in the epistles of Paul, pay close attention.

The Bible was not written with chapter-and-verse divisions. The flow of the argument or narrative is not always finished with the end of the numbered chapter.

At times, only the context determines whether an expression is to be taken literally or figuratively. In rare cases, when the context is not definitely literal or figurative, consult other Scriptures that are parallel in context or concept.

Jesus called the wine the "blood of the new testament" (Mtt. 26:27). The word "blood" must be taken figuratively, since Jesus, in the context, also called the wine "fruit of the vine" (Mtt. 26:29). In John 6, when Jesus said, "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life," and "my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed," the disciples were astonished. The context shows that "The Spirit (the spiritual sense of what is said) quickeneth; the flesh (the carnal sense) profiteth nothing." To eat the flesh and to drink the blood is equivalent to appropriating by faith the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, resulting in eternal life (John 6:48-63).

When Paul spoke of being "laborers together with God" and building with "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble," he was speaking of Christ as the foundation (1 Cor. 3:5-15). The context shows that these words are to be taken spiritually, doubtless representing true or false doctrines with their consequences. The context also explains the expression, "shall be saved; yet so as by fire." This expression applies to the servants of God. This fire does not burn within the laborers to produce zeal, but it burns up the wood, hay, and stubble in their ministries. Furthermore, it is not a purifying fire, but a destroying fire—the fire of rigorous scrutiny in eternity. These "laborers together with God" will be saved then in the sense of an architect who escapes from the burning house he is building. "He shall be saved," not by means of remaining in the fire, but "as by fire." (From this passage the Catholics wrongly derive the doctrine of purgatory.)

FOURTH RULE: CONSIDER THE OBJECT OR DESIGN OF THE BOOK OR PASSAGE

Consider the object or design of the book or passage in which obscure words or expressions occur. This rule amplifies the previous rules when neither the immediate setting nor the context offers sufficient light.

The object or design of a book or passage is found, above all, by taking into account the occasion and the persons to whom it was originally written. In other cases, the design is contained in the book or passage itself, as, for example, in needing the whole Bible to interpret Romans 15:4 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the Gospels to interpret John 20:31, and the book of Proverbs to interpret Proverbs 1:1,4.

Examples follow:

1. Paul wrote the epistles to the Galatians and the Colossians to combat the errors of the Judaizers who were causing great damage in those churches. Consequently, these letters were designed to clarify salvation through Christ, in contrast to the teaching of Judaizers who taught observance of days and Jewish ceremonies, discipline of the body, and false philosophy.
2. To better understand Psalms 3, 18, 34, and 51, we need to take into account the occasion for which they were written, which is noted in their headings. By examining the titles of Psalms 120 and 134, we learn that they are Songs of Degrees, which were written to be sung by the Jews on their annual journeys to Jerusalem.
3. The rich, young ruler, blinded by his own self-righteousness, asked Jesus what good thing he must do to obtain eternal life, and Jesus answered, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mtt. 19:17). Did Jesus teach here that the means of salvation is the observance of the Ten Commandments? The meaning of Jesus' statement becomes clear when we take into account why Jesus spoke to the rich, young ruler. Jesus wanted to make the ruler see that he was only a poor idolater who worshipped his riches and that he had not fulfilled even the first commandment of the Law. The design of Jesus in this case was to use the Law as a tutor, as the apostle says (Gal. 3:24), to lead the sinner to the sure foundation of salvation. The ruler was given a choice: money or Jesus. The ruler's decision revealed his true heart.

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4. Paul said man is justified through faith, without works of the Law (Rom. 3:28). James declared that man is justified by works, not by faith only (Jas. 2:24). The apparent contradiction disappears when one considers the different designs of these epistles. Paul refuted those who trusted in works of the Mosaic Law as a means of justification, for they rejected faith in Christ. James addressed disorderly ones who contented themselves with a dead faith that was not demonstrated by good works. Moreover, James showed that alleged faith without works is dead. Works justify by proving faith.
5. First John 3:9 says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin...." Does the Holy Spirit mean that a Christian is unable to sin? Toward the end of the apostolic age, certain so-called Christians were deceived into believing that they could practice carnal excess, without regard to any law. One of the designs of 1 John is, evidently, to warn "the sons of God" against such evil beliefs. A person manifests either the works of God or the works of the devil. The sons of God manifest their love to God by keeping his commandments (1 Jn. 5:2), but the sons of the devil imitate their father, who has been sinning from the beginning (1 Jn. 3:8). These sons of the devil practice sin, or continue sinning, as the Greek text indicates with the present tense. Being born of God and aspiring to complete moral perfection, the sons of God cannot by nature continue sinning. The sons of God are exhorted to keep from evil, but this only goes to show that they are not beyond the possibility of sinning, as 1 John 2:1-2 shows: "...And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins...."
6. In Galatians 4:10-11, Paul opposed the observance of Jewish feast days, but in Romans 14:5-6, he did not oppose such observances. How do we explain this difference? The general object of the epistle to the Galatians was to resist doctrines of Judaizers, who had bewitched the Galatians. They had taught the Galatians that to be saved a person must keep the doctrine of feast days; in reality, the Judaizers attacked the foundation of justification by faith, making null the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Because of the great danger of this doctrine, Paul firmly opposed these Jewish observances that were obscuring the glorious Savior and threatening to ruin the apostolic labor among them.

Romans 14:1-13, on the other hand, had as its object the restoration of peace within a group of weak believers converted from Judaism. These weak believers criticized the stronger believers, who in turn despised the weak ones for abstaining from eating meat and drinking wine and for observing the feasts of the Old Testament. These weaker believers were observing feast days, but not as a requirement for salvation, so they were not in the grave danger of the Galatians.

The apostle mentioned that some of the Roman believers considered all days alike while others observed a certain day in preference to another (14:5-6). He affirmed that they did this as unto the Lord, not opposing the practice. Consider, however, Paul's repeated admonition for each man to be fully persuaded in his own mind, that is, to submit the matter to a serious examination. Furthermore, Paul's design was that the opposing groups reach the same opinion without discord (15:5-6). Hence, the apostle wanted the weak to progress in their thinking to the point of abandoning the observance of Jewish feast days.

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Thus, in view of the different designs of the two passages, they are in harmony, though at first glance they seem to contradict each other.

FIFTH RULE: CONSULT PARALLEL PASSAGES

Parallel passages are passages that make reference to one another, have some relationship to one another, or deal with the same subject. Parallel passages can be parallels of words, ideas, general teachings, or figurative language.

Parallels of Words

When the ordinary sense, the immediate setting, the context, and the passage do not sufficiently explain a doubtful word, consult parallel passages that use the same word to obtain its meaning. In dealing with proper names, use the same procedure.

Seek parallels of words first in the same book or the writer's other books, then in the other books of the same epoch, and finally in any book of the Bible. Make sure that parallels of words are parallel in meaning before making any conclusions about the parallels.

For example, in Galatians 3:27, Paul says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on (been clothed with) Christ." The Greek word for "have put on" is enduō. The parallel passages in Romans 13:14 and Colossians 3:12 contain the same Greek word and therefore clarify Galatians 3:27. Putting on (being clothed with) Christ in one respect means casting aside the works of the flesh, and in another respect, it consists of having put on (as clothing) the practices of a new life (the fruit of the Spirit). Early Christians symbolized putting on Christ in their baptism by going down to burial and rising again. This act signified dying to worldly practices and rising to newness of life and its practices. Being clothed with Christ does not consist in having "sacred" garments, but in adorning oneself with spiritual and moral garments of holiness (1 Pe. 3:3-6).

Sometimes parallels of words fail to clarify the meaning of the passage one is researching. Always take the context of the parallel words into account; ignoring the context may lead you to develop two opposing doctrines. For example, "works" in James always signifies the obedience and holiness that living faith produces. "Works" in Romans and Galatians signifies something different than "works" in James. In this example, the parallel passages in Romans and Galatians do not tell us exactly what "works" means in James. In other words, the same word is used, but James uses it in a different way than Paul does in Romans and Galatians.

How can these passages be harmonized? We need to realize that Paul and James were writing from a different point of reference. Paul was writing about how a person is saved, but James was writing about what a person does after he is saved. In Romans and Galatians, "works" usually refers to keeping the Law for salvation, but in James, "works" refers to the result of living faith. We must also realize that James was contrasting living faith with dead faith, not salvation by faith and salvation by works. Since parallel passages in Romans and Galatians do not explain "works" in James, we must seek parallels in James.

Another example of a parallel word not explaining another Scripture occurs in Acts 9:7 and 22:9. According to Acts 9:7, Saul's companions on the road to Damascus heard a voice, yet according to Acts 22:9, they did not hear the voice. Knowing that the Greeks used "to hear" to mean "to understand" harmonizes the two Scriptures. Saul's companions heard the sound but did not understand the words (compare John 12:28-29).

Parallels of Ideas

To obtain a complete, exact idea of what an obscure passage teaches, consult a clearer passage on the same subject that is not obscure or figurative. Such passages are called parallels of ideas. Examples follow:

1. When Jesus instituted communion, He gave the cup to His disciples, saying, "Drink ye all of it" (Mtt. 26:27). Some theologians conclude that Jesus' statement means that only ordained ministers may drink the wine at communion. ("Drink ye all of it" is ambiguous in the King James Version. The Greek makes certain that Jesus did not say, "Drink all there is of this wine," but "All of you drink of it.") First Corinthians 11:22-29 proves that eating the bread and drinking the wine involves every member of the church mature enough to understand communion. Thus, practice excluding some from partaking of the wine is a human tradition, not a Biblical command.
2. When Jesus said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Mtt. 16:19), did He establish the primacy of Peter and of the popes, as the Catholics contend? To find out the answer, notice first that Jesus did not say, "I will build my church on thee, Peter," or "Thou art Peter, and upon this stone I will build my church." Jesus specifically said, "on this rock." Jesus' mention of "rock" is significant, because the Greek for "rock" is petra, whereas the Greek word for "Peter" is petros. Petros is a fragment rock of the massive cliff rock, petra, so Peter could not have been the rock of which Jesus was speaking.

What is the rock then? In Matthew 21:42,44, Jesus presented Himself as the foundation stone, or "head of the corner," already prophesied of in the Old Testament (Isa. 28:16). Likewise, Peter declared that Jesus is the "living stone," and the "chief corner stone" (1 Pe. 2:4,8). Paul confirmed this truth, saying that the Ephesian church was to be "built upon the foundation of (laid by) the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20). Paul further confirmed this truth by saying: "For other foundation can no man lay than that (which) is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). These and other parallel passages clearly prove that Jesus did not name Peter as the foundation of the church.

3. According to Galatians 6:15, that which avails in Christ is "a new creature." What does this figurative expression mean? Consulting the parallel passage in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the new creature is the person who is in Christ Jesus and lives a life in which "all things are become new." In 1 Corinthians 7:19 and Galatians 5:6, two other parallel passages, the new creature is described as a person who observes the commandments of God and has faith that works through love.

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4. In Galatians 6:17, Paul said, "...I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The ordinary sense, the immediate setting, the context, and the passage do not explain these marks. However, in a parallel passage, 2 Corinthians 4:10, Paul used the expression, "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," to speak of the persecutions that Paul suffered. This passage indicates that "the marks" in Galatians 6:17 are related to the persecutions Paul had suffered. Second Corinthians 11:23-25 provides more light. Paul affirmed that he had been beaten five times with a scourge and three times with rods, causing marks on his body that remained all his life. These parallel passages show that the marks in Paul's body were marks received through punishments, not wounds or signs of a cross miraculously or artificially produced.

Parallels of General Teachings

To rightly interpret passages when parallels of words and of ideas are not sufficient, one must examine the tenor of Scripture. Examples follow:

1. Romans 3:28 declares, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." If someone concludes from this verse that Christians may live free from the commandments of the Word of God, he errs. Even though he may find other parallel passages that seem to support his conclusion, the tenor of the Bible contradicts his conclusion. Many New Testament passages warn believers against sin and exhort them to be holy. Although Christians are not justified by the Law, they must obey the laws of God in the entire Bible that apply to them. In the New Testament, Christians do not have to observe the ceremonial laws but still must obey the moral laws.
2. According to general teaching of the Scriptures, God is a Spirit that is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Some passages seem to limit God to time or place because of figurative language and man's inability to grasp God's truths. For example, after Adam fell, God called to Adam, "Where art thou?" God was calling to Adam so that Adam would see the separation that resulted from his sin, not because God needed to know where Adam was—God is omniscient, so He knew where Adam was. Another example is found in the many Scriptures that say Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. "Right hand of God" is a figure of speech, because God does not have a material right hand. God is omnipresent, filling heaven and earth. Rather, the right hand of God speaks of a position of authority with God similar to what we say today, "John is the right-hand man of the president of this corporation." (God sometimes condescends to speak as man so that man's finite mind may better grasp the truths of the infinite God, which are beyond man's ability to comprehend. An expression that describes God in human terms is called an anthropomorphism.)
3. Proverbs 16:4 says, "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Some say this verse means that God created the wicked to be condemned. Other Scriptures, however, make it clear that the Lord does not desire the death of the wicked. For example, according to 2 Peter 3:9, God does not desire that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Moreover, the last part of Proverbs 16:4 signifies that in the evil day God will make even the wicked to bring to pass His designs.

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Parallels of Figurative Language

At times we must consult parallel passages to determine whether a passage is to be taken literally or figuratively. For example, God is sometimes pictured with a cup in His hand giving drink to those whom He desires to punish; they fall to the ground dazed or drunken (Psa. 75:8; Nah. 3:11; Hab. 2:16). Isaiah 51:17,22-23 identifies the cup as the fury of the Lord and the intoxication as destruction.

Although the figurative sense and the literal sense of a word sometimes overlap, not every aspect of the figurative sense is necessarily found in the literal sense. When Jesus called His disciples "sheep," for example, He was not ascribing all the qualities of sheep to His disciples. Common sense determines the extent of the similarity. As the Lamb of God, Jesus was meek and submissive to being sacrificed. Other qualities of a lamb do not necessarily apply to Him.

We must be careful not to press figures of speech beyond their intended limits. For example, Ephesians 2:1 describes the state of sinners: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." A sinner is dead in sin, but, unlike a physically dead man who cannot choose, a sinner can repent and choose to serve Jesus. Therefore the literal sense of "dead" only partially describes the spiritual state of the sinner.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

In this area of study, we will take up figurative expressions of the Bible only in enough detail to become generally acquainted with them. The purpose of such a study is to teach us how to approach each figure of speech. The main consideration is that we recognize that not every passage is to be interpreted literally.

We will take up the following classes of figures: metaphor, allegory, personification, irony, hyperbole, enigma, simile, apostrophe, antithesis, proverb, hebraism, type, symbol, and parable. Many of these figures overlap, so that a story may be, for example, both an allegory and a type and may contain irony, hyperbole, and antithesis.

1. Metaphor.

The word "metaphor" is from the Greek word metaphero, meaning to carry over, to transfer (qualities from one object to another).

In this figure, one thing is declared to be another, without using words of comparison (e.g. "like" or "as"). There may be no resemblance between the objects, but certain qualities or characteristics are illustrated in the one object by comparison to the other object.

Examples: "Ye are the salt of the earth (Mtt. 5:13)." Here, saints are illustrated as having preservative qualities in the earth, as salt preserved some of their food. "Ye are the light of the world (Mtt. 5:14)." Here, saints are spoken of as possessing qualities giving benefits to the world much as light gives life, heat, etc., to the earth and its inhabitants. "He is the rock (Deu. 32:4)." God is immovable and enduring, like a rock.

In the same way, other metaphors can be interpreted as to their intended comparisons. "I am the way (John 14:6)"; "Ye are God's husbandry (I Cor. 3:9)"; "Judah is a lion's whelp (Gen. 49:9)"; "Thou art my rock and my fortress (Psa. 71:3)." "The Lord is a sun and a shield (Psa. 84:11)"; The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph shall be a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble (Oba. 18)."

2. Allegory.

An allegory is a prolonged description of one thing under the image of another. It is a prolonged or extended metaphor; a series of metaphors built into a teaching. An allegory is a presentation of things, people, or events that represent other things, people, or events in a way that makes a literal interpretation impossible. The meaning is usually factual, however.

The word allegory is from allos (other) and agoreno (to speak in a place of assembly). Agoreno is from agora (a market place). Hence, allegory means literally "to speak in an assembly (to illustrate principles so the assembly might learn)." At times, an allegory is accompanied with its interpretation.

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Examples: Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life," etc. This allegory has its own interpretation in the same passage of Scripture (John 6:51-65).

At other times, the allegory includes no interpretation; rather, the meaning is often implied or seen in the overall passage. Examples: Jotham gave an allegory with the theme of trees seeking either an olive tree, fig tree, vine, or bramble to rule over them. The lesson being taught is only seen in the entire passage surrounding the allegory where the intended comparisons are seen. Also, Jesus taught concerning the relationship between the two testaments by the allegories of new wine versus old wineskins, and new cloth versus an old garment (Mtt. 9:16,17).

Another allegory is brought forth by the Psalmist (Psa. 80:8-13). The Israelites, their transfer from Egypt to Canaan, and their successive history are represented by the metaphorical figure of a vine with its roots, shoots, etc.—which after being transferred, shoots out its roots and extends itself, but later is cut off by the mountain hogs and devoured by the beasts of the field. (The hogs and the beasts represent the Gentile powers.)

The Song of Solomon is an unusual allegory inasmuch as the story is partly literal and partly prophetic. It is not a purely fictional story meant to represent a truth, as are most allegories. Solomon and his beloved were historical characters, but because God was using their love to point to the greater love of Christ and the church, the story magnifies King Solomon far above his real character. This is also true of his beloved.

The term "allegory" (allegoreo in Greek) is used in Galatians 4:24 where Agar (Hagar) represents Mount Sinai which in turn represents the Law (the Old Testament); therefore, Agar's children represent Israel under the old covenant. Sarah represents Jerusalem which in turn represents the Spirit (the New Testament); therefore, her children represent those born anew of the Spirit of God. This is a complex allegory with several connecting metaphors.

3. Personification.

This is a figure by which objects or things are represented as or spoken of as persons. In personifying these things, we attribute intelligence to them by word or action.

"The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isa. 55:12)."

Another case of great personification occurs in Psalm 65:10,11, where reference is made to the abundance of the blessings belonging to the kingdom of the Messiah in these terms: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

Also, in Proverbs 8:1-9:6, "wisdom" is personified as a woman calling out to all people to hear and follow her direction.

4. Irony.

Irony is a simulation of ignorance; the intended implications are the opposite of the literal sense of the words. It is the expression of thought in a form that naturally conveys its opposite. The distinguishing quality of irony is that the meaning intended is contrary to that seemingly expressed, thus adding greater force to the meaning. It is often used to greatly emphasize that which is already obvious by making statements plainly contrary to that obvious fact.

Examples: Paul employs irony when he calls the false teachers "chief apostles," making us understand at the same time that they are in no wise such apostles (II Cor. 11:5; 12:11; see 11:13).

The prophet Elijah uses irony when, on Mount Carmel, he says to the priests of the false god Baal, "Cry aloud: for he is god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened (I Ki. 18:27)."

5. Hyperbole.

A hyperbole is a gross exaggeration stated for effect. There is no deception in a hyperbole, however, as the exaggeration is not an attempt to deceive (and hence, a lie). A hyperbole is such a wild exaggeration that everyone knows that it is used to give force to a statement.

"Hyperbole" comes from the Greek huper (over) plus ballo (to throw), hence an overthrowing. "Parable" is from para (with, or alongside) plus ballo (to throw). So while a parable is the throwing of a story alongside a truth to illustrate it, a hyperbole is the throwing of a story way over the truth, in order to give it impact.

Examples: The spies of the land of Canaan said, "We saw giants...and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers," and "The cities are great and walled up to heaven (Num. 13:33; Deu. 1:28)." The Pharisees stated concerning Jesus, "Behold, the whole world is gone after him (John 12:19)."

Jesus often used hyperboles. He talked about a camel going through the eye of a needle. He spoke of a beam in one's eye and of swallowing camels.

6. Enigma.

An enigma is a dark riddle, a concealing of the truth (only hinting at the solution) which must be searched for in order to be discovered. It is a dark or obscure saying, a puzzling statement or action, a truth expressed in obscure language.

The Greek word ainigma occurs in I Corinthians 13:12, where the King James Version translates it "glass darkly," ("dim window"—Rotherham). It comes from a word meaning, "to tell a strange tale."

The corresponding Hebrew word translated "dark saying" (Psa. 78:2), comes from chood, meaning "to tie in a knot, to twist; a knotty or intricate saying."

In the words of Agar (Pro. 30:24) we get, among other things, the following enigma: "There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceedingly wise." This also has its corresponding solution in the passage.

Another enigma comes to us in the form of a riddle. Samson quizzed the Philistines with the statement, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness (Jdg. 14:14)." The answer later came back in the form of a question, "What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion? (v. 18)"

Isaiah prophesied in an enigma both dark and deep. "He calleth to me out of Seir, 'Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?' The watchman said, 'The morning, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye; return, come' (Isa. 21:11,12)."

Jesus spoke many things in enigmas. At times, a parable that is given without an explanation and does not readily provide a meaning can be called an enigma. For example, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven...hid in three measures of meal (Mtt. 13:33)." A proverb can be an enigma, such as "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first (Mtt. 19:30)." A promise can also be an enigma; "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come (Mtt. 10:23)." In each of these cases, notice that the solution is kept hidden to the listener.

7. Simile.

"Simile" from the Latin word similis, meaning "like, similar." A simile is a comparison between things essentially unlike, expressed directly through the use of a comparing word—like or as. It is a declaration that one thing resembles another.

The Bible abounds with the most beautiful similes, which are like windows to a house, letting in the light and permitting those who are inside to look out upon God's wonderful world. The metaphor assumes that the reader or hearer will recognize the likeness, and calls one thing by the name of another. Jesus calls Herod "that fox," a metaphor. If He said that Herod was like a fox, He would have been using a simile; but in this case, it would have weakened the expression. The word "fox" fitted the wily king so well that Jesus did not need to say that Herod was like a fox. The simile specifically asserts the comparison, while the metaphor assumes it.

Examples (from Psa. 103:11-16): "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (a simile). "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (a simile). "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (a simile). "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (a metaphor). "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone: and the place thereof shall know it no more (a simile).

Another series of similes is found in Isaiah 55. The chapter begins and ends with metaphors. In verses 8-11 we have similes of rare beauty: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it" (a simile). "The images chosen," says Delitzsch, in his Biblical Commentary on Isaiah, "are rich with allusions. As snow and rain are the mediate causes of growth, and thus, also of the enjoyment of the harvest, so also by the word of God the ground and soil of the human heart is softened, refreshed, and made fertile and vegetative, and this word gives the prophet, who is like the sower, the seed which he scatters, and it brings with it bread that nourishes the soul; for every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God is bread (Deu. 8:3)."

Another telling pair of similes concerning the power of the Word of God is found in Jeremiah 23:29: "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Compare the powerful metaphor in Hebrews 4:12).

Isaiah says that "the wicked are like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." The same prophet compares the righteous to a watered garden and to a perennial spring (Isa. 57:20; 58:11).

Isaiah 1:18, in a pair of familiar similes, makes known God's promise of forgiveness and cleansing—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool."

Nothing can be more unstable than a surge of the sea tossed by the winds. To this James 1:6 compares the uncertain believer, who vacillates between faith and doubt—"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the winds and tossed."

The similes of the Bible are beautiful, artistic engravings accompanying truths which would otherwise be only dimly discerned and then quickly forgotten.

8. Apostrophe.

The apostrophe closely resembles personification. This word is made up of two Greek words—apo (from) and strephe (to turn), denoting the turning of the speaker from his immediate hearers to address an absent or imaginary person or thing. When the address is to an impersonal object, the figure of personification and apostrophe are combined (for example, I Cor. 15:55).

Examples: "What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the God of Jacob; Which turned the rocks into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters (Psa. 114:5-8)." Here is another example combining personification and apostrophe: "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest and be still (Jer. 47:6)." One of the most familiar and striking apostrophes in literature is the cry of the heart-broken David over his rebellious, slain son: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son (II Sam. 18:33)!"

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth (Deu. 32:1)." This resembles Jeremiah 22:29, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord"—a very emphatic way of asking for an attentive hearing and to emphasize the importance of what is spoken.

In the famous song of Deborah and Barak, the absent and subdued kings and princes are addressed as if present, "Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes: I, even I, will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praises unto the Lord God of Israel."

The unbelief, indifference, and resistance of the cities where Christ had done most of His mighty works caused Him to exclaim: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes...And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell (Mtt. 11:20,21,23)." Who does not feel the anguish in our Savior's heart, when He lamented: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings, and ye would not (Mtt. 23:37)"? (In these last examples, apostrophe and personification are combined.)

Remember that in each of these examples the speaker had turned from addressing his immediate hearers to address an absent or imaginary person or thing. The full context was not quoted to show this, though, for lack of space.

9. Antithesis.

This word comes from two Greek words meaning "to place over against." It is a figure by which two thoughts, ideas, or phrases are set one over against the other, in order to make the contrast more striking, and thus to emphasize it. This is a very effective figure of speech found in many parts of the Scriptures. The bad and the false serve as a foil or background to the good and the true.

Examples: Moses' farewell address (Deu. 27-33) consists of a remarkable series of contrasts or antitheses. Note Deuteronomy 30:25: "See, I have set before thee this day life and death, good and evil" (a double antithesis). Again, in verse 19, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."

In His "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus presents many antitheses. Note Matthew 7:13,14: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Our Lord puts the "strait" (narrow) gate in antithesis to the wide gate; the narrow way in antithesis to the broad way: the two destinies, life and destruction, and the few and the many in sharp contrast with each other. Hence, a quadruple antithesis. In verses 17 and 18, the bad tree and its bad fruit is contrasted with the good tree and its good fruit. In verses 21-23, He contrasts the false professor with the true professor. He illustrates the difference by a most remarkable multiple antithesis vv. 24-27). Our Lord finishes His wonderful discourse (Mtt. 24-25) by a powerful antithetical climax (25:31-46).

In II Corinthians 3:16-18, Paul contrasts the Old Covenant with the New, the Law and the Gospel; employing a remarkable series of antitheses, which may be arranged in parallel columns. In Romans 6:23, Paul contrasts "death" with "eternal life" and "the wages of sin" with the "gift of God." "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life." In II Corinthians 6:8-10, he gives a series of antitheses related to his own experience; and in verses 14-16, by well-chosen antitheses he shows the folly of a Christian linking himself to the world. In I Corinthians 15:35-38, he concludes this powerful argument on the resurrection with a volley of antitheses.

10. Proverb.

The word comes from the Latin pro (for, instead of) and verbum (word), referring to a brief saying taking the place of many words. Therefore, a proverb an adage, a wise saying; it is wisdom condensed into a brief form both to aid memory and to stimulate study. Often, proverbs are spontaneously coined among groups of people and become common sayings to them, sometimes even gaining universal acceptance.

The proverb may contain other figures of speech. For example, sometimes it will also be an enigma, as seen in John 16:25 where the proverb is the opposite of something being spoken of or shown "plainly." The same Greek word for proverb is also found in John 10:6, where it is translated "parable" in the King James Version; and here again, "they understood not what things they were which he spoke unto them." Also, some proverbs are condensed parables, as the two examples just given. They can contain metaphors, similes, or even be extended into allegories.

The purpose of proverbs is stated in the introduction to the book of Proverbs (1:2-6): "To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsel: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings."

Examples: "Physician, heal thyself (Luke 4:23)." This must have been a common saying in Nazareth. It was perhaps first applied to physicians with personal diseases, trying to cure others of the same. But Jesus knew that His old acquaintances in Nazareth, in their unbelief, would throw it at Him as a taunt and an insult if He failed to do in Nazareth mighty miracles, such as they had heard He had performed in Capernaum. He answered their unspoken taunt by using another proverb in self-defense, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." This appears to be the condensed interpretation of the proverb: "A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house (Mark 6:4)."

Against the backslidden, apostate teachers who were working havoc in his time, Peter uses with telling effect two facts, which all must have observed, made into one proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (II Pe. 2:22)." The interpretation lies on the surface, and examples to illustrate its truth are not hard to find, even in our day. (Compare Proverbs 26:11, where the first part of this double proverb is applied to a fool and his folly.)

How to deal with proverbs:

1. Use great caution when interpreting proverbs, in particular those which are difficult to understand and interpret. They may rest on circumstances or customs which have been lost to us.
2. Since proverbs may be similes, metaphors, parables, or allegories, one should first ascertain to which class the proverb belongs. Different figures may be combined to form the proverb. For instance, in Proverbs 1:20-23, wisdom is personified and the proverb is given in the form of a parable with its application. See also Ecclesiastes 9:13-18.
3. Study the context, which often is the key to the interpretation.
4. When all earnest efforts to clarify the meaning, reserve judgment you receive more understanding; do not jump to an impatient, hasty conclusion.
5. Do not use proverbs (or other Scriptures whose meaning you cannot determine) as proof texts just because their words seem to favor your doctrine.
6. Avail yourself of the help of learned commentators who know the original languages and can give you the conclusions of scholars.
7. First, last, and all the time—pray for the light.

11. Hebraisms.

By "hebraisms" we mean expressions and terms peculiar to the Hebrew culture or language. As we have already indicated, some knowledge of hebraisms is necessary in order to be able to use the first rule of Bible interpretation. Keeping them always in mind, we shall see many obscure points cleared up and apparent contradictions explained.

Examples: It was a custom among the Hebrews to call a person a son of the thing which especially characterized him; so that a man that was peaceful and of a good disposition was called "a son of peace"; the illuminated and learned, "a son of light"; the disobedient, "a son of disobedience"; etc. (Luke 10:6; Eph. 5:8; 2:2; 5:6).

Comparisons are at times expressed by negations such as, for example, when Jesus says, "Whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me but him that sent me." This is equivalent to saying, "He who receives me, does not receive me so much as Him who sent me." We ought to interpret the following in the same way: "I seek not (only) mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." "Labour not (only) for the meat (food) which perisheth, but for that meat (food) which endureth unto everlasting life." "Thou hast not lied unto men (only) but to God." "Christ sent me not (mainly) to baptize, but (rather) to preach the gospel." "We wrestle not (only) against flesh and blood (mere men) but against principalities...against spiritual wickedness" (Mark 9:37; John 5:20; 6:27; Acts 5:4; I Cor. 1:17; Eph. 6:12).

At times, the Hebrews, although referring to only one person or thing, used the plural to strengthen the idea and/or to indicate the relation of the person or thing to its surroundings. (See Young's Concordance, "Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation," number 50.) For example, "The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat," is equivalent to saying that it rested on one of the mountains of Ararat. Likewise we read that Jephthah was buried in the cities of Gilead—that is to say, in one of the cities of Gilead.

The Hebrews frequently used the name of the parents to denote their descendants, as, for example, when it was said, "Cursed be Canaan (Gen. 9:25)," instead of the descendants of Canaan. Many times, likewise, with the name of Jacob (or Israel) (Gen. 19:7; Psa. 14:7; I Ki. 18:17,18).

The word "son" is used at times (as in nearly all languages) for designating a descendant more or less remote. The priests, for example, are called sons of Levi; Mephibosheth is called a son of Saul, although in reality he was a grandson. In the same way the word "father" is used at times to designate any ancestor. At times "brother" is used of someone who is more or less a near kindred. Thus, for example, Lot is called a brother of Abraham, although in reality he was a nephew (Gen. 14:12-16). This hebraism is the explanation for some apparent contradictions. In II Kings 8:26, Athaliah is called a daughter of Omri, and in verse 18, a daughter of Ahab; she was in reality a daughter of Ahab and a grand-daughter of Omri.

In addition to these hebraisms, other singularities in the Biblical language occur—certain near-hebraisms the knowledge of which leads to a right understanding of many texts. We refer to the peculiar use of certain numbers, of some words which express acts realized or supposed, and of various proper names.

Examples: Certain definite numbers are used at times in Hebrew for expressing indefinite quantities. Seven is used for expressing a large or complete number, although indeterminate (Pro. 26:16,25; Psa. 119:164 commanded to forgive seventy times seven times—i.e., if the brother repents we ought always to forgive him (Mtt. 18:21,22). (Remember, Jesus spoke in Aramaic which is very close to Hebrew.)

Sometimes action words are used in a peculiar way. Scripture may say that a person does a certain thing, when actually he only declares it done, causes it to be done, or prophesies that it will be done.

For example, when the Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah (1:10), "I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant," He did not set him to execute these things, but to prophesy or proclaim them. In the same sense, Isaiah was to make the heart of the people fat, to make their ears heavy, and to blind their eyes (Isa. 6:10).

The Hebrew language may express simple permission—scarcely a consent or approval—in the form of a positive command. In Ezekiel 20:39 the Lord says, "Go ye, serve ye every one his idols." In the next line we see that the Lord did not approve of such conduct. In the case of Balaam God says, "Arise and go with them (with the princes of evil Balak), however, thou shalt do that which I shall tell thee." The connection makes it evident that this was no more than simple permission for the prophet to do an evil against God's will (Num. 22:20). We have a similar case, probably, in the words of Jesus to Judas when He says, "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27).

This final example of a language idiom is found in other languages, too. One is said to have done a thing when, in actuality, he only in some way caused it to be done. For example, we read that Judas "purchased a field with the reward of iniquity." Judas, himself, did not actually purchase the field; rather he caused it to be purchased by delivering money to the priests (Acts 1:16-19; Mtt. 27:4-10). Likewise, we learn in what sense the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. God was the cause behind Pharaoh hardening his heart when he offered the king mercy if he was obedient, but Pharaoh hardened himself by resisting the goodness offered (Exo. 8:15; 9:20; compare Rom. 9:17). Pilate is said to have scourged Jesus, when in actuality he was the one who caused it to be done (John 19:1).

12. Type.

The type a metaphor which does not consist merely in words, but in acts, persons, or objects which designate similar acts, persons, or objects in time to come. Types are numerous in the Scriptures.

The Greek typos means an impression (as is impressed in wax by a seal) or a mark (as in metal, made by a blow of a hammer on die). It is a face-to-face image of the impression and the impressor. The impression is the type; the impressor is the antitype, that which is "anti" (opposite or facing) the type. When one recognizes an impression (type), he knows that an impressor (antitype) exists.

Christ, the central theme of the Bible, is the great antitype, fulfilling the majority of Bible types. Sometimes, the type is found in the Old Testament, the antitype in the New Testament. In fact, to many schools of thought, this is a requirement for a type. The New Testament use of typos, however, reveals that there are New Testament types as well, as in I Peter 5:3 where "examples" is a translation of typos. The New Testament often uses typos in a literal sense that does not touch the theological subject of types and antitypes, however, as the print (typos) of the nails in the hands of Christ.

In Hebrews 9:24 "figures" (typos) is used in the sense of types and antitypes. The Emphasized Bible by J. Rotherham, renders typos as "counter-part" here.

Characteristic Points of a Type

1. There must be a point, form, or spirit of resemblance between the type and antitype, ordained of God, to point to a truth.

There are four schools of thought on this matter. Some say that any connection that points to a truth is a type to him that finds it, whether intended or not (omitting "ordained of God"). Some say that any connection must be boldfaced so as to be obvious (this, of course, is relative to the reader). What is obvious to one is not necessarily so to another, but they mean "fairly obvious to all scholars." Still others demand that the New Testament declare the connection. Since theologians and grammarians have invented the classifications of Biblical figures, the definition is according to accepted and popular usage. And if, as in our case, several concepts are in vogue, then all are permitted within the sphere of those that will accept it.

2. Generally prefigures something future—usually from Old Testament to New Testament.

These concepts are literary or theological, not Biblical, as has already been pointed out, unless we declare the New Testament exceptions as all being used in another manner. Much of the controversy that rages over typology is only a misunderstanding of how different men define and use certain words.

The Greek word typos (from which we derive our word "type") is never rendered "type" in the King James Version. In John 20:25, it is translated "print"; in Acts 7:24 and Romans 5:14, "figure"; in Romans 6:17, "form"; in Acts 7:44, "fashion"; in Acts 23:25, "manner"; in Titus 2:7 and Hebrews 8:5, "pattern"; in I Corinthians 10:6 and I Timothy 4:12, "example."

The Greek word antitypon (our word "antitype," the reality for which the type stands) is found twice in the New Testament—in I Peter 3:21, translated "like figure" and in Hebrews 9:24, where it is rendered "figure."

Definition of a Type

An historical and actual fact, circumstance, or event that allegorically foreshadows spiritual or moral truth. (It may be readily seen that this standard definition is not as restrictive as some of the characteristics of a type previously stated. Inasmuch as types do not prove doctrine, but only splash light on revealed truth, there is no point in being too concerned over an exact definition for the sake of academics.)

Limitations of Types

1. Types do not prove doctrines.
2. Types are not perfect, as may be seen where Abraham (God) offered Isaac (Christ) on Mount Moriah (Calvary) inasmuch as Isaac did not die. There the type shifts to the ram substitute and to Abraham offering Isaac in his heart and Isaac returning to Abraham alive (the resurrection).
3. Not every possible connection is a type (some connections may have no spiritual or moral significance, but may be merely coincidences).

Considerations

1. The antitype is on a higher plane than the type.
2. A type is to the antitype what a shadow is to the substance (see Col. 2:16,17).

(continued)

3. An antitype is never the opposite in quality from the type. Something evil cannot be a type of something good. A pig, a vulture, or snake cannot be a type of Christ. For this reason, the brazen serpent lifted up on the pole in the wilderness is not a type of Christ Jesus, but a type of our sin that Christ paid for on the cross. They were to see that He who knew no sin (Christ) was made sin (as to penalty and therefore position, not nature). They were to see that their sin was transferred and paid for; they saw it lifted up so that God (in the analogy) might see that it was dead, no longer living in man; therefore, man was free from its penalty. It was not a type of the person of Christ.
4. A type can also be a symbol or allegory (Gal. 4:21-31), but is generally an historical fact presented in a literal way pointing toward a spiritual truth.
5. One should not be too quick to accept a critic's evaluation of those who define types differently than they do. It is easy to believe that those being ridiculed for being too fanciful must indeed be too fanciful. Perhaps some are. But these same critics often judge New Testament saints and those who follow their practices as being fanatics. The criteria is not the view of a given critic, but the revelation of the Holy Spirit.
6. Some caution us that a type can only have one meaning; but this is erroneous, as is the teaching that a prophecy can have but one fulfillment. In fact, we should be alert to the fact that a type may prefigure different things or persons. Elisha was both a type of Christ and the saints. Joel 2:28 was intended to be fulfilled both at Pentecost (Acts 2:17) and in the Millennium.
7. The basic difference, in general, between an allegory and a type is that while an allegory may be fiction or fact, a type is historical fact. An allegory is a story made to illustrate a truth, whereas a type is a real event that points toward a truth.

Examples

Christ refers to the known incident of Jonah as a type prefiguring His burial and resurrection (Mtt. 12:40).

Paul presents to us the first Adam as a type prefiguring the second Adam, Jesus Christ; and likewise, the paschal lamb as a type of the Redeemer (Rom. 5:14; I Cor. 5:7).

Above all, the letter to the Hebrews makes reference to the types of the Old Testament: the high priest who prefigured Jesus; the sacrifice of Christ; the sanctuary of the tabernacle, which prefigured heaven; etc. (Heb. 9:11-28; 10:6-10; 9:11-29).

13. Symbol.

The word comes from the Greek syn, changed to sym in many combinations, and ballo (to throw)—hence, to throw together in such a way that one thing represents another. The Bible abounds in symbols. The prophetic parts of Daniel and almost the whole of Revelation are written in symbolic language. Biblical symbolism is, in many respects, one of the most difficult subjects with which the interpreter has to deal. Spiritual truths, prophetic oracles, and things unseen and eternal have been represented enigmatically in sacred symbols; and it appears to have been the pleasure of the Great Author of divine revelation to thus enshrine the deepest mysteries of providence and grace. Because of its mystic and enigmatic character, symbolism demands of the interpreter a sober and discriminating judgment, a thorough collation and comparison of Scriptural symbols, a rational and self-consistent procedure in their explanation, and above all the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Author of the Book.

The symbol is a species of figure by which some thing or some act is represented by means of another thing or similar act which is considered suitable to serve as a resemblance or representation. It differs from a type in that the figure is not an historical occurrence, but rather an object or action presented for representation of another object or action.

Examples: The lion is considered the king of the animals of the forest. Thus, we find in the Scriptures the royal majesty symbolized by the lion. In like manner, craftiness is represented by the serpent (Mtt. 6:10). Considering the use of keys to unlock, it is not strange that they should come to symbolize authority; and, because of the tremendous power we observe in the horns of animals, that horns should represent power. (Mtt. 16:19; Luke 1:69; Rev. 13:1,11.)

Remembering that the gates of an ancient city served as a sort of fortress, we learn why in symbolic language they came to represent force and dominion (Mtt. 16:18).

The act of immersion and rising from the water in baptism symbolizes the death to the world of a sinner and his entrance into new life through spiritual resurrection. Likewise, the celebration of the Lord's Supper represents our spiritual communion with Jesus and our participation in His sacrifice (Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 11:23-26).

15. Parable.

The word parable is of Greek origin, coming from two words joined together: para (alongside) and ballo (to throw); hence, throwing one thing alongside another for the purpose of comparison and illustration.

The parable is an allegory presented in story form, relating natural acts and possible incidents with the object of illustrating a truth. Jesus illustrated various important truths to His own sheep. Wolves do not understand the language of either sheep or the Shepherd; so light to the disciples was not light to Christ's enemies.

Examples: In Luke 18:1-7, Jesus sets forth the truth that it is necessary to pray always and not to become dismayed, although we may be late in receiving the answer. To impress on our hearts this truth, He used the example or parable of a widow and a wicked judge who neither fears God nor regards man. The widow appeals to the judge, asking justice in relation to her adversary. The judge does not do anything for her, but on account of her frequent coming and troubling him, the widow succeeds in getting the unjust judge to do her justice. And how much more will God hear his own "which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them"?

Other parables include the stories of the sower whose seed falls on four kinds of ground (Mtt. 13), the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15).

To correctly understand and interpret parables, one must do the following:

1. Search out the truths which the parable illustrates.
2. Only take into account the principal features of the parable, casting aside that which serves to adorn or complete the narrative. We see that Jesus did this when He interpreted parables for His disciples. In Luke 11:5-8, Christ illustrates the truth that it is necessary to pray with insistence, using the example of a person who needs three loaves. He goes at night to ask his friend for the loaves. The friend has already closed the door and is in bed with his children. He is lazy and does not want to arise to help him, but by reason of his insistence and importunity in asking, he obtains what he desires. It is easy to see that there is a man in need and supplicates—he represents the Christian. The friend represents God. But it is absurd to interpret all that is said of the friend, applying it to God—namely that He his door is shut, he is in bed with His children, and, being lazy, is not willing to arise! It is evident that this part constitutes what we call adornment of the parable, and it ought to be cast aside as having no correspondence to the reality. It only serves to complete the natural story. Always pay attention to the totality of the parable and to its principal parts, omitting its minor details.
3. Do not forget that the parable, as the other figures, serves to illustrate doctrines, not produce them.

The following words by Trench in Notes on the Parables are well worth remembering: "His words laid up in the memory were to many that heard them like the money of another country, unavailable; it might be for the present use, of which they knew not the value, but which yet was ready in their hand when they reached that land were naturalized in it. When the Spirit came and brought all things to their remembrance, then He filled all the outlines of truth which they before possessed with its substance, quickened all its form with the power and spirit of life."

No one has ever used parables so aptly, constantly, and effectively as did Jesus. This form of speech was by far the best for His purpose in instructing His disciples in the presence of His enemies who were watching them for a chance to seize words out of His mouth and injure His reputation and condemn Him. These parables were like burrs, fastening themselves in the memory and easily carried about for meditation; but as the enemies of the Lord were not sure of the interpretation, they could not use the parables as clubs with which to attack Him; and secretly our Lord frequently gave His disciples the true interpretation which He withheld from the unbelieving (Mtt. 13:10-17). Sometimes, however, His enemies "perceived that He spake of them" (Mtt. 21:45), but for all of their opposition and hatred, they could not fail to notice that the shoes He made for their feet fit them perfectly.

15. Metonymy.

This figure of speech consists of using the name of one thing for another thing because the two are frequently associated or suggestive of each other.

For example: "Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day..." (Heb. 4:7). "David" here is referring to "the book of Psalms" because the two are so often associated. Often "lip" is used to mean "language," and "earth" is used to mean "people." In Luke 16:29, "Moses" is used, meaning "the Law."

16. Anthropomorphism.

This word is taken from two Greek words: anthropos, which means "man", and morphe, which means "form." In this figure of speech, God is described with human characteristics.

God is eternal (Psa. 135:13). He is a spirit (John 4:24). He is not bound by time or space or any other limitation whatsoever. Therefore, descriptions of His actions or character in human likeness and environment is a figure of speech to make them understandable to finite minds. The Scripture abounds in these pictures.

For example: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deu. 33:27). Here, God is seen to be our eternal support, and what would picture that support any stronger or more lovingly than "arms"? "I will hide My face from them" (Deu. 31:17) is interpreted for us in the same verse as referring to when "God is not among us." "His face" refers to His attention and focus, and could represent favor, acceptance, intimacy, rejection, anger, judgment, etc., even as the face of man portrays these same sentiments. Yet God does not dwell in a form having one part differing from another. Even further, God is portrayed as having eyes, ears, nose, and mouth—representing how He perceives and communicates with us. These are effective figures to illustrate the actions of God by simply using the common member of the human body associated with those actions. In like manner, God is described in His dealings with us under the figures of "hands," "feet," "arms," "fingers," etc.

HERMENEUTICS
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Human positions and actions used to describe God's relationship to us are also anthropomorphisms. For example, in Genesis 11:5, the Lord is pictured as a sovereign ruler or judge who must leave his exalted palace to survey his great domain; "and the Lord came down to see the city and the tower." Also, God's "repentance" in Genesis 6:6—"And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth"—is a figure of speech pointing to God's displeasure at man's rebellion. Even the familiar relationship of marriage when applied to God toward us is an anthropomorphism illustrating the solemnity and intimacy of our covenant relationship to Him (Jer. 3:14).

HISTORY OF HERMENEUTICS

Available Sources:

1. Berkhof - Principles of Bible Interpretation (pp. 14-39)
2. Mickelsen - Interpreting the Bible (pp. 20-53)
3. Terry - Bible Hermeneutics (pp 603-738)

INTRODUCTION: The field of interpretation is not something new. Throughout history men have devised certain principles with which to interpret the Scriptures. We want to page through the past procedures and see what the major trends have been in the epochs of time. History will show to us that erroneous principles have often spoiled the exegetical work of fine men; men who deeply and sincerely sought to serve God. This must serve as a warning to us against carelessness in interpretation. Remember there is less excuse for us because we can profit by the lessons of the past, and also because we are filled with God's Holy Spirit which is to lead us into all truth (John 16:13).

God desires that history provide powerful and meaningful lessons for our lives in Jesus Christ. God's Word is to be our very source of life, and in order for this to be true, we must divide it according to the heart and mind of God. From the past, we see where men have not done this, and on the judgment day their souls will stand in danger of some terrifying eternal consequences. See Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:19. Now, as we look back upon the history of hermeneutics, we want to learn the follies which have crept in so that we will stand with a pure heart on the final day (2 Tim. 2:15).

JEWISH INTERPRETATION: "There were public teachers of religion, in oral and written discourses, who expounded and applied the oracles of God to the people. Hence, in the course of ages, a great variety of expositions and a vast amount of Biblical literature have appeared. The student who acquaints himself with the works of the great exegetes of ancient and modern times, is often saved thereby from following new developments of error, and is guarded against the novelties of restless fancy."¹ With this in mind and ever before us, we will consider the work of Ezra the scribe.

Ezra: The Jewish people had been entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1,2), but during the long period between Moses and the Babylonian exile they showed little appreciation of their heavenly treasure. The people of both Israel and Judah had ignored the law, persecuted the prophets, turned to idolatry, and finally received the exile and dispersion foreannounced by Yahweh (Deut. 28:63-64).

While Judah was in their land of exile, a descendant of Aaron the high priest set his heart upon the devout study of the ancient Scriptures. See Ezra. 7:10. He was one learned in the law, and God called him to impart instruction to the people. A fact of great importance is here revealed--instruction demands interpretation and explanation. We may, because of this, date the beginning of formal exposition of the Scriptures at the time of Ezra.

Ezra in his position as a scribe copied and expounded the sacred books. Constant searching of these holy writings led to the various reforms narrated in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. God was taking great steps among the people because His Word was being properly interpreted. As men continued to study, a need arose for guidelines.

¹ Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (Zondervan, 1974), pp. 603, 604.

principles, and methods to be formulated in order to insure that the Word of God would not be misused. Notice the scribe's role in interpretation made explicit in Nehemiah 8:7-8:

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

The rest of Jewish history concerning the exegesis of Scripture only shows us that a great many errors entered into their study of the law and prophets. This is manifested to us, if time allowed, in a survey of the various Jewish sects. These primarily being the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION: Within the New Testament, God provided many key principles that shine much needed light on the pathway to proper interpretation. The following Scriptures warn us concerning the traditions and commandments of men--Titus 1:14; 3:9; 1 Tim. 6:20; Col. 2:8 with 1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:14-16,23. These were and are important admonitions for the interpretation of God's truths in the new dispensation. These traditions must not color our interpretation of God's Word!

We are not able to really study methods of interpretation until we move into the post-apostolic age. In the writings of the apostolic fathers we observe a frequent, practical, and, in the main, appropriate, use of Scripture. It seems that the largest criticism leveled against these writers by modern interpreters is that they had a tendency to over¹ allegorize² God's Word. These explanations are supposed "fanciful interpretations." The error is actually of the scholars from Luther's time to the present day expositors.³ Men, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, and Eusebius are ones greatly studied in order to determine general past trends in interpretation.

Jerome and Augustine: Of Jerome it is said that he generally aimed to give the literal sense of the passages in question. He had studied Origen extensively, and from him, frequent traces of influence can be seen. He was accused of the allegorical method error, but still, he was considered a great scholar.

Augustine is described as an incisive theologian and a clear thinker. He knew that sound principles are important for interpretation. We are able to see that with Augustine the tradition of the church is beginning to play a prominent role in controlling interpretation. Terry says that he, Augustine, shaped and directed theological studies and speculations for more than a thousand years. He used extensively allegorization, and through all his works are scattered many brilliant and precious gems of thought.⁴

¹ Some interpreters feel that any allegorical explanation should be considered as error.

² To explain the literal in a figurative manner.

³ These men, for the most, are so concerned with the literal explanation that the spiritual truths are many times left untouched. Both sides have wandered into mistakes; it is our position now to learn from them.

⁴ Augustine is a difficult man to understand; the writings by and of him are terribly tainted with Catholicism. We use him only to gain an idea of the prevalent thoughts concerning interpretation at his time in history.

EXEGESIS OF THE REFORMATION: From 600 to 1500 A.D., darkness covered the truths of God's Word. Now a light breaks forth, and man finds it revealing a pathway out of the harlotry of Roman Catholicism.

The Bible was returned to the forefront, and this emphasis advanced both the methods of interpretation and the actual practice of interpretation. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was justified by faith, and from this point, God had a man that He could use. Luther asserted the right of each believer to interpret the Bible for himself. His Biblical interpretation is centered in Christ. He knew very well that training in linguistics, history, or even theological reasoning does not suffice. Here was a new beginning; God's Word was to be understood. This desire and concern would continue to lead men to look to God in order to understand the Bible.

"Of all the exegetes of the period of the Reformation the first place must unquestionably be given to John Calvin...his commentaries are justly celebrated for clearness, good sense, and masterly apprehension of the meaning and spirit of the sacred writers."¹ Calvin's commentaries are of such a caliber that they are still helpful to the modern interpreter. His standards were clearness and brevity.

Following Calvin's death, we see the beginning of creed and system making which has hindered many a man of God in truly learning and understanding God's Word. These creeds would not allow, in many cases, new truths to be revealed. We must learn from this error; we always must be ready for new understanding to unfold as we journey deeper into the heart of God. These writings were produced as a result of the battle between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants.²

EXAMPLES OF FALSE CONCEPTS: These errors followed the main period of the Reformation. Each man sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. "Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof texts."³ The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the concepts that were already embodied in the confessions established by the various reformation theologians. True revelation through interpreting God's Word came to a stand-still.

One group known as the Socinians proceeded on the assumption that the Bible must be interpreted in a rational way. In other words, the carnal mind was made the interpreter of the spiritual Word of God. This led them to reject many truths of the utmost importance.

Coccejus, a Dutch theologian, supposedly misunderstood the Bible, and is said to have erred as he introduced a false plurality of meanings (reading too much into the Bible), by a fatal confusion between the actual sense and all possible applications. The modern critics do not justly condemn this man. He may have over-extended certain meanings and applications, but he did accurately see Christ and the New Testament church in the Old Testament.

Later, the human element in the Biblical authorship was stressed far more than ever before, and found general recognition. They were rejecting the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. Liberal tendencies continued.

¹ Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 676.

² Men felt forced to define their position, and once defined the door of further revelation was closed.

³ L. Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics, (Baker Book House, 1973), p. 29.

- Le Clerk adhered to the theory of an inspiration varying in degrees in different parts of the Bible.
- Schleiermacher denied the supernatural character of inspiration.
- Wegscheider and Parker reduced it to the power which all men possess simply in virtue of the light of nature.
- Final point that the liberalism reached was that the Bible must be interpreted like every other book.

God has kept us out of the abominable lie and perversion which is manifest to us here in the beliefs of these so-called sheep (men who are esteemed as theologians, but actually have rejected true knowledge of God). See Berkhof pp. 33-39 for further examples of grave error.

Satan raised up deceitful wolves in the clothing of sheep, and many have been led astray by their false interpretations (based on improper principles of hermeneutics).

However, God was not allowing this to occur without raising up His own standard of holiness and righteousness. The main problem still existed in that the early commentators were not Spirit-filled, but they did have an overall desire for the truth. Men such as Hengstenberg, Keil, Delitzsch, Meyer, Lange, Barnes, Godet, Alford, Ellicott, Lightfoot, Broadus, Robertson, Westcott, Hort, Hodge, and many, many others produced very useful works but still not what God had for man to attain to in His wisdom and knowledge. There are three keys to interpretation that have escaped man in the New Testament dispensation. This may not be easy to comprehend at first glance, but nevertheless I believe it to be true.

1. The infilling of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in new tongues.
2. A true picture and understanding of the inspiration, infallibility, and total nature of God's holy Word.
3. Proper principles of hermeneutics.

CONCLUSION: There is much more information available, but for our purposes, we have seen what was needed. The Bible has had few interpreters; history shows this to be true. We are seeking for the path to God's heart which will keep us from the past errors. God's desire is for us to be interpreters, one among a thousand. Let us not miss our call.