

**TO DETERMINE THE
AUTHOR'S INTENT**
The Theologian's Approach

Desmond Allen, PhD, MDiv

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Second Edition
CreateSpace 2014

Copy Editor Marlene Rose Frey

ISBN-13: 978-1477683293

ISBN-10: 1477683291

First Print
© 2012 Desmond Allen
LaRue Publications
Opelika, AL USA

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Preface

I wrote the original manuscript for this work several years ago while doing doctoral work at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. My assignment for Professor Earl Radmacher's class was to write a book. The book was to be an instruction guide for laymen to implement proper hermeneutics—a fancy word for the science and art of studying the interpretation of written texts, in this case, biblical literature.

I called the book DON'T CONFUSE ME WITH THE FACT – A Source to Basic Bible Study. That was several years ago; and although Dr. Radmacher encouraged me to pursue publication, I am only now doing so. The information, however, has not grown old. For herein are the time honored principles that every serious Bible student should know.

Christians are reading their Bibles, but do they truly understand what they read? We cannot apply what we do not fully understand, and it is counter productive to apply what we misunderstand. Merely reading these ancient, sacred passages and leaping to some personal application is a leap of ignorance. The accurate interpretation of Scripture is critical.

Bible interpretation, or hermeneutics, is the scientific process of understanding the original, plain meaning of the text. This requires knowledge of the historical context in which the author wrote: the language, the culture, and any theological matters that might be of concern. As such, understanding the author's intent, the literal meaning in common language, is our goal.

Desmond Paul Allen, Ph.D., M.Div.

Acknowledgments

I am compelled to extend a special thank you to Mrs. Marlene Rose Frey, for her painstaking work on this manuscript. Marlene's editorial corrections and suggestions were invaluable. Her attention to detail is simply unsurpassed.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	17
PART 1	21
THE HERMENEUTICAL PURPOSE	21
CHAPTER 1	23
RECEIVING GOD'S WORD	23
Revelation & Inspiration	23
Transmission of the Message	23
The Languages of the Bible	24
Interpretation and Illumination	25
Study Questions	25
CHAPTER 2	27
THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPRETATION	27
The Dual Nature of Scripture	27
The Necessity of Interpretation	27
The Process is Called Hermeneutics	30
Study Questions	31

CHAPTER 3	33
THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETING	33
It is Possible to be Correct	33
Do Not Negate the Languages	33
Be Cautious	35
The Process of Literal Interpretation	35
Literal	35
Historical	37
Grammatical	37
Contextual	38
Study Questions	39
CHAPTER 4	41
THE ILLUMINATION OF GOD'S WORD	41
Hermeneutics, Logic and Illumination	41
Illumination	42
Application	44
Study Questions	45
PART 2	47
THE HERMENEUTICAL PROCEDURE	47
CHAPTER 5	49

THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL CONTEXT	49
The Historical Setting	49
Geographical Setting	51
Culture and Customs	51
Study Questions	52
CHAPTER 6	53
THE LITERARY GENRE	53
Prose	54
Discourse and Logic Literature	54
Epistolary	55
Historic Narrative	57
Poetry	58
Semantic Parallelism	59
Grammatical Parallelism	60
Synthetic Parallelism	61
Parables	62
Wisdom Writings	62
Prophetic Literature	63
Study Questions	64
CHAPTER 7	65
SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR	65

The Overall Theme	65
Syntactical Outline	66
Syntactical/Grammatical Exegesis	66
The Sentence	67
The Clause	67
The Phrase	68
The Verb	68
Paragraph	69
Sentence Diagramming	70
The Use of Grammatical Commentaries	72
Analytical Outline	73
The Context	73
Study Questions	74
CHAPTER 8	75
COMPARISONS AND INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSIONS	75
Word Meanings	75
Etymology and Use	76
Textual Variation	76
The Extended Use of a Term	78
The Extended Use of a Phrase	78
Considerations of Biblical Theology	78
Consider the Theologians	80

Table of Contents

The Historical Meaning	80
Contemporary Relevance	81
Study Questions	82
PART 3	85
THE HERMENEUTICAL PRACTICE	85
CHAPTER 9	87
BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL DATA	87
The Historical Setting	88
The Biblical Data	88
Notes for Further Study	90
A Biblical Encyclopedia/Dictionary	90
A Commentary	93
A Bible Handbook	93
An Introduction to the NT	94
A Bible Atlas	94
Study Questions	96
CHAPTER 10	97
SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR	97
The Genre	97
The Immediate Context	97
A Synthetic Outline of 3 John	98

The Syntax and Grammar	98
Alford on Verses 6 through 8	99
Stott on Verses 5 through 8	99
Textual Variations	102
Study Questions	103
CHAPTER 11	105
OUTLINING THE SYNTACTICAL CONTEXT	105
Mechanical Outline of the Text	105
An Analytical Outline	108
Observations Deduced from the Outlines	110
Study Questions	110
CHAPTER 12	111
WORD STUDIES AND COMPARISONS	111
Word Meanings	111
The Term "Stranger"	112
The Term "Support" or "Receive"	113
A Word of Caution	113
The Idiom "A Manner Worthy Of"	114
Comparison and Extended Context	115
Direct Application	115
Supporting the Leadership	116
Supporting Brethren in General	117
Old Testament Correlations	117
Study Questions	118

CHAPTER 13	119
CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION	119
The Historical Meaning	119
The Setting	119
The Word Meanings	120
The Context	120
Practical Theological Considerations	121
Missiology	121
Sanctification and Rewards	121
Ecclesiology	122
Contemporary Relevance and Personal Application	122
Direct Application	122
Principles to Apply	122
Study Questions	123
Homiletic Outline of 3 John 5-11	125
Leadership, Good and Bad	125
APPENDIX A	127
BASIC TOOLS FOR BIBLICAL EXEGESIS	127
English Bibles	127
Bible Dictionaries	128
Bible Encyclopedias	128
Bible Handbooks	129
Bible Atlases	129
Introductions to the NT	130
Introductions to the OT	130

Literary Genre	130
Critical Commentaries	131
English Concordances	132
Greek & Hebrew Texts	132
Greek and Hebrew Concordances	132
Greek and Hebrew Lexicons	133
Basic Greek & Hebrew Grammars	133
Theologies	134
APPENDIX B	135
ONLINE RESOURCES FOR BIBLICAL EXEGESIS	135
Apologetics	135
Bible Atlases, Maps, Archeology	135
Bible Versions	136
Jewish & Church History	136
Lexicons & Greek NT & Hebrew OT Tools	137
Science and the Bible	137
Theologies	138
Various Study Tools	138
Works of Classic Christian Literature	139
BIBLIOGRAPHY	141

Table of Contents

Introduction

A dramatic change is in the air. What started as a cultural phenomenon of the Western world has gone global. It affects the economy, the work force, education, social life, even the Church. We have become an information society.

The onset of the personal computer, and then the Internet, has had much to do with the rapid growth of this phenomenon. But even the personal computer is more a by-product or a symptom than a cause. Long before the computer's ubiquitous presence, databases, filled with important and unimportant facts, had been growing exponentially. Never before has the world possessed such voluminous knowledge on so many topics. The study of human anatomy and physiology is so advanced that medical science is capable of nearly miraculous feats. Space technology has superseded what, only a couple generations ago, was considered science fiction. Even as I write we are on the verge of developing new energy sources and technologies that could revolutionize energy consumption; and if we ever learn to harness the potential of antimatter, life may truly be like that of the Jetsons.

Our love affair with knowledge and information has spawned a new form of entertainment. We call it trivia. Played on television, in homes, in schools, by the young and the old, its popularity is almost cultic. We are a society of trivia buffs. We even have Bible trivia.

Unwittingly, however, with this enthusiasm for trivia some have effectively lowered the Bible to that of another database. Not that Bible trivia itself is wrong, or even that it is a problem, but it is a symptom of a mindset that permeates Western culture; that is, the accumulation of facts without a corresponding understanding of their significance. We see it in science, politics, medicine, world religions as well as Christianity.

Biblical information abounds within modern Western Christianity. Radio programs, TV programs, commentators, books and more books litter our airwaves and bookshelves with biblically based teaching. What used to be the domain of the theologically educated is now open territory. With the growth of mass media, anyone yearning to voice an opinion now has a platform. Not that having an opinion is wrong, but those offering an opinion should first be educated in the subject about which they opine. Unfortunately, although biblical knowledge abounds, cohesive biblical theology does not, at least not among these self-appointed opinion givers. Too much of their teaching is a pseudo knowledge, which rambles on about improperly interpreted passages.

Although Bible knowledge abounds, we are in midst of a theological famine. Christians read their Bibles, but do they understand what they read? Can they understand what they read without the proper skill set? Who is providing those skills? Certainly, not these would be expositors; it is obvious from their many fallacious teachings that they do not possess the tools themselves.

Today, there is little respect for the theologian. This is aptly illustrated by the near demise of the degree, Th.D., Doctor of Theology. Once considered the highest degree in academia (and still requiring more academic education than any other doctorate), today even most Christians do not know what it is. To our harm, these once respected leaders, educated in ministry, theology, hermeneutics, Church history, Greek, Hebrew, logic, and philosophy are being replaced by virtually untrained, spiritual cheerleaders. Sure, these new leaders have memorized a lot of biblical data and they are able to make their listeners feel good about themselves; but to truly understand the faith, to understand theology and effectively guard against false teaching, is not their forte, and their followers suffer for it.

A few things must be understood about Bible study and interpretation. Accurate Bible knowledge leads to accurate theology; but accurate Bible knowledge requires accurate study, which requires an accurate historical knowledge of the language, culture, and the theological setting in which the text was written. The Bible was written thousands of years ago and therefore, by

necessity, requires more attention than does yesterday's newspaper. Because it is God's message to man (written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit), it especially requires our full attention.

God has provided His Word, and it is the reader's responsibility to seek its intended meaning. Merely reading these ancient, sacred passages and leaping to some ephemeral, contrived personal application is a leap of ignorance. The Church has a rich history of gifted, educated theologians, spiritual men used of God to defend the faith—it is in our best interests to consider what they have to say. We must also consider why we study the Bible. We study it to learn of God and to know His guidance. Correctly understanding and obeying biblical precepts is far more important than knowing the name of Lamech's two wives.

The objective of our personal Bible study is not the memorization of facts to ensure the Tuesday night Bible trivia championship. The goal of our study is to make application. But we cannot correctly apply what we do not correctly understand; and it is counter productive to apply what we misunderstand. Understanding does not come without price. The price is diligent, accurate, study. This work is designed to provide the reader with the necessary skill set to perform accurate Bible study in the same fashion as the theologian.

Part 1

THE HERMENEUTICAL PURPOSE

Chapter 1

Receiving God's Word

Revelation & Inspiration

God has communicated to man in various manners throughout history. To some, such as Joseph the son of Jacob, and Joseph the husband of Mary, He spoke in dreams. To Adam and Moses, He spoke as though face-to-face. To the nation of Israel, He spoke through the prophets. And alas, He spoke to the world through His Son, the Lord Jesus, the Christ, whom the world crucified.

God's direct communication to the various men and women in history is called divine revelation. He chose certain individuals for this blessing. Most of humanity, believer and non-believer alike, will never experience revelation.

While revelation is solely the activity of God, through which He directly reveals truth to man, inspiration involves man in an active sense. By inspiration the prophets passed on to others what they had received from God.¹ Today, we call their works the Bible or Holy Scripture. Through this medium the inspired, recorded Words of God indirectly speak to all of us.

Transmission of the Message

When these chosen men received God's revelation, there were no copy machines or printing presses. Men called scribes copied the original and subsequent manuscripts. It was their job

¹ Norman Geisler, and William Nix. A General Introduction to the Bible, Chicago: Moody Press 1968, p. 30.

to transcribe these documents with accuracy. This methodic and tedious process was carried on for almost three thousand years with the Old Testament and over sixteen hundred years with the New Testament. During this time relatively few variant readings ensued, and when they did they were remarkably harmless: a word doubled appearing twice in a row, a variant spelling, Jesus versus Messiah, etc.

Such longevity of literature is without precedent in history. Even with the advent of modern technology the accuracy of Scripture remains an accomplishment without equal. It has been observed that more variant readings exist in Shakespeare's documents than in the thousands of ancient biblical transcripts. This is a feat made possible only by God's providential care.

Yet, the eminent Greek scholar and textual critic, Dr. Hort, calculated that substantial variations, among the some 5,300 partial or complete extant New Testament Greek manuscripts, were so rare that only one word in a thousand summoned a critic's attention. Rather than alarming, there is something very reassuring about the textual variations (or the comparative lack of them), in these many manuscripts. Furthermore, if we simply neglected to read all the variant passages, the Gospel message would not be affected, nor would any doctrine of our theology. For us to squabble over benign variant passages is unwarranted and unwise. To do so over subsequent translations into a second language is even more imprudent.

The Languages of the Bible

The authors of Scripture wrote in one of three languages: Hebrew, Chaldean, or Greek. To date, many of their works have been translated into more than 2,000 languages and dialects throughout the world. The English speaking world has been blessed with several fine versions of the Bible that represent the original languages with astounding accuracy.

Some translations (such as the KJV and NASB) attempt a literal translation, while others (such as the NIV and NLT) are based upon the concept of dynamic equivalence (which at times makes them more a commentary than a translation); still both systems have their strengths and their weaknesses. For example,

the literal, word-for-word translation is often awkward and sometimes fails to convey the historic idiom, leaving the discovery of certain important cultural details to the reader. But few readers have the means or the desire to ascertain these historic details. On the other hand, the system of dynamic equivalence reads smoothly and interprets the idioms for the reader. However the reader must rely upon the translator's understanding of the idioms. The reader must trust these idioms have been understood correctly; because there are passages in which bias or historical ignorance can influence the understanding of a certain idiom.

Interpretation and Illumination

Now that we have God's Word in our hands, what do we do with it? His Word is designed to change our actions and attitudes, but how do we apply these ancient writings to our modern lives? That is, how do we apply them with meaning and accuracy? This is where interpretation and illumination come into focus. They bridge the gap in the transmission of God's Word from His mind into our mind, thereby making application possible to our spirit and soul, and to our life experience. The concepts of interpretation and illumination are developed more fully in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Study Questions

1. In what ways has God communicated with man?
2. What role has Israel had in God's communication with man?
3. What role does the Holy Spirit have in God's communication with man?
4. What role did Jesus have in God's communication with man?
5. Characterize and define God's direct communication with man.
6. Characterize and define God's indirect communication with man.
7. What was the function of a scribe?

8. In what languages were the Scriptures written?

Chapter 2

The Importance of Interpretation

The Dual Nature of Scripture

God's Word transcends culture and time. It has had, presently has, and shall continue to have, meaning for all mankind. By its very nature it has eternal relevance. However, because God spoke through historical individuals, Scripture has a particular historical setting that must be understood.

Each book of the Bible is necessarily conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was written.² Even the author's personality must be considered. Because of this, the Bible has a unique dual nature about it. It is God's Word, expressed in the human words of various historic individuals.

The Necessity of Interpretation

Interpretation is not a deceptive device employed by unscrupulous intellects bent upon distorting truth. Interpretation is a common activity of communication, required for both verbal and written language.

Unfortunately, some have the idea that we need not interpret the Bible. To them, it seems good enough merely to read it and believe what it says.³ While this logic may sound reasonable and even pious, it has a major flaw. God's Word is divine, while our minds are human and thereby corrupt with bias and ignorance. It is largely the tension between these two natures (the divine and

² Gordon Fee, and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for all its Worth, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, pp. 15-17.

³ Ibid. p. 15.

the human) that requires interpretation on our part.⁴ Or more precisely, it is the corrupt, biased, and ignorant nature of man that requires interpretation on our part.

Because of our corrupt nature, the act of interpretation is requisite to all communication—whether it is from God to man or man to man, or whether it is the spoken or written word. To press this point just a little further, we might add that it is our corrupt nature that compromises even our communication with the animal world. For a short time, Adam walked with the animals, but his sin immediately changed that. Now animals are afraid of us or we of them. Even domestic animals have trouble knowing their master's will, and we certainly have trouble understanding them.

Man's sinful nature, tainted with bias and ignorance, clouds his ability to communicate or receive communication clearly. Each of us possesses our own myopic worldview, shaped by our culture, our life experiences, and our belief system. Therefore, the speaker's meaning might be very different from what the hearer understands. For this reason, there is no escaping the necessity of interpretation on the part of the hearer or reader.

With this understanding we see there is a great distance between simply reading and believing. To quickly leap from one to the other is to bypass understanding. It is proper to believe what we read in Scripture, but it is also proper, and of extreme importance, to have first a clear, correct understanding of what it is we are reading. This understanding comes only by interpretation; and it must be the correct interpretation. False interpretation leads to incorrect knowledge, which leads to incorrect thinking, which leads to incorrect conclusions, and finally, to incorrect actions.

That understanding does not take place without interpretation is true of any spoken or written communication, but it is especially true of ancient literature, simply because we are so far removed, both culturally and chronologically. Being so far removed, however, does not change our objective. The singular objective of the interpretation process is to arrive at the plain, literal meaning of the speaker or author. What did the

⁴ Ibid. pp. 18-19.

speaker or author mean by the spoken or written words? Although this is a simple premise, there are certain difficulties inherent to the process.

Immediately, we face problems of several levels, so that, what seems to be the obvious meaning may, in fact, not be the meaning at all. Due to cultural, language and geographical differences, historical distance, theological ignorance, and the self-imposed limitations from our personal background—that is, our biases—what may seem to be the plain meaning of a text, may actually be a gross misunderstanding on our part. Many self-imposed misunderstandings have arisen from the reader's ignorance of the author's context.

For example, Paul said, "*Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof*" (Rom. 13:14). Many in our culture might assume that flesh refers to physical body. Therefore, they suppose he is speaking of bodily appetites. However, Paul seldom used this particular term in reference to the physical body. He generally used it to speak of the sinful nature.⁵ Readers will interpret the passage as either physical flesh or sinful nature. Wittingly or unwittingly, correctly or incorrectly, but either way, by necessity, the reader will interpret the passage.

Another example can be found in a poor exegesis of Malachi 3:10. Israel had been experiencing the Lord's wrath due to their disobedience. This wrath had caused them to doubt His love for them. In their sin they had lost trust in the Lord; they doubted that He would provide for their needs even if they were to keep His commandments. The book begins with God assuring Israel of His love and concern for them. He challenged them to put Him to the test. If they did so, the nations about them would understand that they have been blessed. Thus,

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Mal. 3:10).

To derive somehow (as some have attempted to do) from this specific reprimand and challenge to Israel that God will heap

⁵ Ibid. p. 16-17.

financial and material rewards on Christians who give heartily and envision a blessing, is to twist the text in the manner of our enemy. At best, it is a prime display of ignorance, the epitome of a poorly executed exegesis leading to false doctrine.

Does this mean that only theologians should attempt biblical interpretation, or that only biblical scholars should even read Scripture? Of course not; but it does mean that all readers who intend to formulate a belief system from their reading must take interpretation very seriously. As with all communication, there are certain grammatical and contextual rules that must be followed. One prominent theologian gave this encouraging comment for non-theologians,⁶

Strict grammatical analysis, and the rigid observance of exegetical rules, lead to the same views of truth as are entertained by theologians, who bring to the study of the Bible strong sense and devout piety.

Without strict adherence to the rules of context and grammar, meaningful communication cannot take place. Without these rules we have nothing more than meaningless babble. If readers can take literature to mean anything they desire, they might as well be staring at cloud formations and letting their imaginations run wild.

Words have meaning. Words within a certain context have a specific meaning. Words from a certain historical setting will be expressed in a specific vernacular. But always, we must assume the author spoke in simple language attempting to convey a simple message. We must always ask, what is the author's meaning?

The Process is Called Hermeneutics

This process of biblical interpretation, called hermeneutics, is a transliteration of the Greek term ἑρμηνεία *hermeneia*, *interpretation, translation, to explain*.⁷ In English, we define

⁶ Joseph Angus, and Samuel Green, The Bible Hand-Book: An Introduction to the Study of Sacred Scripture, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, no date, p. 176.

⁷ Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956, p. 10.

hermeneutics as the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system. It is an art because the application of the rules is accomplished by skill, not rote or mechanical imitation.⁸

The goal of hermeneutics is to bridge the gap between the readers' minds and the mind of the author.⁹ We all agree that God has spoken, but what has He said? It is the task of the hermeneutical process to answer this question. To do this properly requires study and research on our part. We must learn something about history, geography, language, culture, literature, theology, and logic. It is not easy, but it is rewarding and necessary if we expect to truly know what God has said.

Because it is difficult, time consuming, exhausting, and technical, it is rarely exercised in its entirety. Many would-be Bible interpreters neglect to engage the complete hermeneutical procedure. No doubt such lazy interpretation is at the root of many erroneous doctrines.

Is it not a pitiful enigma? The Christian values the Bible so highly yet in reality does so very little to seek its meaning. Locke observed that,

Man can weary himself in any secular affair, but diligently to search the Scripture is to him tedious and burdensome. Few covet to be mighty in the Scripture; though convinced their great concern is enveloped in them.¹⁰

What an insightful, yet dismal, expose of the human condition.

Study Questions

1. In what way is the Bible culturally bound?
2. In what way is the Bible eternally relevant?
3. How does one distinguish between the two?
4. Discuss the tension that makes interpretation necessary on our part.

⁸ Ramm, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰ Angus and Green, p. 176.

To Determine the Author's Intent

5. Discuss the statement, "You don't have to interpret the Bible, just read it and believe what it says"?
6. Discuss how it is possible to read something and understand the words but not the meaning?
7. What is the goal of interpretation?
9. Discuss hermeneutics as an art and science.
10. Why do so many who hold the Bible in such high regard neglect to study and interpret it properly?

Chapter 3

The Process of Interpreting

It is Possible to be Correct

What then is the correct hermeneutical procedure? The answer to this question is the subject of this chapter. While it is true that a thorough exegesis (another fancy word for interpretation and critical explanation) of certain difficult passages requires an advanced knowledge of biblical languages (something the average reader is not expected to have), much of Scripture can be correctly interpreted with simply a good translation, and many reference works are available to help with the more difficult passages. Indeed, as English readers we have at our disposal all the tools necessary to arrive at reliable interpretations of most passages. However, if we are to be making doctrine, we must work in the original languages.

By its very nature, a translation, any translation, necessarily loses something in transmission; if for no other reason than that the two languages are separated culturally and grammatically, thus having different idioms as well as different grammatical structures. In the case of Scripture, our translations are also separated historically—by nearly two thousand years. It is for this reason that doctrine should always be based upon the text as presented in its original language rather than a translation, any translation.

Do Not Negate the Languages

Does this mean that we need not study the original languages? Well, yes and no. Certainly the mastery of Greek

and Hebrew is beyond the needs of the average reader, but it behooves the serious Bible student, the preacher, and even the Sunday school teacher, to learn (at least at a rudimentary scholastic level) to function in these languages. It is not the ominous task that some might suppose. We are spoiled by our American culture. Because English prevails we feel no need to learn another language. Is it not convicting that the average European can function in several languages? Are they of greater intellect than we? Or is it not, rather, our lack of interest, our busy schedules, our priorities? No doubt the latter, in which case, the study of biblical languages is simply not deemed as something important enough, to the average Bible teacher, to invest the necessary time and discipline.

This is both sad and confusing. Believers defend and adhere to the orthodox doctrines of a literal interpretation of the inspired, inerrant Word of God. But curiously, many are content, even belligerently committed to, adhering to His Word in an amended form, a translation.

How is it that when we have at our disposal that which is in focus, we are satisfied to focus our whole life upon something that is, by its very nature, out of focus? I mean no disrespect for our translations, but it was the original writings that were inspired, not our translations. Even though the extant manuscripts are not the autographs, they are duplicates. They convey the author's mind with precision, within his own context. Before we construct any doctrine, they simply demand our attention.

Certain thoughts, idioms, and intents are inevitably lost in translation. No translation can project the crisp picture of the original language, though because the biblical language is better or more precise than English. Indeed, it could be argued that the opposite is true. Our present English is likely the most precise language in history. The issue is translation. Linguistics, as well as cultural and historical distance, necessarily makes certain expressions in the receptor tongue slightly askew from its counterpart in the mother tongue. If God had chosen to communicate in Mandarin Chinese, the issue would be the same, and we would study Mandarin rather than Greek and Hebrew.

Be Cautious

The purpose of this work is to teach a sound hermeneutical process. Although much of this process can be done in English, we must recognize that certain textual and grammatical issues are necessarily answered in the original languages. Therefore, the less experienced interpreter must take caution and tread lightly when the ice is thin. Do not expect to be forming new doctrines or finding new meanings that have never been understood. It can be said with a great measure of certainty that such new findings will be erroneous.

Theologians and Bible teachers must acquire a certain proficiency in the original languages, the historical setting and theological concepts, and they must master sound hermeneutical processes. Again, this is not to suggest that only formally trained theologians are worthy of offering opinion; but it is to suggest, even argue, that no one untrained in the biblical languages and in theology should seriously expect to uncover or formulate doctrinal issues. Let us keep in mind that the purpose of personal Bible study is for application and obedience, not for the construction of new theological systems.

The Process of Literal Interpretation

One of the primary features to distinguish fundamental Christianity from liberal Christendom is its adherence to a literal-historical-grammatical-contextual hermeneutic of these Scriptures, which we accept as inspired by God. Therefore, let's define the meaning of literal, historical, grammatical, and contextual.

Literal

We use the term literal to say every passage has a plain meaning. The author or speaker had a singular understanding in mind when he wrote or spoke. We refer to this as a meaning with a single sense. It is the interpreter's goal to understand the author's plain, singular meaning.

It is the nature of language, both written and verbal, for writers and speakers to express themselves in various ways. The authors of Scripture were no different. We all have favorite

words and idioms we use frequently. We will have a certain style of expression, such as short, pithy sentences, as in the manner of John Steinbeck, or long, drawn out sentences, connecting one parenthetical idea to another, as in the style of Nathaniel Hawthorne. But always, if the speaker is coherent, there is a plain singular meaning in mind.

Words, then as now, have metaphorical, figurative and concrete uses. Each usage is considered literal: one is figurative-literal the other is concrete-literal. Therefore, literal simply refers to the author's contextual meaning for the term. This is true in both the figurative or concrete sense.

When we use the idiom, "It's raining cats and dogs," everyone within our culture understands it is a euphemism for "It's raining hard." When we say, "It's raining hard," everyone within our culture understands that we are using "hard" in the figurative sense. The concrete-literal meaning of hard is, "not easily penetrated, firm, solid."¹¹ This concept does not fit our context. There is nothing solid about raindrops. But there are several figurative meanings for hard. In this phrase "hard" is a reference to the inclement weather. This is the speaker's obvious meaning, and to understand it as such is to understand it literally. It is a legitimate, figurative-literal use of the term.

Likewise, when James said, "*the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity*" (*Jm. 3:6*); he did not mean fire in a concrete-literal sense, as Luke meant it when he said Paul "*shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm*" (*Act 28:5*). Nor did James mean "world" in the concrete-literal sense. His use for both terms is plainly in the figurative-literal sense. But we must take it still another step to arrive at the literal-meaning. Even James' use of the generally concrete term "tongue" is a euphemism for the thoughts and intents of the mind which control the tongue. This is the plain meaning of James' figurative speech. This is literal interpretation. The idea is that the expression of thoughts flowing from our sinful nature can have destructive power.

So then, by literal we mean the author's plain, obvious,

¹¹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1961.

intended meaning, whether it be a figurative or concrete use of the term.

Historical

By its nature, Scripture has meaning for all time, but there is also a determined historic aspect to it. As such, there is a determined historic aspect to hermeneutics. These documents were written by, and to, historic figures. Correct interpretation on our part demands that we understand the historical setting in which they were written and received.

Learning this historical background is more than knowing the date and author of a particular writing. It requires careful consideration of the author's background, the recipient's background as well as the circumstances in which it was written.¹² Sometimes it requires knowledge of the culture, the geography, or even the historical events leading up to the occasion in question; and always, it requires an understanding of the historic terms, as defined at the time of the writing.

Grammatical

Language is our basic means of communication. If a language is to have consequence, its users must agree upon a recognized structure and a common meaning for each term. Every language functions on this basis. It is this common agreement in our English language that enables you to understand the words I have written.

We monitor and modify the structure of a language by rules of grammar. In English we generally construct a sentence in the order of its subject, verb, object. Thus, Mary (the subject) picked (the verb) apples (the object). This is grammar. And as we might recall from grade school, the rules seem endless. We obey most of them without realizing it. With proper instruction, as children we learn to speak correctly long before we actually study grammar. But this does not negate the need for the rules or our need to understand them. When studying a foreign language this is especially important. Grammar is our rule book, our

¹² Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, Toward an Exegetical Theology, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981, p. 88.

guide; the structure in which we communicate.

Our grammatical rules are based upon past usage; but because language is fluid—ever changing, to some degree—so too are the rules of grammar. They change to reflect common usage. But these changes are slow, generally taking place over decades or even hundreds of years.

The grammatical considerations in the hermeneutical process require great detail. We must consider the meaning of a given term and the function of that term in the phrase, the clause, or the sentence. Then we consider the function of a phrase in a sentence and the purpose of a sentence in the paragraph, the relationship of one sentence to another, and one paragraph to another.

This step of the hermeneutical process often requires technical skills that many have not perfected, or perhaps have allowed to become rusty. But do not dismay; there are several study tools designed to help such students with the important grammatical issue. These tools will be discussed later.

Contextual

The context in which a passage is written is also of extreme importance. In some ways contextual considerations are akin to grammatical considerations. We might even think of them as an extension of grammatical issues. The grammatical study is concerned with everything from the meaning of a word to the connection of one sentence to another. Contextual considerations transcend the immediate grammatical issues, to deal with the general argument, logic, story, or flow of thought. What is the author's point? How has he substantiated it? What led him to this point? What conclusion does he draw from it? Or for instance, in the case of historical drama: What is the situation? The background? Who are the characters? etc.

Furthermore, contextual issues must consider the main theme of the book, the rest of the author's works, the rest of the Old or New Testament, and finally the rest of the Bible. Thus, the question is, how does this passage fit into the immediate and broad context?

Without such considerations we are liable, and likely, to

interpret a passage out of context. That is, we could make it seem to say something entirely different than the author had intended.

Study Questions

1. To what degree are we able to follow the hermeneutical process in the English language alone?
2. Why is it important, for the interpretation of certain passages, to have a working knowledge of the original language?
3. What is meant by the term literal?
4. What is meant by the term figurative?
6. What is meant by the term grammatical?
7. What is meant by the term contextual?
8. Discuss a proper hermeneutical procedure.

Chapter 4

The Illumination of God's Word

Hermeneutics, Logic and Illumination

While hermeneutics is a sound process easily achieved by any informed and logical mind, the illumination of the Word of God to the mind of man by the Holy Spirit is something to which only the believer is privileged. To understand the meaning of Scripture in its cognitive sense takes only intellect. To understand and experience it via illumination requires the Holy Spirit.

Anyone with even a moderate intelligence can understand, in the syntactical sense, the propositional logic of Paul's argument on justification up through chapter 4, in the book of Romans. Justification "*is by faith . . . it is apart from ordinances . . . it is apart from the law.*"

The logic of both his argument and his conclusion is easy to follow. Justification is accessed through faith. The keeping of the law has nothing to do with justification. Justification has brought peace with God. This justification and subsequent peace is established through the Lord Jesus Christ. The introduction into this state of grace is obtained by faith, and accessed through Jesus Christ. Paul and his readers stood before God by grace. Paul and his readers rejoiced in hope. Their hope was in the glory of God.

This is such an excellent example of logic and argument that (so we are told) in years gone by, law professors would assign it as required reading. Understanding this in the cognitive sense is something almost anyone can do; but to understand this in the experiential sense as one having received this peace with God,

and rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God is, as stated earlier, something to which only the believer is privy. This is illumination in action.

Illumination

The difference between the most intelligent unregenerate mind, and the most simplistic regenerate mind, is that the unregenerate mind has not experienced the truths of which Paul speaks. For them, his conclusion is merely a remote abstract thought, nothing more than philosophy,

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

For the unbeliever, pondering these ideas is little more than an exercise in mental gymnastics. He has no empirical knowledge of them. In reality, to him such thoughts are virtually meaningless, having no more value than $E=MC^2$ has to the mailman. The mailman may be able to understand—in an abstract sense—the concept of potential energy being equal to an object's mass multiplied by the speed of light in a vacuum to the second power; but unlike the research scientist, he is unable to apply this concept in any concrete or theoretical situation.

Likewise, an intellectual unbeliever may fully understand the logic of Paul's argument, but he can find no practical use for it, no application. The terms have no concrete meaning to him. They are merely theoretical, abstract concepts. But to the believer these words are life. They are concepts of which he has first hand experience, personal knowledge. He knows them in a way only made possible by experience.

The concept of love is perhaps an even better comparison than Einstein's theorem. Until you fall in love yourself, you cannot fully understand the experience. You may have a very clear understanding of the concept, but it is nothing like experiencing the real thing for yourself.

A similar illustration is parenthood. Before becoming a father I understood—at least cognitively—what it meant to be a

father. I understood the responsibilities, the concerns and the difficulties involved. However, when I became a father I really understood. I suddenly had first hand knowledge, an experiential knowledge, an application that made the abstract suddenly concrete.

I remember the morning my first child was born as the most dramatic day of my life. At once, as if a light had been turned on, I was struck with the reality of the awesome responsibility of parenting. It was not the overwhelming pressure to provide material needs; that is insignificant in comparison. But it was the reality of my responsibility to raise this child in godliness. To provide a spiritual heritage that created a love for, and a trust in, God. The challenge frightened me. Parental responsibility is a knowledge that a non-parent can easily understand; but the knowledge is necessarily different when parenthood arrives. Only then is it understood intimately, with genuine experiential reality.

So it is with the truths of God's Word. Jesus Christ is life, and this life is the light of men. When we are born anew by the Spirit of God, we receive this life, God's life, eternal life. This new life is lived in light. We refer to this as illumination. Therefore, an important distinction must be made. The illumination of God's Word by the Holy Spirit is not light shed upon the Word of God, but from the Word.¹³

Revelation is the fact of divine communication. Inspiration is the means of divine communication. Illumination is the gift of understanding that divine communication.¹⁴ The unbeliever does not have this gift. He is in darkness. The believer is in light, the light radiating from God and from His Word. Here is where divine communication takes place.

A prime example between cognitive knowledge and this lack of illumination is the world's hatred for Israel and Christianity. Although they hate both with equal vehemence, they do not fully know why, nor can they clearly understand it

¹³ Unpublished classroom lecture by Randy Roberts, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1987.

¹⁴ Norman Geisler, and William Nix. A General Introduction to the Bible. Chicago: Moody Press 1968, p. 30.

when it is explained to them. Even those non-believers sympathetic to Israel and Christianity do not clearly understand it. But to the believer, the reason is crystal clear. Or course, Satan cultivates this hatred because of God's covenant with Israel and because of Christianity's nature to shine light into the darkness. The master of darkness does not like light shining into his domain. But the real impetus to man's vehement hatred of both Israel and Christianity is the Judeo-Christian total depravity: *that none is righteous; that all have sinned and come short of God's glory*. For this infers that man cannot please God and, thus, needs a savior. This is offensive to man's pride, to his self-righteousness, to his self-sufficiency.

Application

It is through illumination that the believer's mind and life are opened to a new reality, a dimension where an intimate, personal relationship with God takes place. It is a spiritual reality. Here, the application of Scripture carries a whole new meaning. The unbeliever can know none of this. He does not have the requisite facility. He has no relationship with God. Therefore his spirit gropes in darkness, unable to find any meaningful application for the truths of Scripture. Any study of Scripture, on his part, is merely academic. He is able to realize nothing more than trivial, intellectual accuracy. His study necessarily stops at this level.

For the believer this is only the first step—an important step, but only the first. Academic accuracy is necessary. That is why we do hermeneutics. But intellectual accuracy, in and of itself, is not the objective of biblical studies. Nor is it the objective of God's Word to simply provide facts for academic gymnastics. The objective of God's Word is to change lives. The objective of Bible study is the discovery and personal application of God's truths. Lives are changed as the Word of God is understood and applied accurately.

This distinction is easily seen in a passage referenced earlier, Romans 5:1-2. Paul concluded that,

Having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we

have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exalt in hope of the glory of God.

Only the believer has the wherewithal to apply this passage, to truly exalt in the hope of the glory of God.

Scripture is filled with truths that only the believer can access. In today's world everyone is familiar with passwords. We need them to access bankcards, e-mail, restricted rooms at work, etc. In a sense, illumination is the believer's password to spiritual truth and application.

Study Questions

1. What are the requirements to achieve sound biblical hermeneutics?
2. Define the difference between cognitive understanding and illumination.
3. In what sense is illumination important to the exegete?
4. Discuss exegesis, illumination, and application.
5. What is the objective of God's Word?
6. What is the objective of Bible study?

Part 2

THE HERMENEUTICAL PROCEDURE

Chapter 5

The Historical, Cultural Context

The next two chapters present a step-by-step hermeneutical procedure and the resources we shall employ. Later, we will apply this hermeneutical method to the letter of 3 John.

The Historical Setting

The initial consideration of a text must be its historical setting—the circumstances behind the writing. When was it written? Where was it written? By whom and to whom was it written? What, if any, are the problems addressed? These and other questions of this nature must be answered. Much of this information is found within the text itself. We call this inductive study. Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and works will answer other questions of Old or New Testament surveys. More will be said about these tools in the following chapter.

The importance of knowing this historical background cannot be overstated. Sometimes this data is essential to a thorough understanding of the text, sometimes it is less important. But always, it must be considered; for generally, at least to some degree, it is of significance to the text. A good example of this is Paul's admonition to Timothy.

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather . . . show yourself an example . . . give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you. . . . Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, . . . persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you . . . (1 Tim. 4:12-16

NASB).

This text has often caused consternation. However, a few historical details are needed to fully appreciate Paul's charge. Without this knowledge, several things might be erroneously read into the text. We might conclude that youth need not respect its elders, that everyone ought to read Scripture publicly, or exhort, or teach; that everyone ought to be a scholar devoted to a life of research, or that personal salvation comes through diligent study.

Some might even conclude that a pastor's personal faithfulness can somehow be accounted to his congregation for righteousness; so that they too, merely by hearing him teach, can obtain salvation. Of course, such an understanding is completely contrary to biblical theology; for always, in Scripture, one's faith and salvation is a personal issue. It is not something that can be imputed by the actions of a fellow sinner.

Without knowing the background, the reader might arrive at any number of false conclusions regarding this or other passages. Here, Paul wrote to Timothy, his prize pupil whom he had personally disciplined. Paul had sent Timothy to Ephesus with a mission: there were a few issues in the assembly that needed attention. False teachers, seemingly prominent individuals, were in the church. Timothy was probably about thirty years old at the time, which in that culture, was young for leadership. No doubt these false teachers, who were likely his senior, intimidated him. He was under fire and Paul charged him to stick with it, on the front line and fight the battle. In so doing he would save himself and them that heard him.

Once the background is considered, Paul's plain meaning is apparent. Timothy's faithful proclamation of the truth and his rebuke of false teaching would save him and the others from theological shipwreck and ultimately, the spiritual defeat that would follow. We might expand Paul's thought as: Hold the fort! Do not succumb to the attack, for if you give in, you and those with you will be harmed. You will suffer great loss. Fight the enemy back and save yourself the certain injury and pain that comes with defeat.

The historical background is the context in which the words

were written. It is foundational to proper exegesis. To begin a study without the historical background is, necessarily, to begin out of focus. There is little value in viewing evidence under a microscope that you have not bothered to focus. Such a futile investigation would be foolish; so too is any biblical study without first having the historical background in focus.

Geographical Setting

Although often less pressing than the historical background, at times the geographical setting is a very real issue. The account of David and Goliath is one example. The two armies had been in a stalemate for 40 days, yet no battles had been waged. Each day Goliath would stand before Saul's army taunting and defying the armies of the living God.

Have you never wondered why this went on for 40 days? The answer is topography. The confrontation took place in the valley of Elah, a horseshoe shaped valley with mountain slopes on the north, south, and east. Each army had positioned itself on strategic high ground on either side of the valley and neither was willing to relinquish its position. In hand to hand combat, the high ground is crucial. Too often the geographical setting is treated simply as ornamental; but, as we see, at times it is integral to the full understanding of a passage.

Culture and Customs

Sometimes, it is also necessary to have knowledge of ancient customs. Just as knowing the geographical setting for the battle with the Philistines helps to better understand the circumstance, so too understanding certain ancient customs of the day can clarify the situation. Again, in the battle with the Philistines, this is paramount. For it was customary, in such stalemates, to send out warriors from each army to fight. The army of the losing warrior would retreat in defeat, believing the gods were against them. Understanding the way battles were fought, and the belief system employed by the pagan warriors, gives insight into the nature of Goliath's challenge, the ultimate battle between David and Goliath, and the uncontested Philistine retreat.

The Bible speaks to life situations. It makes reference to shepherds, sheep, farming, markets, cities and hundreds of other real life settings. Each has great cultural significance. Each must be understood in its historical and cultural background. Why was the Samaritan woman drawing water from a well so far from town? Why was Jesus crucified instead of stoned? Why is the story of the Good Samaritan especially damning to the Israelites? What did it mean to be a Roman citizen? These and numerous other cultural questions must be addressed. Not only does this provide the color, the backdrop, the setting for the context, often knowledge of particular customs will provide necessary insight for understanding a passage.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the importance of the historical setting.
2. Give a few examples of biblical passages in which a clear understanding of the historical background might be important.
3. What questions might be asked to discover the historical setting?
4. What study tools help us understand the historical setting?
5. Discuss a biblical event in which knowing the geographical setting might be important.
6. Discuss a biblical event in which knowing the customs and cultural setting might be important.

Chapter 6

The Literary Genre

Literature is the written record of linguistic expression. It comes in many styles, which we call genres or literary forms. Each genre has a specific purpose. One presents an argument, while another provokes emotion or introspection. Another gives an historical account, while yet another illustrates a point.

The Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God. It is God's communication to man in the form of written literature. As literature, it necessarily has literary form. Indeed, it has many literary forms, employing each of those mentioned above. Each "performs the same function in relation to biblical writings as it does to non-biblical writings; it is the means of communication and consequently the means of interpretation."¹⁵

Different genres require different considerations. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the various literary forms and to understand their purposes, their qualities and their applications. Is the passage prose, poetry, prophecy or a parable? Is it an epistle, an Old Testament narrative, a Gospel or an historical account? Understanding this will determine the limits of a passage, the internal structure, the audience or even the effect and response that was desired by the original author.¹⁶

Without this important consideration, passages are frequently taken out of context and made to say something considerably different from the author's original intent. This is a common ploy of the unbelieving scoffer who argues that

¹⁵ Robert A. Traina, Methodical Bible Study, Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985 reprint, p. 10.

¹⁶ Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, Toward an Exegetical Theology, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981, p. 94.

Scripture contradicts itself.

We can hardly treat a descriptive poetic proverb such as, “*Many will entreat the favor of a generous man, and every man is a friend to him who gives gifts*” (Prov. 19:6), with the same urgency that we treat Paul’s prescriptive imperative to Timothy, the Ephesian elder, when he writes, “*instruct those who are rich in this present world . . . to be generous and ready to share*” (1 Tim. 6:17-18). Here, the genre is most important. We have a problem when we attempt to give these passages equal application. One is a poem expressing a generalized observation about mankind. It warns the rich to beware of those who only want their money. The other is a directive from the Apostle, a command for the rich to share their wealth with others.

Prose

Prose compositions are the basic model of biblical communication. The word prose comes from the Latin adjective *prosus*, meaning “direct” or “straight.” The term describes plain speech such as used without reference to the rules of verse. Prose is divided into various subcategories:

- Descriptive prose is a narrative, speaking plainly about people, places, things, or actions.
- Explanatory or expository prose addresses matters such as law, science, philosophy, theology and politics.
- Emotive prose is primarily designed to induce feelings rather than linear thought.
- Polemical prose is the trade of fiction writers, journalists, critics and orators.¹⁷
- Historical narrative is also a category of prose, but due to the specific problems it presents we will handle it separately.

Discourse and Logic Literature

The literary genre of discourse and logic appeals primarily

¹⁷ Kaiser, p. 91.

to the intellect. Arguments and ideas are placed in this category. So too are extended discourses and writings of explanation. This book is in this category. The epistles, some of the prophetic sermons and the longer discourses of Jesus are placed in this genre as well.

Because this type of literature appeals primarily to the intellect it is important to recognize it as such. This awareness leads to a careful observation of its logical development. Only then, when special attention is given to its rationale, can valid interpretation take place.¹⁸

There are a couple of things to keep in mind while interpreting this type of literature—things that help us to arrive at the author's original meaning.

- Trace the argument sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph. Follow the train of thought.
- Ask: what is the point of each paragraph? How do the paragraphs relate to each other?
- Consider the historic significance.
- Be aware of what is culturally relative and what transcends the original setting.

Epistolary

An epistle, or epistolary literature, is sometimes referred to as an occasional document because it addresses a specific occasion. Although it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and belongs to all time, still it was written from the context of the author to the context of the original recipients.¹⁹ This point cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, because it appeals primarily to the intellect, some scholars prefer to classify epistolary literature under the grouping of discourse and logic.^{20,21} This is a fair assessment, for it is very important to recognize and carefully consider the epistle's logical progression. However, above all

¹⁸ Traina. pp. 68-69.

¹⁹ Fee. p. 45.

²⁰ Traina, Ibid., p. 68

²¹ Ibid. p. 69.

else, the occasional nature of the epistle must be taken seriously.²² Because a specific occasion—either on the author's part or the recipient's part—was the impetus for the epistle, the occasion must be recognized and considered.

For instance, Paul's address, "*Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, . . .*" was not written to a solitary auspicious group gathered under his apostolic stamp of approval. Rather, he spoke to the many small, in-house assemblies gathering throughout the city. Collectively, these small gatherings were the local church at Corinth.

This concept has been misunderstood by certain denominations in today's culture, which fancy themselves the only true local church, the only anointed assembly of their particular township. They have failed to take the genre of the epistles into account and therefore, have failed to arrive at a correct interpretation of the passage. This, in turn has led to an out of context application, which consequently, has led to a false doctrine.

Inevitably, the occasional nature of these documents is the very thing that makes them difficult to understand. We were not present for the occasion and we generally receive only half the conversation. A good example is 2 Thessalonians. Having discussed the coming of the Lord Jesus, the coming apostasy, and man of lawlessness, Paul writes, "*Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?*" (2:5). Then, seemingly speaking of the lawless one, he says, "*And you know what restrains him now . . .*" (v. 6). Our problem at this point is no small issue. The original readers knew precisely what Paul was speaking of, for he was reminding them of what he had previously taught them. However, because he did not specify the issues, and we were not there for the lesson, we do not know with certainty to what he is referring. Neither do we know with certainty what he meant by the term ἀποστασία *apostasia* in verse 3, nor exactly what he had in mind when he spoke of the restraining power in verse 6. We can, and do, speculate; but the immediate text simply does not reveal that information.

Like others, based upon corroborating theological data and

²² Fee, p. 45.

other biblical passages, I have drawn inference as to the correct understanding of these passages. But in the end (also like the others), I am making inference without any final confirmation as to accuracy. The problem is an unknown historical occasion. An unknown historical occasion is not an issue for divine inspiration, but of historical research. Simply, although the Thessalonians knew what Paul was addressing, because I was not present, and because he did not elaborate further, I cannot know with certainty. I can only make inference. Fortunately most passages are not so obscure.

But even the apparently obscure can sometimes come to light through various other historical documents that help us reconstruct the context—the occasional nature of the writing. Once the context is understood, the primary concern when interpreting epistolary and discourse literature is to follow the argument, the flow of thought. But we must remember the context; we must remember the occasion. As with all literature, these passages must not be taken out of context.

Historic Narrative

For analytical purposes, historic narrative is prose literature and, therefore, basically follows the rules for prose. Appealing primarily to the imagination and the emotions, biblical historical narrative is more than a simple account of impersonal, chronological events. It recounts personal histories in the form of stories and biographical sketches. With this in mind, Traina argues that attempting “to interpret it without the liberal use of the imagination in its legitimate sense is to guarantee either partial or faulty interpretation.”²³

Similar to occasional documents, the primary difficulty with relating historical truth and theological teaching is to bridge the gap between the historic event and the present day.²⁴ While we must keep in mind that the primary purpose of this narrative is to present historical data pertinent to theological considerations, at the same time, we must be cautious of unduly pressing every detail of the historical narrative for some perceived exegetical

²³ Traina. p. 69.

²⁴ Kaiser. p. 92.

point. Much of the detail is merely ornamental, included to set the background. This does not mean it is false information, or that it is not relevant. Quite the opposite is true. It is both historically correct and very relevant, especially to the complete understanding of the passage. However, the relevance is generally that of reconstructing the occasion in the mind of the reader, rather than arguing or supporting some controversial doctrine.

For example, Luke tells us of Paul's incident with the viper on the isle of Melita (Acts 28); but it was not his intention that future readers would devise snake-handling practices to prove their faith. Yet sadly, because of their failure to apply these basic principles of reading historic narrative, in their energetic, yet ignorant devotion, some actually practice an ostensible display of faith by handling deadly snakes.

Poetry

Poetry is another important literary form used with frequency throughout Scripture, accounting for about one third of the Old Testament. Easton's Bible Dictionary defines poetry as "the measured language of emotion." Biblical poetry deals almost exclusively with the great question of man's relation to God: guilt, condemnation, punishment, pardon, redemption and repentance are the common themes of this heaven-born poetry.²⁵

The Old Testament contains three distinct styles of poetry: the dramatic poetry of Job and the Song of Solomon, the lyrical poetry of the Psalms, and the didactic and sensuous poetry of Ecclesiastes. Unlike Western poetry, which is rich in meter and rhyme, Hebrew poetry has neither. Its genius lies in parallelism—a certain interaction between clauses, phrases, and sentences. Some have called it thought-rhyme.²⁶

Basically, parallelism consists of two or more lines of verse that express thoughts in various relationships. Some are synonymous ideas, using equivalent but different words. Others are antithetic ideas, using some type of contrast. The numerous styles of parallelism can be divided into the three primary

²⁵ Easton's Bible Dictionary.

²⁶ Ibid.

categories: semantic, grammatical, and synthetic parallelism.

Semantic Parallelism

Semantic parallelism deals with meaning—two ways of saying the same thing, as in Proverbs 20:13.

Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty;

Open your eyes, and you shall be satisfied with bread.

Here, although the second clause may appear different from the first, both center on the theme of laziness versus productivity. The writer is speaking in semantics, two ways of saying the same thing.

Various kinds of expressions differ, yet remain within the primary semantic style of thought-rhyme. Synonymous or cognate parallelism is generally considered a subcategory of semantic parallelism. For example, in Proverbs 6:2, two similar effects are caused by the same agent,

You are snared with the words of your mouth,

You are taken with the words of your mouth.

Proverbs 6:26, makes a statement in the positive and then the negative.

For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread,

And the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.

Psalms 40:15, states an idea in triplicate.

Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha.

Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee.

Let such as love thy salvation say continually. The Lord be magnified.

An example of double parallelism is found in Isaiah 9:1. Here the third and fourth clauses correspond to the first and second clauses.

Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation,

*When at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali,*

*And afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of
the sea,*

Beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.

Grammatical Parallelism

Grammatical parallelism is yet another form. An example is seen in Proverbs 21:4.

A high look,

And a proud heart,

And the plowing of the wicked

Are sin.

Here the writer uses the progression of grammatical clauses to construct the verse. Each clause builds upon the last until the abrupt climax ties them together.

Another example of grammatical parallelism is often referred to as introverted parallelism. In a four-clause verse, such as Psalms 135:15-18, the fourth clause answers to the first and the third answers to the second.

*The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of
men's hands.*

*They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they,
but they see not;*

*They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any
breath in their mouths.*

*They that make them are like unto them, so is every one that
trusts in them.*

Synthetic Parallelism

In synthetic parallelism the second line adds further information to the first. This style is also referred to as constructive or compound parallelism. Proverbs 20:4 is a good example.

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold;

Therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

Here, the second clause provides further information to the first; even a cause and effect is expressed.

Antithetic parallelism is another form of synthetic parallelism. As the name might suggest, the second clause is contrary to the statement of the first, as seen in Psalms 37:9 and again in 20:8.

For evildoers shall be cut off;

But those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.

They are brought down and fallen;

But we are risen, and stand upright.

Other forms of poetic odes exist in books of Hebrew poetry as well as the historical books.²⁷ Sometimes, as in the famous axiom of a virtuous woman in Proverbs 31, an alphabetical arrangement is used to connect the thoughts. Repetition is often used for emphasis and at times there is simply a progression of thought from one verse to another.

When dealing with poetry, it is imperative to remember that it frequently uses figurative and flexible language. And we must keep in mind that it usually expresses feelings and emotions rather than linear logical argument.²⁸ Here again, the context must be considered with extreme caution to avoid leaping to unfounded conclusions.

²⁷ Kaiser. p. 92.

²⁸ Traina. p. 70.

Parables

The term parable is a transliteration of the Greek παραβολή *parabolē*, *placing beside*. It is used to signify the placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison. Parables have been used as a method of instruction throughout recorded history as a means to compare one circumstance or life situation to another. They comprise a large portion of Jesus' public teaching, concerning which he explains, "*I speak to them in parables because seeing, they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand*" (Matt. 13:13).

Drawn from nature or human circumstance, these short narratives convey spiritual lessons by employing the principle of analogy. In Scripture, parables have two parts: the spiritual truth being illustrated, and the brief, but expressive, narrative of an earthly life circumstance. Placed side by side for the purpose of clarification, the tangible is used to explain the intangible.²⁹ However, although analogous, they deal with real, earthly things and must be differentiated from fables, which speak of attributes that do not belong to the circumstance in nature.³⁰

The parable is designed only to illustrate one truth. Consequently, two dangers must be avoided when interpreting a parable. The first error is to ignore the important features of the parable. As with historic narrative, much of the detail may simply be ornamental, but each parable has important physical features that must be understood if one is to understand the spiritual meaning. The second error is attempting to make each detail in the parable have a spiritual meaning.³¹ We must be careful not to unduly press every detail for some hidden spiritual meaning. Again, the parable is designed to convey one spiritual lesson, not three or four, or even two.

Wisdom Writings

Kaiser observes that Wisdom literature has two basic types.³² The first is a reflective or a philosophical kind of

²⁹ Vine's Greek Dictionary.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kaiser. pp. 92-93.

wisdom, which generally is presented as a lengthy debate or argument. It often deals with the more basic questions of life. It is generally polemical in nature, such as the book of Ecclesiastes. Or, it may have an exhortative style much like a teacher with his pupil. Proverbs, chapters 1 through 9, are such examples.

The second type of wisdom writings is prudential, consisting of smaller units of seemingly disconnected thoughts which are often isolated contextually. Psalms 37, 49 and 112 are good examples of this style, as are Proverbs 10-31, and the book of James.

Although Job, Song of Solomon, and the Sermon on the Mount are generally considered wisdom writings, they are difficult to classify definitively. Some have made the case that these should be included in the reflective or philosophical genre.

Prophetic Literature

The genre of prophetic literature presents a certain difficulty of its own. While some prophecies speak of more immediate events looming in the near horizon, others fit into a long-range eschatological view of human history, speaking of events to take place in the distant future. To this day, thousands of years after these prophecies were penned, many are yet to be fulfilled. Distinction between these two types of prophecies is the concern when interpreting prophetic literature.

What makes this distinction complex is that prophecies for the near future are often set against the background of the overall eschatological future with which they sometimes seem to blend. Scripture regularly portrays God's acts in sequential history in the light of His overall scheme for the entirety of human history.³³ Therefore, great care must be taken on our part to distinguish that which was chronological for the prophet and Israel, and that which is part of the greater eschatological picture.

Furthermore, prophetic literature is often metaphorical. Apocalyptic literature characteristically employs the use of rich symbolism involving animals, men, and the spirit world. It often consists of the formal introduction of a vision or dream. There are frequent conversations between the prophet and the heavenly

³³ Fee. p. 164.

being who is attending the vision. We hear of the cosmic catastrophes, the radical transformation of nature and nations, the imminent end of the age, and the establishment of the eternal kingdom. As for vocabulary, Kaiser reminds us the prophet often

projects the future in terms gleaned from the actions of God in past history. Also the art forms and cultural vehicles of past civilization are readily employed to vivify the otherwise prosaic format of the material. Thus . . . there will be a need to rely heavily on the informing or antecedent theology. Once the symbols and antecedent theology are accounted for in the exegesis, the material may be treated as straightforward and direct prose.³⁴

Study Questions

1. Discuss the importance of meaningful communication and literature.
2. What is another term for literary form?
3. What are some terms used to categorize various styles of literature?
4. Discuss the importance of realizing and understanding each of these literary categories in biblical literature.
5. Define prose and cite two examples from Scripture.
6. Discuss the differences between Western and Hebrew poetry.
7. How is a parable different from a fable?
8. What should be kept in mind when interpreting a parable?

³⁴ Kaiser. pp. 93-94.

Chapter 7

Syntax and Grammar

It is imperative that the interpretation of any biblical passage be confined to the context in which it was written. Indeed, this is true of all literature. This context includes the historical, the cultural, the geographical, as well as the syntactical. Taking a passage out of context is not only unscholarly it is dishonest. At the very least it is careless. And to do so knowingly, as some do, is nothing less than unethical fabrication.

In this chapter various aspects of the hermeneutical process are introduced in the order one might expect to employ them. Identifying the theme of the biblical book or letter with which we are dealing, providing a syntactical and grammatical analysis, diagramming sentences and constructing a mechanical outline, the use of commentaries, and constructing an analytical outline. Subsequent chapters provide detailed examples and discussions of these procedural aspects.

The Overall Theme

Once the genre is identified, and the historical, cultural background understood, we turn our attention to the overall theme of the book. The author's theme must always be on our mind. Think of it as a plumb line running straight through the document. The author's logic, arguments and doctrinal issues will not stray far from his theme.

The letter of Hebrews is a good example. This letter has five warning passages which ill-equipped exegetes commonly misconstrue as speaking to unbelievers. These misinterpretations tell us the interpreter obviously neglected the overall theme of Hebrews, which is the sufficiency of Christ's priesthood and His

steadfast relationship to the believer. If the inattentive exegete had kept this theme in mind he would have avoided the erroneous interpretations that presume these warning passages are addressing unbelievers. Providing such warnings to unbelievers does not fall in line with the overall theme and purpose of the letter. Some try to teach from these passages that believers can lose their salvation; but this too, does not coincide with the theme of the letter; nor does it agree with the theology found in Ephesians and Colossians.

Clearly these passages are written to believers, to warn of them losing their rewards, not their salvation. Understanding the theme helps us to stay on track with the author's logic, which in turn leads us to the correct understanding of the author's meaning.

Syntactical Outline

Before we consider the meaning of a passage we must perform a grammatical and syntactical analysis. This is best accomplished by constructing a synthetic outline of the whole book or letter. Structuring the outline requires a thorough understanding of the various parts of speech. This outline reveals the structure of the book, painting the broad picture by highlighting the author's major points, the flow of logic, and the argument. An example of a synthetic outline is provided in chapter 10.

From this outline we easily depict the author's theme and primary purpose for the document. The synthetic outline also shows how the particular passage we are dealing with fits into the overall scheme of the book. Thus, the outline is very important, even when dealing with large books; indeed, it is especially important when dealing with large books.

Syntactical/Grammatical Exegesis

Grammatical considerations deal with the syntax of the immediate passage. What did a certain term mean at the time of the writing? How does that term relate to the phrase in which it is found? How does it relate to the clause, the sentence? How does the clause relate to the sentence? How does the sentence

relate to the paragraph? How does the paragraph relate to the paragraphs before and after it, and to the theme of the book? To understand these relationships also requires a thorough understanding of the various parts of speech.

The Sentence

A sentence, of course, is a group of words expressing a complete thought. There are simple sentences and compound sentences. A simple sentence consists of two parts: the subject and the predicate. The subject of the sentence is that part about which something is being said. The predicate is the part that says something about the subject. A compound sentence has two or more subjects joined by a conjunction and sharing the same verb; or it may have two or more verbs joined by a conjunction and sharing the same subject.

The Clause

A clause is that part of a sentence that has a subject and a verb. There are three types of clauses.

- ✓ The independent clause expresses the main idea and is able to stand on its own.
- ✓ The coordinating clause is that part of a compound sentence that expresses the main thought. It is frequently introduced by such connectives as: and, or, for, but, neither, nor, either, or, both, not only, but also, except, yea, certainly, in fact, therefore, then, wherefore, so, and moreover.
- ✓ The dependent or subordinate clause does not express a complete idea and cannot stand on its own. It is frequently introduced by such connectives as: when, because, if, since, although, that, where, who, whose, whom, which, and that.

A clause is classified by its grammatical function. A noun clause functions like a noun. A relative clause modifies the noun. An adverbial clause modifies or qualifies the verb, adjective, adverb, or prepositional phrase. A miscellaneous-clause (which is

generally limited to Hebrew texts) is adversative, equational, or existential, and is less important than the previous types.

The Phrase

A phrase is a group of words without a subject and predicate. Phrases have three basic functions.

- ✓ The prepositional phrase, such as *from time to time* lacks a verb and is introduced by a preposition.
- ✓ The participial phrase, such as *looking at the time* acts as an adjective and is introduced by a participle.
- ✓ The infinitive phrase, such as *to laugh openly* is introduced by an infinitive and may be adverbial, adjectival, or nominal.³⁵

Although it may sound trivial, knowing how and where the parts of speech fit into the text is quite important.

The Verb

The verb is an obviously integral aspect of the sentence. However, the English verb and the verb in both Greek and Hebrew have significant differences. English has several helping words to conjugate the verb: for example, *has, were, will, being, etc.* Greek and Hebrew conjugate the verb with different spellings and suffixes, and there are many, very many, of them. There are other differences as well, such as the aorist tense in Greek, which generally speaks to a perfective or punctiliar aspect of past tense. We do not have this in English.

Another difference is that Greek has a voice that we do not have in English. We have the active voice, in which the subject causes the action (He *hit* the ball). We have the passive voice, in which the subject receives the action (He *was hit* by the ball). But we do not have the middle voice. In the middle voice the subject is involved as both the initiator and the recipient of the action (He *hit himself* with the ball).

The intent here is not to detail or explain these differences, but to make the reader aware of them. There are many Greek

³⁵ Kaiser. p. 95-96.

and Hebrew grammars and lexicons that will instruct the student in these issues.

Paragraph

A paragraph is the framework for expressing and developing a single idea or a unifying theme. Sometimes the paragraph is indicated by the repetition of a term or concept. Sometimes it is introduced by a rhetorical question or a vocative address. On the other hand, a sudden change in the mood, tense, or voice of the verb, the location, the topic, or the use of an introductory connective such as a conjunction, a preposition or a relative pronoun, may indicate a new paragraph. Often, what appears near the end of one paragraph will be addressed and developed more fully in the next.³⁶

Because a thought process can be a composite of many intertwined and complex ideas, the expression of these ideas is necessarily given a certain degree of flexibility. That is, there are no hard and fast rules for connecting thoughts and building paragraphs, only general guidelines to which we try to adhere. Here are a few tips for analyzing a paragraph.

- ✓ Identify the proposition, the theme of the paragraph.
- ✓ Identify the natural divisions in the paragraph. These are often suggested by Hebrew accents, Greek particles, and overall punctuation.
- ✓ Identify each connector, such as relative pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and transitional adverbs.
- ✓ Identify the antecedents for each subordinated or coordinated word, phrase, clause or sentence.³⁷

Although our English versions of the Bible have already divided the text into paragraphs, these divisions are often somewhat arbitrary and not always reliable. The serious exegete would do well to provide his own divisions.

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 96-99.

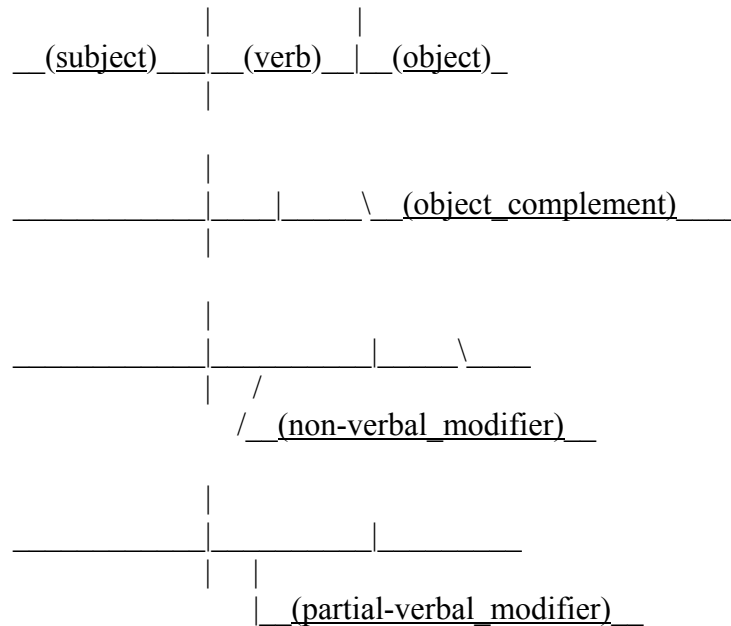
³⁷ Ibid. p. 99.

Sentence Diagramming

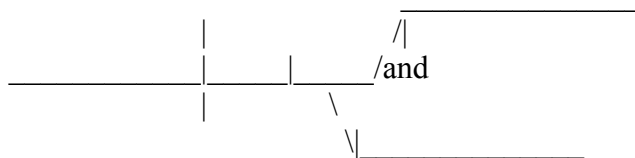
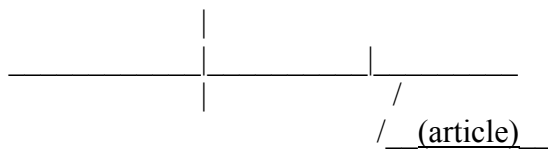
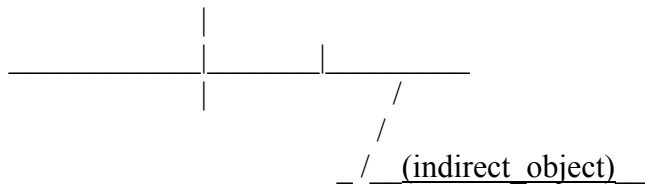
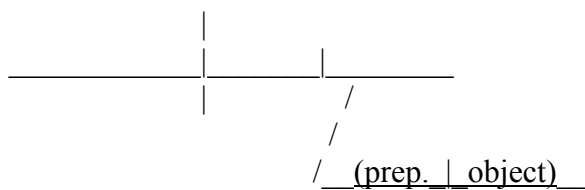
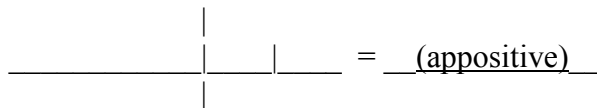
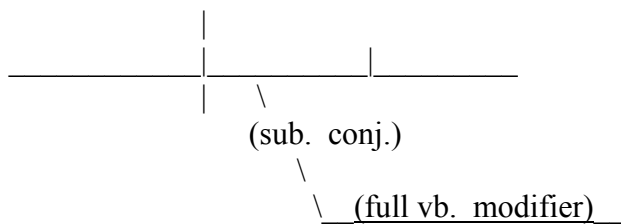
While it is always beneficial to diagram a difficult sentence, a thorough exegesis of any passage requires diagramming every sentence of the text in question. As we diagram we ask such questions as:

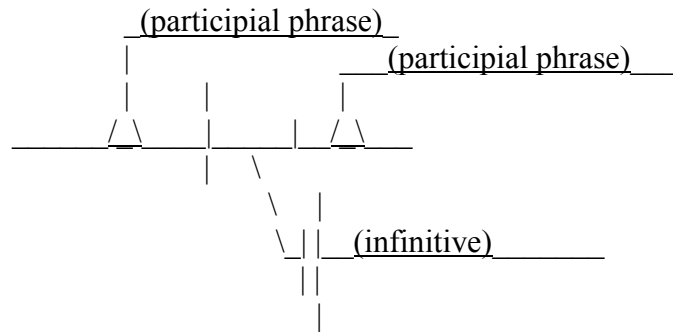
- Where is the action of the verb?
- What is the subject, the direct object, the indirect object?
- Are there any appositional words or phrases?
- Are there participial or infinitive clauses?
- Where do the relative pronouns and connective words adjoin?

Answering these questions is the backbone of hermeneutics. They cannot be overlooked. These diagrams pave the way for the mechanical outline that is soon to follow. Most readers have probably not diagrammed a sentence since English class; therefore, let's refresh our memory.



Syntax and Grammar





From these sentence diagrams we construct a mechanical outline for the passage which we will deal with more fully in chapter eleven. Although a thorough mechanical outline requires knowledge of the original language, do not despair, much can be done using the English translation, an interlinear, and a good commentary. A good exegetical commentary will identify the difficult syntactical and grammatical matters which you can then investigate further; but a grammatical commentary is invaluable for this purpose.

The Use of Grammatical Commentaries

To be used effectively, the most comprehensive commentaries require a basic knowledge of the original language; however, there are several less scholarly, yet critical, commentaries designed specifically for the English reader.

Some syntactical relationships are not easily resolved. Even the scholars struggle with them. As a result, you may find differing opinions among certain commentators. One of the foremost scholars of our day has confessed that the syntactical analysis of each clause and phrase, and their relationship to the context is the hardest task the exegete faces.³⁸

Because it is difficult, many would-be Bible students simply bypass the process. But this is not an option. To side-step this process is to discard the whole interpretive procedure. As interpreters we must be aware of the syntactical difficulties and the reasons for each exegete's position before we entertain any

³⁸ Ibid. p. 96.

conclusions. To settle for anything less is to exercise personal bias which necessary results in personal ignorance.

Remember, the scholastic commentator is the grammatical and theological expert. You are the novice in his field. If you are going to take odds with him, the better part of wisdom demands that you do it with understanding, not with ignorance. You must understand the problems, the various solutions, and the reasons behind each solution before you are ready to raise a disagreement, much less to form an opinion.

Commentaries serve another vital function beyond the difficult syntactical issues. They are written by scholars with years of study in the field of hermeneutics. Here too they are the experts. The novice would do well to consider their observations. Often interspersed with their critical notes are interpretive comments. It is foolish to seek their critical comments concerning the grammar and syntactical issues while overlooking their valuable information concerning other aspects of the hermeneutical process.

Analytical Outline

From the mechanical outline we produce an analytical outline. Again, an example is provided in chapter eleven. Similar to a lawyer's brief, it provides a working outline from which we eventually construct the homiletical outline, from which we teach and preach. However, before constructing the homilitical outline we must consider the context.

The Context

Once the analytical outline is complete we are ready to examine the passage in context. Now we ask more questions of the context, both before and after the passage.

- What is the argument?
- How does the passage connect to the previous point, the previous argument?
- How does it connect to the following point, the following argument?

- What is the point of the passage?
- What is author's intent, the simple meaning?
- How does it connect to the theme, to the conclusion?

After answering these questions of the immediate context, we then apply this same line of questioning to the rest of the author's writings and other applicable Scriptures.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the importance of knowing the author's theme.
2. What is syntax and why is it important to understand?
3. Define the terms: clause, phrase, sentence, paragraph.
4. Why is it important to have a basic understanding of the original language?
5. What value do commentaries provide?
6. What value does a textual outline provide?
7. What are some questions you might ask to determine context?

Chapter 8

Comparisons and Interpretive Conclusions

Word Meanings

The final area of the syntactical-grammatical study is the word study. Here we look for etymology, the frequency of use, the range of meaning, the range of use by the author in question, by other authors, and for synonyms and antonyms. Some of the synonyms and antonyms will require further word studies. Word studies are an important step in the hermeneutical process, but the word study encompasses more than mere etymology and lexical meaning of the words alone. Indeed, in the order of importance, etymology and lexical meaning take a tertiary concern to usage and context.

The word study is discussed in this chapter because of its link to the next area of investigation, comparison. The word study seeks many things; so that by its very nature it leads us into comparison.

When doing a word study we must keep certain factors in mind. Foremost is context; context determines meaning. Once the context is established, several questions must be addressed to determine the author's obvious meaning for the term.

Usage and context must always take precedent over dictionary definitions. Language is precise to be sure; but conversely, it is too fluid, too dynamic, to be captured or defined by how it was used either centuries before or centuries after the historical context. This, however, does not preclude our understanding of ancient literature; but it does necessitate research to determine the author's obvious meaning.

Etymology and Use

Etymology refers to the origin and development of a term throughout its history. The meaning of a word often changes with time and use. Our objective is to discover the meaning of the term as the author used it. Therefore, the primary purpose of a word study is to establish common and accepted usage during the author period. It is not, necessarily, to ascertain origin. Although word origin often plays an important role, the objective is to discover the scope of common use at the time of the writing. How would the author have used the term?

Often there are several meanings for a given term. This does not mean we are free to pick and choose the meaning we like best. The lexicon is merely noting the range of possible meanings throughout the etymology of the term. I emphasize possible. They are possible because context determines usage. This cannot be overstated. The lexicon sets the boundaries for possible meanings, but the context determines the correct meaning for each particular use.

The Greek term γυνή *gunee*, may mean woman in one passage (whether single or married), and wife in another. The same is true with ἄνθρωπος *aner*, for either man or husband. The author might use a word metaphorically, figuratively, or hyperbolically. However, always, context determines meaning.

Another example is the Greek preposition. The lexicon will list several possible meanings for each of them. But the correct meaning for each preposition is determined by context; the preposition's grammatical relationship to the object; and the author's obvious meaning. Does the author use διά *dia* to signify the means by which something is accomplished, as in Roman 11:36, "from Him and *through* Him and to Him, are all things . . ."? Or does he use it to denote the cause of the accomplishment, as in Romans 8:20, "but *because* of Him who subjected it . . ."?

For each preposition there is a range of possible meanings. The exact meaning of each term is determined by its usage within the context.

Textual Variation

Another consideration that must be dealt with from time to

time is textual variation. Both Greek and Hebrew manuscripts were hand copied by scribes. Many copies were made through the centuries: copies of copies of copies were made until, at last came the printing press. Sometimes inadvertent spelling errors, duplication errors, omissions and other mistakes common to such work were made. The texts from which our versions are translated were compiled by ancient scholars who had an assortment of manuscripts from which to choose. Even these were reduplications of texts copied long before their time. With so many texts to choose from, naturally, scribes copied different manuscripts. If unable to make a decision about a certain passage, the scribe might take a reading from more than one manuscript. As a result we have several Greek texts with minor differences. We call these different readings variants.

Yet, even with this human element, the total variants are amazingly minimal. The number of variant readings is so low and so inconsequential it could be assumed to be nothing short of miraculous how God has preserved His Word. Consider this. If every variant throughout the entire Bible is simply ignored, not one critical doctrine of Judaism or Christianity is affected. Thus, although the variants exist, they are hardly worth the attention they get or the arguments that ensue.

Be aware of these variants, but don't be distracted by them. Also, don't expect or attempt to be a textual critic, at least not at this level of study. The textual critic must be a scholar of the original language, a historian of the time period, and a theologian who has mastered the author's works. That equates to eight years of arduous, postgraduate academics, which leads to the distinction of Th.D., Doctor of Theology, the most advanced academic degree offered in any discipline.

Be satisfied to know that for the most part, these variants will have very little influence on your conclusions. When they are an issue, do three things. Refrain from using them to support doctrine, put them to rest by relying on the judgment of the scholars, and move along to more important matters, such as the application of undisputed passages.

The Extended Use of a Term

Once the lexical meaning is confirmed and the possible contextual meaning considered, search for its use elsewhere in Scripture.

- How else did the author use it, both in the particular work and in his other writing?
- How did other authors use it?
- If working with the NT, how was the term used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT)?
- How do other authors use the term?

Some words are used with great frequency by certain authors; other are primarily used by one writer, and some appear only once in the entire Bible. We call them hopoxlogomina.

The Extended Use of a Phrase

Similar to the extended use of a term, sometimes we must consider the extended use of a phrase.

- Does the author use the phrase elsewhere? If so, how?
- Is it peculiar to the author, or do others use it as well? If so, in what context?
- Does the phrase stem from an OT passage?
- Is it an idiom of the culture? If so, which culture?
- Is it a Hebrew idiom?
- Is it a Greek idiom?
- Is it an idiom of Christian theology?
- If it is an idiom, what was its meaning in the historical context?

Considerations of Biblical Theology

The comparative search also involves theological considerations. We must not resist theology. It is not a worn-out subject for professors in musty libraries. It is something with

which every Christian is concerned whether he or she realizes it or not. In this respect it is much like interpretation, in that we exercise our theology even if we are not aware of it.

Our theology is our personal belief system concerning God and His relationship with man. Although certain foundational truths remain forever solidified in our belief system (e.g. the Trinity, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, Christ's sacrificial death and victorious resurrection), other truths are not so consistent; especially matters of practical theology: that is, how we apply our beliefs in our daily lives. As we grow and mature some beliefs are modified and sometimes change entirely as new truths are learned. Our theology, our belief system, defines what we accept to be truth and what we reject as false. Therefore, when we change our belief about a certain issue, such as the meaning of the gift of tongues, the meaning of baptism, or the election of the saints, we change our theology.

Our theology is based on Scripture; but Scripture must be understood. To be understood, it must be interpreted. Interpretation requires knowledge of the author's circumstances, the historical occasion, and the context in which the author wrote. This, of course, is why we study history. It is also why we must study biblical theology.

It is imperative that we first know Paul's theological understanding of election before we form our own understanding of it. But in order to fully know Paul's understanding of election we must consider other authors and speakers as well. How did they view the subject? How did Jesus view it? An informed belief system can settle for nothing less.

The ruling principle is that "*no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation*" (2 Pet. 1:20). God's Word is a perfect, cohesive, revelation; there is no discord, no internal error, no contradiction. Any confusion or seeming contradiction is in our own minds—born in ignorance or disbelief. God is not confused; neither were the chosen authors of Scripture. Their writings are consistent within themselves and with each other. If there is confusion it is ours. Our task is to clear this confusion by seeking these authors' plain meaning.

Consider the Theologians

Likewise, considering the thoughts and conclusions of the Church's greatest theologians is more than a mere suggestion. They raise questions we might overlook. And just as important, they generally have answers. These men were scholars who spent their lives devoted to the research and understanding of Scripture. Aside from keen intellects and more time studying a single passage than most spend studying the entire Bible, they were gifted by God to perform the task of teacher.

However, these experts of the infallible Scriptures are themselves, not infallible. They are gifted men of great intellect and education, but they are also men of passion and preference, susceptible to blind spots and misunderstandings. Therefore, on occasion they have differing opinions. Still, we do well to hear them. We do well to think twice before arguing against them. And we do well to make any determined disagreement a minor issue.

The Historical Meaning

Now we are ready to form an opinion as to what the passage meant in its historical setting. That is, by now we should know the plain meaning of the text. What the author said. What the recipients would have understood.

We must arrive at this historical meaning before we attempt any contemporary application. Otherwise, we strip the text of anything meaningful. If historical meaning is not crucial, then Scripture is not crucial. If God only inspires meaning as we read, then we might as well be reading a newspaper or an encyclopedia. Surely He could inspire meaning there as well.

But this is not how literature operates. This is not how God operates. He chose certain individuals whom He inspired to record His message to man. They wrote in, and to, a historical context. Some of their writings were culturally significant only to the particular circumstance, while other writings transcend both culture and time; but always their words have historical meaning, even in the case of prophetic literature, where the meaning might bridge two worlds, in which the future world is described in terms of the immediate historical context.

Regardless, the historical meaning must be understood before we can find contemporary application.

Contemporary Relevance

Having ascertained the historical meaning, we are now ready to make present day application. To begin at this final step, as so many do in their personal Bible study, is nothing less than biblical existentialism. It is this common error that gives rise to the aforementioned snake-handlers who believe spiritual individuals can handle poisonous snakes without harm. It is this error that leads to forbidding woman to wear pants, forbidding believers to eat meat, to televangelists promising their listeners financial gain if only they give generously to their ministry, to whole assemblies of ecstatic worshipers ostensibly speaking in a heavenly tongue, whole communities living without modern technology. It is this common error that fuels a number of misapplications.

Only after the previous steps are taken can we finally arrive at personal application. We call this contemporary relevance. Here we ask such questions as:

- How do I apply this teaching, this truth, in my life?
- Is it an imperative to be obeyed?
- Is it prescriptive, descriptive, cultural, transcultural?
- Is there a timeless principle to consider?

If the passage is clearly cultural in content, it might have little direct meaning for us; but at the same time it might express a principle that has considerable application to our lives. An example of this might be Paul's admonishment concerning meats offered to idols and the ceremonial keeping of certain holy days (Rom. 14:1-23). Few in our culture can find direct application for this passage. Sacrificial meats and the observance of holy days are generally not issues of concern for most of us. However, we can extend the spirit of this admonishment to issues for which we do have concern in our culture. Paul himself based his counsel on certain timeless principles. In a similar way, we too can apply those principles to our lives. We could

draw a number of principles from this passage.

- ✓ We are not to judge the practices of others in respect to doubtful things.
- ✓ We have a certain liberty regarding what we do.
- ✓ We are to do whatever we do without self condemnation.
- ✓ We are personally accountable to God for our actions.
- ✓ We are not to do anything that will put a stumbling block before others.
- ✓ We should, for the sake of weaker individuals, voluntarily abstain from certain practices.
- ✓ We are to do what will edify others.
- ✓ We are to follow the example of Christ, who did not live to please himself.³⁹

On the other hand, a non-cultural and prescriptive passage will always have direct meaning and application for everyone within the classification it addresses (i.e. Jewish, Christian, unsaved, all of humanity). Such are Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (Jn. 3:3). This passage has direct application for all men.

Similarly, if a passage is merely descriptive it will have no direct application for us, who are historically removed from the occasion. Furthermore, neither can we draw principles from it. For the event may or may not involve correct actions. We can, however, examine such events in the light of other principles and descriptive passages, and thereby evaluate its ethic. Then we can reference these events. The book of Ruth is an example; here we might glean encouragement or caution, but direct application is sparse.

Study Questions

1. Discuss etymology and its importance.
2. What type of information does a lexicon provide?

³⁹ Scotfield Study Bible, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

3. Discuss a word's range of meaning and how this relates to contextual meaning.
4. When trying to determine a word's meaning, what is the most crucial consideration?
5. What is the extended use of a term? Of a phrase?
6. Discuss how one's theology might, or might not, change.
7. To what degree should we consider the comments of theologians?
8. What is the problem with reading a text and jumping to interpretation and application without consideration of the historical context?

PART 3
THE HERMENEUTICAL PRACTICE

Chapter 9

Biblical and Historical Data

In this section we put it all together, employing the entire hermeneutical process using the passage of 3 John 8, “*We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth.*” The following study will be done in the NASB version.

¹ *The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.*

² *Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.* ³ *For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth.* ⁴ *I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.*

⁵ *Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers;* ⁶ *and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.* ⁷ *For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.* ⁸ *Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.*

⁹ *I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.* ¹⁰ *For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.*

¹¹ *Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does*

evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

¹³ I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴ but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face.

¹⁵ Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

The Historical Setting

We begin by setting the historical background. We ask such questions as: Who is the author? To whom was it written? Why was it written? What problems were addressed? Where were the readers located? What was the social and political climate? During this process we will make several notes on topics that may require further investigation.

The Biblical Data

A critical reading of the letter reveals several pertinent historical details. We observe that:

- ✓ The letter is anonymous, as are the other two epistles of 2 John and 3 John.
- ✓ There is no mention of persecution.
- ✓ It is a pastoral setting.
- ✓ Gaius was a beloved friend of the Elder (v. 1).
- ✓ Gaius was probably an elder of the church. At the very least, he was a leader in the church who evidently carried some influence.
- ✓ It is possible that Gaius had a physical illness (v. 2).
- ✓ The author had been informed as to Gaius' walk in truth (v. 3).
- ✓ The church was probably founded by the author of the letter (v. 4).

Biblical and Historical Data

- ✓ The church had established itself in good works both toward those within the body and those without (vv. 5, 6).
- ✓ Certain men who seemingly were traveling evangelists had stayed at the church for a short time (vv. 6-8).
- ✓ These men did not accept anything from the gentiles, probably for fear of appearing to be selling the gospel (v. 7).
- ✓ It was the duty of the church to support these traveling evangelists (v. 8).
- ✓ The supporters of such evangelists are considered fellow workers (v. 8).
- ✓ The author had written to the church before (v. 9).
- ✓ A man named Diotrephes was puffed up and rejected the author's letter (v. 9).
- ✓ Diotrephes was seemingly the chief elder in the church (v. 10).
- ✓ Diotrephes had made unfounded claims against the author and his helpers (v. 10).
- ✓ Diotrephes himself refused to receive traveling teachers and forbade others to do so as well (v. 10).
- ✓ Diotrephes would excommunicate anyone who showed hospitality to these traveling teachers (v. 10).
- ✓ The author is planning to visit the church in a short time (v. 10, 14).
- ✓ The author views himself as having authority over the church and its puffed up leader (v. 10).
- ✓ The author introduces Demetrius. He is probably the carrier of the letter (v. 12).
- ✓ The author knew several church members by name, indicating a close relationship with them (v. 14).

Notes for Further Study

While reading the text several questions come to mind. Some may be answered by an extended historical research. Some may go unanswered altogether.

- Who was the author?
- What is meant by the term elder?
- Who was Gaius?
- What was Gaius' position in the church?
- Where was the church located?
- When was the letter written?
- What is meant by the term strangers (v. 5)?
- What is meant by the term gentiles (v. 7)? Does he mean non-Jews or does he mean unbelievers?
- What was the other letter the author had written to the church (v. 9)?
- Who was Diotrephes?
- What position did he have in the church?
- What is meant by the term imitate (v. 11)?
- Is verse 11, an absolute statement? Why? Why not?
- What does he mean by "doing good" and "doing evil"?
- Who was Demetrius?
- How did Gaius know the author's witness was true (v. 12)?
- What does the author's comment that he hoped, very soon, to see them face to face indicate as to the location of the church (v. 13)?

A Biblical Encyclopedia/Dictionary

To continue the historical research we turn to a good biblical encyclopedia. I have chosen the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Under the listing JOHN, THE

EPISTLES OF, we discover a wealth of information.⁴⁰

1. Although there are arguments against it, the three letters of 1, 2, and 3 John have been traditionally ascribed to John, the son of Zebedee. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons from 185 to 202, quoted from the 1st and 2nd epistles and ascribed them to John. This carries much weight, in that Irenaeus, who had heard the Apostle John speak, was a disciple of Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of John.
2. Tradition points to Ephesus as the residence of John, and thus it is supposed that all three letters were written from there.
3. The location of the church is uncertain. Probably somewhere within the radius of the Ephesian influence.
4. The date of the writings is deduced from several factors.
 - a. The reference to the Gnostic teaching in 1 John would suggest a later date than Colossians or the pastoral epistles.
 - b. The absence of any reference to persecution probably indicates a time prior to Emperor Trajan (98 - 117); and probably even prior to the last years of the Emperor Domitian, who reigned until 96.
 - c. They were probably written after the Gospel of John.
 - d. John was still able to travel and work; thus, an approximate date of 87 to 92 seems likely.
5. The church was struggling with early Gnostic tendencies. The article explains that:
 - a. Although Gnosticism was not actually identifiable historically until the 2nd Century, nevertheless, it was in the background of several NT books.

⁴⁰ Merrill C. Tenny, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1975, pp. 648-651.

- b. The most advanced stage of Gnosticism to appear in the background of the NT was reflected in 1 John.
- c. Gnosticism was a popular form of Graeco-Roman philosophy which had spread throughout the Roman Empire by the year 150.
- d. Gnosticism was the philosophical result of blending the cosmogony of Greek thought with the theology of oriental religions, especially Judaism.
- e. Gnosticism had created serious conflict and confusion within the church.
- f. Certain characteristics of Gnosticism were:
 - *Its theology*—it held to Dualism, believing that all matter is essentially evil and spirit is essentially good. Thus the human body and spirit had no effective contact with each other. Therefore, the redeemed soul in a sinful body was not responsible for the deeds of the body. This teaching led to antinomianism—the heresy that under the dispensation of grace there is no obligation to keep moral law because salvation is by faith.
 - *Its illumination*—holding that salvation came from knowing theories rather than from faith in a Savior. Only the initiated who knew the Gnostic secrets were in the light.
 - *Its rejection of the incarnation*—holding that either Christ was not really a divine person in human flesh, but was merely a phantom playing a human role, or that the human Jesus was an ordinary man upon whom the Logos of God came at his baptism and departed from him before the crucifixion.

- g. Gaius was a common name in the 1st Century. There can be no positive identification of this Gaius as one of those mentioned elsewhere in the NT, (i.e. Rom. 16:23; Acts 19:29, 20:29).⁴¹

A Commentary

Another good source for background information is the introductory section of a commentary. For our study, I have chosen *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Again, there are several commentaries that would suit this purpose. The introduction to the three Johannine epistles makes some interesting observations.⁴²

1. Establishing the background for these epistles is at best speculative.
2. Nevertheless, traditions relating to these epistles did develop in the church, and we have no alternative but to accept them.
3. Due to the situation being decidedly worse in 3 John than it was in 2 John, it is possible that 3 John was written a year or more later.

A Bible Handbook

Another tool, though not as complete as the encyclopedia, is a Bible handbook such as Unger's Bible Handbook. Unger points out that:⁴³

1. Several early church fathers ascribe 3 John to the apostle John.
2. According to Eusebius, upon the death of Domitian in 96, John returned to Ephesus from his Patmos exile. He spent his closing years visiting the Asiatic churches, ordaining elders, and ministering. Therefore 2nd and 3rd

⁴¹ Tenny. p. 657.

⁴² Frank E. Gaebelin, (ed.). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, pp. 293-295, 301.

⁴³ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, p. 832.

John were written after the Apocalypse.

An Introduction to the NT

Other indispensable tools for researching historical background are NT and OT surveys. For our study I have chosen Tenney's NT Survey.⁴⁴ Here, we find that:

1. The vocabulary and style indicate the same author for the three epistles.
2. By the time of the writings, the separation between the church and the synagogue was complete.
3. The controversy over justification by faith versus works had largely died out, and the influx of Gentiles into the church with their heritage of Greek philosophical thought was beginning to affect doctrinal teaching.
4. 3 John affords interesting insight into church life in this early period. Apparently much of the ministry was carried on by itinerant preachers who made periodic rounds, staying a little while with each group and holding "protracted meetings" in private homes. Such a procedure was easily susceptible of abuse by religious racketeers, who would use their privileges to obtain a free living from the people.
5. John's protest, and his promise to test the power of Diotrephes, reveals governance difficulties even within the church of the 1st Century.
6. 3 John, unlike the other two epistles, is concerned more with administrative matters than doctrinal matters.

In fairness to the various tools, it should be noted that I did not include duplicate information found in previous works.

A Bible Atlas

A tool that often supplies a different sort of historical information is a Bible atlas. It is different from other biblical

⁴⁴ Tenney. pp. 375-378, 380.

helps in that its primary focus is geography. Accordingly, it deals with those geographical particulars that would have played a role in a given passage. Often an atlas can yield important information.

Although we can only speculate as to the location of Gaius and his church, it seems probable from the study thus far that it was in Asia-Minor, probably within the vicinity of Ephesus. Reading about Ephesus in the atlas, we find that:

1. Except for the two Jewish rebellions, the lands were at peace.
2. Commerce flourished as merchant ships sailed the Mediterranean free of pirates. Caravans traveled a vast network of well patrolled roads, some 60,000 miles in all. Along with the traders and their caravans, went the Christian faith.
3. The general level of prosperity encouraged the contributions needed to support the traveling evangelist.
4. Jewish synagogues were present in virtually every major population center. This had been a great factor for the rapid spread of Christianity through the region.
5. Several centuries after the Diaspora, there were probably more Jews living outside Palestine than in it.
6. The Greek language had become the dominant language and had effectively done away with the language barrier. This also helped to unite the growing network of churches.
7. It is estimated that by the year 100, there were already nearly 300,000 believers throughout the empire. Of these, some 80,000 were concentrated in Asia-Minor. In 112, Pliny wrote to the Emperor Trajan, "this contagious superstition has spread through the province, leaving the ancient temples almost deserted."

Other helpful tools at this juncture (depending on the passage) could be archaeology textbooks, Bible dictionaries, texts on manners and customs, etc.

Study Questions

1. Summarize the biblical data.
2. What kind of details might require further investigation?
3. Summarize the information from the biblical dictionary/encyclopedia.
4. Summarize the information from the Bible handbook.
5. Summarize the information from the NT Introduction.
6. Summarize the information from the Bible atlas.
7. What other significant details might these tools reveal? Why?

Chapter 10

Syntax and Grammar

The Genre

The genre of 3 John is epistolary, which appeals primarily to the intellect.⁴⁵ It is important to recognize this because it demands careful observation of its logical development and its occasional nature. Because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it belongs to all time. But it also was written from the historical context of the author to the historical context of the original recipients. This occasional nature must be given the utmost recognition.⁴⁶ We must know the circumstances, follow the flow of thought, follow the argument, and consider the theme of the letter.

The Immediate Context

Concern for the immediate context may hardly seem appropriate in such a short letter; for it is easy to assume such contextual concerns only apply to passages within larger texts. But that is not the case. Context must always be considered.

Let's suppose we are primarily concerned with 3 John 8, as it relates to missionary support. Before we can attempt to apply the passage we must understand how it fits into the immediate context. What precedes it? What comes after it? What is the primary argument? What is the logic? For this information we must construct various kinds of outlines of the text. Each will provide needed information.

⁴⁵ Traina. p. 69.

⁴⁶ Fee. p. 45.

A Synthetic Outline of 3 John

The synthetic or conceptual outline is designed to highlight the major ideas or events of the entire book or letter being studied. The objective of this outline is to ascertain the theme of the work and the author's purpose. Accordingly, we might outline this letter as follows.

- I. The Opening Greetings (v. 1).
- II. The Influence of Gaius (vv. 2-8).
 - A. Gaius' Godly Life (vv. 2-4).
 - B. Gaius' Generous Treatment of Traveling Ministers (vv. 5-8).
- III. The Indictment of Diotrephes (vv. 9-11).
 - A. Diotrephes' Selfish Ambition (v. 9).
 - B. Diotrephes' Selfish Activities (vv. 10-11).
- IV. The Introduction of Demetrius (v. 12).
- V. The Concluding Remarks and Benediction (vv. 13-14).

It is apparent from our reading, and the subsequent synthetic outline we constructed, that two leaders of a certain local church were at odds. As evidenced by their deeds, one was contentious and ungodly while another was faithful and true. Thus, we might express the theme of the letter as *Walking in Truth*. The author's purpose for writing the letter was to denounce the one leader and encourage the other.

The Syntax and Grammar

The next interpretive step considers the grammar and syntax. As mentioned before, a thorough consideration requires knowledge of the original language. Assuming the average reader lacks this knowledge we will employ the help of two critical commentaries: Alford's NT for English Readers, and Stott's Tyndale NT Commentary. Recognizing these men as hermeneutical experts, several of their interpretive and critical remarks are included in the following pages.

Alford on Verses 6 through 8

Of the idiom, “*bring forward on their journey after a godly sort*” (v. 6), Alford comments,⁴⁷

forward on their way worthily of God (in a manner worthy of Him whose messengers they are and whose servant thou art).

Concerning verses 7 and 8, he writes,

taking nothing (receiving nothing by way of benefaction or hire: even as St. Paul in Achaia, 1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 11:7 ff., 12:16 ff.; 1 Thess. 2:9ff.: against Huther, who denies the applicability of the comparison, seeing that in St. Paul’s case they were Christian churches: but so must these have been, before they would contribute to the support of their missionaries. The peculiar word used for **nothing** implies that it was their own deliberate purpose; refusing to take anything) **from the heathens. We therefore,** (contrast to the heathens: **therefore,** because they take nothing from the heathens) **ought to support** (the word does not seem to signify “receive hospitality,” as some have explained it).

Stott on Verses 5 through 8

In the Tyndale NT Commentary,⁴⁸ Stott observes several points of interest in verse 5 and 6a. Concerning Gaius’ hospitality, Stott addresses minor grammatical and syntactical issues and finally arrives at a very important truth; namely, that godly work is the result of faith.

In each of these verses the Greek word in either the noun philoxenia or the adjective philoxenos, which indicate literally a love for strangers. . . . Gaius’ . . . ministry had been to the brethren, and (RSV, ‘especially’) to strangers (xenos). This does not mean that there were two separate groups to whom Gaius

⁴⁷ Henry Alford, NT for English Reader, vol. 4, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, p. 1766.

⁴⁸ John R. W. Stott, Understanding the Bible, Glendale, California: Regal Books, 1972, pp. 220-224.

showed hospitality. 'The brethren and the strangers are not two classes, but one and the same' (Plummer). His philadelphia (love of the brethren) and philoxenia (love of strangers) were combined. Cf. Heb. 13:1, 2 where these words occur together. . . . His service . . . was being done faithfully. . . . 'He could still be counted on' (Dodd); cf. RSV, 'it is a loyal thing you do' and NEB, 'you show a fine loyalty'. . . . But it is noteworthy that what Gaius is said to do faithfully is his 'work' ergase. His work was the outcome of faith; it was 'a faithful work' (RV). The adverbs seem to link together the truth and the love of Gaius. His practical ministry to strangers was true to his profession. His love was consistent with the truth which he believed. . . .

Concerning the testimony of the traveling strangers Stott makes another grammatical observation.

The verb 'have borne witness' is an aorist emarturesan and refers to some definite occasion when before the assembled congregation, of which John was leader, the returned travelers spoke appreciatively of the love Gaius had shown them, and of his truth (3). . . .

In verse 6b, Stott points out the syntactical progression in John's logic. He provides a few interpretive comments as to the duty of the local believers to traveling teachers.

The Elder now turns from the past to the future, from what 'thou doest' (5) to what thou shalt do (6). . . . So he urges him to continue to entertain traveling teachers. The implication of extending hospitality to itinerant missionaries is now clear. They are not just to be received when they arrive, but to be so refreshed and provided for (no doubt with supplies of food and money) as to be sent forward on the next stage of their journey after a godly sort, 'as befits God's service' (RSV). Literally 'worthily of God' (RV; axios tou theou; cf. Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). . . . Such thoughtful sending forth of missionaries on their journey is not only 'a loyal thing' (5, RSV), but a 'beautiful' thing (kalos poieseis, thou shalt do well).

Stott then makes reference to Dodd's comments about John's use

of the term *propempas*.

C.H. Dodd suggests that the verb translated ‘bring forward on their journey’ *propempas* was ‘something like a technical term of early Christian missions,’ implying ‘the assumption of financial responsibility for the journey’ of departing missionaries. This is probably the case for . . . in other places, as here, it indicates to receive and entertain someone in preparation for the next stage of his journey (Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6, 11; 2 Cor. 1:16) and possibly to supply him with money or provisions as well when he leaves (as in Tit. 3:13 and possibly Acts 15:3). Cf. verse 8 here.

Stott continues to follow the flow of logic into verse 7, where he observes the reasons for hospitality. Here he makes grammatical, interpretive and historical observations.

The reasons for such hospitality are now given. . . . The verb *exelthan* is the same as that used for the false teachers (1 Jn. 2:19, 4:1; 2 Jn. 7). It depicts a deliberate setting out on a mission. . . . Their motive is described as being ‘for his name’s sake.’ The possessive adjective should be omitted and the phrase rendered ‘for the sake of the Names’ (RV). The Name is the Names of Jesus Christ, that is, the revelation of His divine-human Person and saving work. . . . “The Gentiles’ *hoi ethnikoi* refers here not to non-Jews, but to ‘the heathen’ (RSV) or ‘pagans’ (NEB), in contrast to Christian believers. The phrase ‘taking nothing’ need not be pressed into meaning that these Christian missionaries would refuse to accept gifts voluntarily offered to them by the unconverted. There is no prohibition here of taking money from non-Christians. . . . Jesus Himself asked for and accepted a glass of water from the sinful Samaritan woman. What is here said is that these itinerant evangelists would not (as a matter of policy) seek their support from the heathen and did not (as a matter of fact) receive their support from them. . . . C.H. Dodd writes: ‘Devotees of various religions tramped the roads, extolling the virtues of the deity of their choice, and collecting subscriptions from

the public. Thus, a “slave” of the Syrian goddess has put on record . . . how he traveled in the service of his “Lady”, and “at each journey brought back seventy bags”.’ Jesus told the Twelve and the Seventy to take with them ‘no script . . . and Paul condemned those who were ‘peddlers of God’s word’ (2 Cor. 2:17, RSV).

In verse 8, Stott makes a few more syntactical, grammatical, interpretive, and even text critical points.

This verse is in direct contrast to verse 7. It is because the itinerant evangelists were not supported by the heathen that “we therefore ought to receive such.” “We” is strongly emphatic in the Greek sentence. There is also a pun in that we ought to receive, or better ‘support’ (RSV, NEB, rendering hupolambanein rather than apolambanein), those who refuse to receive lambanontes anything from the heathen. If the first reason for entertaining traveling missionaries is that they are brethren whom we should honor for setting out for the sake of the Name, the second is the much more practical one that they have no other means of support. . . . An important principle lies buried here, namely that Christians should finance Christian enterprises which the world will not, or should not, be asked to support. Indeed, Christians have an obligation (ought) to do so. . . . The third reason for receiving and providing for traveling missionaries is that by so doing we become “fellow helpers to the truth. . . .” The truth itself being personified and regarded as the one with whom we collaborate. . . .

Textual Variations

Many commentators will make mention of major variant textual considerations. Otherwise, variant readings may be found by reading a Greek text with a critical apparatus.⁴⁹

✓ In verse 3, some manuscripts omit the word γάρ *gar*, *for*,

⁴⁹ The Greek New Testament, 3rd edition, New York: United Bible Societies, 1983, p. 830.

and others substitute οὖν *oun*, *therefore*.

- ✓ In verse 4, some manuscripts read χαρά *chara*, *for the sake of*, instead of χαράν *charan*, *joy*.
- ✓ In verse 8, many of the manuscripts read ὑπολαμβάνειν *upolambanein*, instead of ἀπολαμβάνω *apolambanō*. But the meanings *to entertain* are virtually the same.
- ✓ In verse 9, the word ἔγραψά *egrapsa*, *I wrote*, appear in some manuscripts as *egrapsa*, *I would have written*.

Although these variants are slight, still they should be considered.

Study Questions

1. What genre is this epistle? Why is that significant?
2. From the synthetic outline, what seems to be the theme of the letter?
3. Discuss a couple of grammatical issues.
4. Discuss three of the more significant issues pointed out by the commentators.

Chapter 11

Outlining the Syntactical Context

Having completed the previous observations we are ready to construct a mechanical outline. The purpose of this outline is to identify the syntactical structure and relationship between the various words, clauses, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs divisions. Knowing the syntactical structure of any passage is integral to a clear understanding of the passage.

Mechanical Outline of the Text

The mechanical outline, based upon detailed considerations of the grammar and syntax, provides very important information. Here we will notice the author's theme and intention (which we determined in the synthetic outline) thread through the book. We will recognize paragraph divisions and see the development of the author's argument, his logic and how he ties one thought to another. In some genres such as historical literature, we might simply follow the story line of the narrative. A mechanical outline of 3 John is as follows.

- (v. 1) The elder
to the beloved Gaius,
|
| whom I love
|
| in truth.
- (v. 2) | Beloved, I pray that
|
| in all respects you may prosper

- (v. 3) | and be in good health,
| | just as your soul
| | prospers.
- (v. 3) | For I was very glad
| | when brethren came and
| | testified to your truth,
| | that is, how you are
| | walking in truth.
- (v.4) | I have no greater joy than
| this, to hear of my children
| walking in the truth.
- (v. 5) Beloved,
you are acting faithfully
| in whatever you
| accomplish
| | for the brethren,
| | and
| | especially when they are strangers;
- (v. 6) | and they have testified
| to your love before the church.
- | You will do well
| to send them on their way
| | in a manner worthy of God.
- (v. 7) For they went out
| | |
| | for the sake of the Name,

Outlining the Syntactical Context

- (v. 8) | | accepting nothing from the Gentiles.
| Therefore
| we ought to support such men,
| | so that we may be fellow workers
| | with the truth.
- (v. 9) | I wrote something to the church;
| | but Diotrephes = {who loves to be first among them}
| | does not accept what we say.
- (v.10) | | For this reason,
| | (if I come),
| | I will call attention to his
| | deeds which he does,
| | |
| | unjustly accusing us with wicked words;
| | | and not satisfied
| | | with this,
| | he himself does not receive the brethren, either,
| | and he forbids those who desire to do so
| | and puts them out of the church.
- (v.11) | Beloved,
| | Do not imitate what is evil,
| | | but what is good.

|
| The one who does good is of God;
|
| the one who does evil has not seen God.

(v. 12) Demetrius has received a good testimony
|
| from everyone,
|
| and from the truth itself;
and we add our testimony,
|
| and you know that our testimony is true.

(v.13) I had many things to write to you,
|
| but I am not willing to write them
| to you with pen and ink;

(v. 14) | but I hope to see you shortly,
|
| and we will speak
| face to face.

(v. 15) Peace be to you.
The friends greet you.
Greet the friends by name.

An Analytical Outline

From the mechanical outline we construct an analytical outline. Later, this analytical outline serves as an excellent tool from which to construct a homiletic outline for teaching or preaching.

Setting aside the customary greeting, prayer of thanksgiving, and final farewell of epistolary literature, verses 5 through 11 formulate the body of the letter in which the main point is made.

In this portion of the text three paragraphs clearly emerge: paragraph 1, verses 5 through 8; paragraph 2, verses 9 through 10, and paragraph 3, verse 11.

I. The recognition of Gaius' steadfast faith (vv. 5-8).

A. Gaius' is faithful (v. 5a).

1. In all things he does for the brethren (v. 5a).
2. Especially in things he does for brethren who are strangers (v. 5b).

B. Strangers bear witness to Gaius' love (v. 6a).

C. Gaius will do well to send the strangers out with support (v. 6b).

1. Because they went out for the Lord's sake (v. 7a).
2. Because they have accepted nothing from the Gentiles (v. 7b).
 - a. Therefore, we ought to support them (v. 8a,
 - b. That we may be fellow workers with them in the truth (v. 8b).

II. The rebuke of Diotrephes (vv. 9-10).

A. Diotrephes rejected John's letter to the church (v. 9)

B. Diotrephes loves to be first among them (v. 9b).

C. If John visits the church he will call attention to Diotrephes' deeds (v. 10a).

1. His unjust accusations of John and his helpers with wicked words (v. 10b).
2. His not being satisfied with this alone, (10b).

D. Neither does Diotrephes receive the brethren (v. 10c).

1. He forbids others to receive the brethren (v. 10d).
2. He excommunicates those who do receive the brethren (v. 10e).

- III. Gaius is charged to do good (v. 11).
 - A. Do not imitate what is evil (v. 11a).
 - B. Do imitate what is good (v. 11b).
 - C. The one who does good is of God (v. 11c).
 - D. The one who does evil has not seen God (v. 11d).

Observations Deduced from the Outlines

From these outlines we determine that the subject matter of verse 8 is John's praise for the warm reception and support Gaius provided to the itinerant evangelists and teachers who were taking the gospel throughout Asia-Minor. John champions this support, concluding that such monetary participation on the Christian's part makes him a fellow worker with the evangelist. The relationship of verse 8 to the overall theme of the book is the real life illustration of Gaius' "*walk in truth.*"

John then condemns Diotrephes for his failure to receive John himself, and for his failure to receive and support the traveling teachers. In so many words, John implies that Diotrephes' actions reveal that he is an evil man. He implies that these evil deeds likely spring from a life that has not had a personal confrontation with the Holy God.

Study Questions

1. Describe a mechanical layout.
2. Discuss the significance of the mechanical layout.
3. Describe an analytical outline.
4. Discuss the significance of the analytical outline.

Chapter 12

Word Studies and Comparisons

Word Meanings

Although tedious at times, word studies are a necessary part of doing proper interpretation. Because the focus of this exercise is to understand the meaning of verse 8, and its relationship to missionary support, the terms we are especially concerned with are:

- strangers (v. 5),
- support (v. 8),
- receive (v. 10),
- the idiom “send them on their way in a manner worthy of God” (v. 6).

An investigation of these terms in the original language may, or may not, yield a greater understanding of the issue. But we must investigate to find out. Various tools are available. Some are more helpful than others.

To be used effectively, the advanced works require at least a basic knowledge of the original language. For our purposes I have chosen resources that require little skill in the original language. However, they necessarily have limited information and thereby tend to be somewhat overly generalized. We will use: Strong’s Concordance, Vine’s Dictionary of NT Words, the Englishman’s Greek concordance of the NT, and Berry’s Interlinear Greek NT.

The Term “Stranger”

Because the Strong's Concordance is keyed to the KJV, we need to know the KJV translation for the NASB term *strangers* (v. 5). We see that is the same as the NASB. Therefore, we look up “strangers” in the concordance. The passage, 3 John 5, is listed on page 980. In the far right column is the number 3581. This reference is keyed to the Greek term in the dictionary at the back of the book. Turning there we find the word ξένος *xenos*. Following the entry is a short definition, apparently a primary word: *foreign (literally alien, for figuratively, novel); by implication a guest or (vice versa) entertainer: -host, strange(-r).*

Under the English term “strangers,” Vine's Dictionary of NT Words shows three different Greek adjectives used as nouns, as well as one verb and one other noun. The term *xenos*, which we learned from Strong's Concordance, is the term we are after. It is the first listing in Vine's. The term denotes a stranger, or a foreigner. Several NT verses are listed and we are instructed to look at the first word in the previous listing for further explanation. Here, we find the same Greek term *xenos*, used as an adjective (i.e. strange). It is the first in a list of four terms translated *strange*. Vine's defines it as “(a) foreign, alien; . . . (b) unusual. . . .”

We find *xenos*, on page 521 in the Englishman's Greek Concordance. The entry is easy to find because each entry is keyed to the dictionary number in Strong's Concordance. Thus, *xenos* is listed as entry 3581. The Englishman's Greek Concordance lists all 14 uses of the term in the Greek text. It makes reference to foreigners, strange doctrine, strange gods, and strange things that were happening. In the KJV, it is translated *strange* or *stranger* in every passage but one. There it is one of the (vice versa) uses mentioned in Strong's, and is translated *host*.

From this we conclude that *xenos* appears to be a general term making reference to someone who is not from the area or something to which certain folks are not accustomed. The English translation *stranger*, seems to express the meaning adequately.

The Term “Support” or “Receive”

Our next term is the NASB *support* (v. 8). The KJV translation is *receive*. We look up *receive* in Strong’s Concordance and find the Greek term used in verse 8 is keyed to number 618; however, the Greek term for *receive* in verses 9, and 10, is keyed to the number 1926. Turning to 618 in the dictionary at the back of the book, we read: ἀπολαμβάνω *apolambanō*; from 575 ἀπο *apo* and 2983 λαμβάνω *lambanō*; *to receive (specifically in full, or as a host); also to take aside: -receive, take.*

A Word of Caution

Please note that we are in an area of study in which one who is not a student of the Greek language can easily get off track if he is not very careful. Several Greek words are combinations of two or more terms. However, the meaning of these combined terms seldom expresses the full concepts of the individual terms used to construct the word. The term referred to under number 575 is the preposition *apo*. But Greek prepositions are very versatile. The definition offered by Strong’s Concordance is vague and quite inadequate. For the untrained reader it may do more harm than good, in that some might attempt to derive meanings from the preposition that were never, and grammatically could never, be intended. Be very careful at this point not to read into the word something other than it actually means in the context.

Vine’s records 19 Greek verbs and 4 nouns translated by our English *receive*. The fourth entry is *apolambano*. A number of biblical references are cited and terms defined:

Signifies to receive from another, (a) to receive as one’s due. . . ; (b) without the indication of what is due . . . ; (c) to receive back.

For *receive*, in verses 9, and 10, Strong’s Concordance refers to number 1926.

ἐπιδέχομαι *epidechomai* from 1909 ἐπι *epi* and 1209 δέχομαι *dechomai*; to admit (as a guest or [figuratively] teacher):-
receive.

Vine’s Dictionary of NT Words says of *epidochomai*,

Literally, to accept besides (*epi*, upon), to accept (found in the papyri, of accepting the terms of a lease), is used on the sense of accepting in 3 John 9; in verse 10, in the sense of receiving with hospitality, in each verse said negatively concerning Diotrophes.

The term for support in Acts 20:35, is keyed to number 482 in Strong's Concordance. We read,

ἂντιλαμβάνω *antilambanō* from 473 ἂντι *anti*, and the middle voice of 2983 λαμβάνω *lambano*; to take hold of in turn, i.e. to succor; also to participate: - help, partaker, support.

Vine's Dictionary has *antilambano*, listed under "help." He says of it,

Literally, to take instead of, or in turn, is used in the middle voice, and rendered 'he hath holpen' in Lk. 1:54; to help, to support; its other meaning, to take part of, is used of partaking of things.

The Idiom "A Manner Worthy Of"

We find that the idiom, "a manner worthy of," in the NASB is translated "a godly sort," in the KJV. Using Berry's Interlinear Greek NT, we see the Greek term is ἀξίως *axiōs* and Berry translates it, *worthily*. Under the English word *worthy*, Vine's Dictionary lists the Greek adverb *axios*. He defines it as,

Worthily, so translated in the R.V. [with one exception, see (c)], for A.V., "worthy" and other renderings, (a) "worthily of God," 1 Thess. 2:12, of the Christian walk as it should be; 3 John 6, R.V., of assisting servants of God in a way which reflects God's character and thoughts; (b) "worthily of the Lord," Col. 1:10; of the calling of believers, Eph, 4:1, in regard to their "walk" or manner of life; (c) "worthy of the gospel of Christ," Phil. 1:27, of a manner of life in accordance with what the gospel declares; (d) "worthily of the saints," R.V., of receiving a fellow-believer, Rom. 16:2, in such a manner as befits those who bear the name of "saints." Deissmann (Bible Studies, pp. 248 ff) shows from various inscriptions that the phrase "worthily of god" was very popular at Pergamum.

Comparison and Extended Context

Now that we have examined the immediate context we are ready to check for correlating passages. Here we seek to answer such questions as: Where else do we read of support for such missionaries, traveling teachers, and evangelist? For Christian workers? For Christian brethren in general? To answer these questions we rely on three things: our personal familiarity with Scripture, a topical index, and a Bible concordance. I have chosen the New Topical Textbook and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

We will make three lists of possible correlating passages.

1. Those with direct application to our concern of support for missionaries and traveling evangelist.
2. Those that address the support of the teachers and leaders of the church.
3. Those that address the issue of supporting the brethren in general.

Before turning to the concordance and the topical index, we make a list of words and topics under which we might expect to find information. In the topical index we might look up such things as: giving, money, missionary, teachers, etc. But when we look them up, we find the listings under giving, money, and teachers have nothing of concern. However, the term missionary provides several passages. Now we look up the terms receive and support in the Concordance.

Direct Application

Passages that seem to have direct application are:

- ✓ Mark 6:7-13, and Luke 10:1-11; Jesus sends his disciples out to preach. He instructs them not to take provisions, but to live on what is given to them by those who receive them. For, he says, "the laborer is worthy of his wages."
- ✓ Matthew 10:14; 41, and Luke 9:5; Jesus is instructing his disciples how to respond to those who do not receive them.

- ✓ Acts 18:27; Apollos is given a letter of introduction from the Ephesians to the Achaians, asking them to receive him and his ministry.
- ✓ Romans 16:1-2; Paul instructs those at Rome to receive Phoebe in a manner worthy of the saints, and to help her in whatever matter she may have need.
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Paul sets forth the Macedonian believers as an example of giving, telling of how they “begged for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.”
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 11:9; Paul speaks of how the brothers of Macedonia had “fully supplied” his need while he was teaching among the Corinthians.
- ✓ Galatians 4:14-15; Paul commends the Galatians for their former treatment of him when they received him as an angel of God. At time they would have given him anything he needed.
- ✓ Philippians 4:14-19; Paul commends them for the faithful support of his missionary work. They alone had been faithful. He concludes that the importance of their gift was not so much the gift itself, but the “profit which increases to (their) account.”
- ✓ 2 John 10; the lady and her children are warned not to receive a traveling teacher who brings false teaching.
- ✓ Of course 3 John 5-8, is the passage with which we began our study. It would concur with the tenor of Paul's comments above.

Supporting the Leadership

- ✓ 1 Timothy 5:17-18; may be considered as a correlating passage that deals with the indirect issue of supporting local church leaders. “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.

And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (KJV).

Supporting Brethren in General

Although even more remote from the issue, other passages deal with meeting the needs of the brethren in general.

- ✓ Acts 11:29-30; the church at Antioch determines to send relief to the church in Jerusalem.
- ✓ Acts 20:35; Paul says that he had worked hard with his own hands and had met his needs and the needs of those with him. He concludes that in like manner the Ephesians were to “support” the weak and remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 8:14-15; Paul reminds them their present abundance is to supply for the needs of others.
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 9:1-15; everyone is to give cheerfully, according to the purpose in his heart. One who sows bountifully will reap bountifully.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:28; they are told to work with their hands and to labor that they may have something to give to those who have need.
- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 5:14; “encourage the faint hearted, help (support) the weak, be patient with all men.”
- ✓ 1 Timothy 6:17-19; the rich are to share with the poor.

Old Testament Correlations

Although they may not have direct application, there are to be correlating principles in certain OT as well.

- ✓ Levites (who were to minister to the spiritual needs of Israel), had no inheritance in the land. Therefore, Israel was to be benevolent toward the Levites (Deut. 12:12, 18-19, 14:29), and to support them with tithes (Num. 18:21, 24).
- ✓ At Jericho, Rahab received the messengers of Israel into her house. Twice she is commended in the NT (Heb.

11:31, Jm. 2:25).

- ✓ Paul makes reference to the feeding and care of a working ox (Duet. 25:4). He applies the principle to Christian workers and he concludes that “*a laborer is worthy of his wages*” (1 Tim. 5:18).

Study Questions

1. Discuss the various tools for word studies. What benefits and limitations does each have?
2. What precautions should we take when doing word studies?
3. Discuss the difference between the KJV and NASB translations of the Greek term *apolambano*, which they translated “support and receive.”
4. What is the significance of considering other similar passages?
5. What is an idiom?
6. What are some modern day idioms that we use in our culture?
7. Discuss a passage with direct application.

Chapter 13

Conclusion and Application

The Historical Meaning

Before arriving at personal application we must not overlook the historical meaning. What was the author's intention? What was his meaning, his purpose, in the passage? How did those to whom it was written understand it? It is imperative that the author's intended meaning and the recipients' understanding be our understanding as well. This historical meaning is the primary objective of hermeneutics.

With this in mind let us draw some conclusions from what we have learned. The following conclusions are not meant to exhaust the possible applications of the text, but they are the primary conclusions we might draw from our specific focus on the significance of verse 8 in regards to missionary support.

The Setting

- ✓ Early Church writings and Church tradition teaches that the Apostle John wrote this letter. Furthermore, several scholars believe the writing is consistent with John's style and vocabulary. And since there is little evidence for any other author, we will assume this position.
- ✓ The letter appears to have been written near the end of the first century.
- ✓ We know it was written to Gaius, who was probably an elder in a church somewhere in Asia-Minor, not too far from Ephesus, John's residence.

The Word Meanings

- ✓ Both contextual and historical evidence indicates that the idiom “*send them on their way in a manner worthy of God*” (v. 6), is a clear admonition for Gaius to assist these men with physical and financial support.
- ✓ The study of *xenos* (v. 5), did not tell us much more than the translation. Therefore, our main source for arriving at the identity of these strangers is the immediate context. The term itself tells us they were not local residents.
- ✓ We may conclude from our study of the terms for “receive,” that what John had in mind with *apolambano* in verse 8, and *epidechomai* in verses 9 and 10, was hospitality.
- ✓ We ascertain from the context they were traveling Christian teachers of some sort. In verses 5 and 10, John called them brethren. In verse 6, he mentioned their journey. In verse 7, he said they went out for “*the sake of the Name.*”
- ✓ In verse 8, John said they should be supported. And in verse 10, he condemns Diotrephes for rejecting them.

The Context

- ✓ He seems to use *apolambano* in verse 8, and *epidechomai* in verses 9 and 10, as synonyms. However, we might observe a slight difference between the two terms. It could be that by using *apolambanein* in verse 8 (or as many manuscripts read *hupolambanein*), he is indicating a more intensive reception (i.e. “support,” as translated by the NASB), which goes beyond mere hospitality. Whereas, his use of *epidechomai* in verses 9 and 10, might refer to a less aggressive hospitality. If this is the case, we could interpret this change in terms to be magnifying his charge against Diotrephes. In effect saying, that “while local believers ought to be supplying for the needs of these traveling ministers, Diotrephes will not even be hospitable to them.”

Conclusion and Application

- ✓ John's words to Gaius imply that it is his Christian duty to supply for the needs of these men. And furthermore, that when he does so, he is joining in their work.
- ✓ Diotrephes is condemned for his lack of hospitality. Indeed, John implies he is evidently not even a true believer.

Practical Theological Considerations

Thinking through the theological implications of our findings will ultimately lead to certain practical applications for life. Granted this passage is not one of great controversy, nor is it packed with deep theological thought; but, as seen in the corresponding passages, it does touch upon certain fundamental considerations of practical theology from which we can derive personal applications.

Missiology

As it relates to the work of evangelism and discipleship:

- ✓ The worker is deserving of support (Mat. 10:14, 41; 2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:14-19; Rom. 16:1-2).
- ✓ The supporter is a fellow worker of the truth (Phil. 4:17).
- ✓ Such missionary work, so as to spread the truth, fulfills the great commission (Mat. 28:19-20).

Sanctification and Rewards

As it relates to one's spiritual life:

- ✓ A willingness to support evangelists and teachers has a relationship to one's walk with God (Gal. 4:14-15; Phil. 4:14-19).
- ✓ A desire to support such workers is an evidence of spiritual growth, for it is an expected result of one set aside for God and His purposes (2 Cor. 8:1-5).
- ✓ Such faithful obedience will be rewarded (Mat. 10:40-41).

Ecclesiology

As it relates to the brotherhood:

- ✓ The support of leadership is expected (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:9).
- ✓ The support of needy brethren is expected (1 Tim. 6:17-19; 2 Cor. 8:14-15; 1 Thess. 5:14).
- ✓ The support of the underprivileged brethren is expected (1 Tim. 5:16, 6:17-19; Jm. 1:27).

Contemporary Relevance and Personal Application

Direct Application

The passage is prescriptive and transcultural. Therefore, we derive direct application.

- ✓ We are to support those who have devoted themselves to evangelizing and teaching God's Word. It is our Christian duty to do so.
- ✓ When we support such workers, we become partakers with them in the work of spreading the truth.
- ✓ As partakers of the Great Commission, rewards are accredited to our account.

Principles to Apply

From those passages spoken directly to or about both the righteous Gaius and the evil Diotrophes, we may detect several timeless principles that we can apply to our lives today.

- ✓ One's conduct displays or betrays his spiritual life.
- ✓ Genuine hospitality is the characteristic of a godly and loving heart.
- ✓ Pride can destroy Christian fellowship.
- ✓ One man's pride can cause many to grieve.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the historical meaning. Why is this so significant?
2. Discuss the historical setting for this text.
3. How important was the word study for this text? Why? Why not?
4. Discuss the application of this text to Missiology.
5. Discuss the application of this text to Ecclesiology.
6. Discuss some of direct applications we might derive from this passage.
7. Discuss some principles we might derive from this passages.

Homiletic Outline of 3 John 5-11

Leadership, Good and Bad

I. Recognizing the Loyal Elder (vv. 5-8).

A. Faithfulness Service (v. 5).

1. To the membership (v. 5a).

2. To the visiting teachers (v. 5b).

B. Visitors bear witness to his love (v. 6a).

C. Encouraged to supporting the teachers (v. 6b-8b).

1. They labor for the Lord's sake (v. 7a).

2. They trust in the Lord (v. 7b).

a. Therefore, we should support them (v. 8a,

b. We share in their labor (v. 8b).

II. Recognizing the Disloyal Elder (vv. 9-10).

To Determine the Author's Intent

- A. Rejected authority (v. 9)
 - B. Desired to the big fish in a little pond (v. 9b).
 - C. Reprimand is coming (v. 10).
 - 1. For wicked accusations against authority (v. 10b).
 - 2. For taking his rebellion even a step further (10b).
 - D. Lords over the brethren (v. 10c).
 - 1. Forbids others to receive the brethren (v. 10d).
 - 2. He excommunicates those who disobey him (v. 10e).
- III. Encouraging the Loyal Elder (v. 11).
- A. Do not imitate the evil doer (v. 11a).
 - B. Imitate the Apostle (v. 11b).
 - C. The doer of good is of God (v. 11c).
 - D. The doer of evil does not know God (v. 11d).

Appendix A

Basic Tools for Biblical Exegesis

The following study helps are by no means exhaustive. Several other books in each category could just as easily been selected. These works were selected primarily for one reason: they will be easy for the reader to use.

English Bibles

Because translation is both an art and a science, textual criticism and translations will differ from one another. Therefore, it is advisable to reference many versions. This often proves to be a very rewarding step in the interpretation process.

The New American Standard Bible. Lockman Foundation. LaHambra, California: The Foundation Press, 1971.

The objective of the NASB is to review and increase interest in the American Standard Version. The attempt has been made to render the grammar and terminology of the ASV in contemporary English. It is a literal translation based upon Rudolph Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*, and the 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek New Testament. Although its style is a bit wooden, it is a very reliable rendition of the Hebrew and Greek.

The King New James Bible. Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1979.

This is an attempt to closely follow the original KJV. The vocabulary has been updated, making it more readable. It is a literal translation the NT, *Textus Receptus*.

The New International Version. 1973.

Although it is not meant to be a literal word for word translation, it is, nevertheless, a fairly accurate rendition of the thoughts and theological concepts involved. It is translated by a process called dynamic equivalence and therefore should be read, in some respects, as a commentary.

Today's English Version of the New Testament. trans. The American Bible Society. New York: Macmillan, 1966.

This too, like the NIV, is translated by the method of dynamic equivalence. It is easy to read and makes a fine commentary. Also translated by the process of dynamic equivalence and therefore should be read, in some respects, as a commentary.

Bible Dictionaries

Douglas, J. D. (ed.). The New Bible Dictionary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962.

This is a fine dictionary. It has a conservative approach with helps in the areas of chronology, archaeology, and backgrounds.

Unger, Merrill F. Unger's Bible Dictionary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1957.

Unger stresses the doctrinal content of many key words. This doctrinal treatment is its strength.

Ewell, Walter A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.

Here is an excellent treatment of theological terms and concepts. It is comprehensive, current, authoritative, and understandable. More than 1,250 articles from several of today's best scholars.

Bible Encyclopedias

Orr, James (ed.) and Malvin Grove Kyle (revising ed.). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. 5 vol. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939.

Perhaps the most versatile set for the conservative. There are

excellent articles on any number of topics with extensive book outlines and introductions.

Tenny, Merrill C. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press.

Another excellent resource. Very similar to I.S.B.I. Either one will suffice.

Bible Handbooks

Unger, Merrill F. Unger's Bible Handbook. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966.

An abbreviated but concise resource for historical, geographical, chronological, and archaeological background, book outlines, short introductions, and other topics of interest.

Halley, Henry H. Bible Handbook, Chicago: Printed author, 1955.

This abbreviated Bible commentary provides an overview of the Bible with historical, chronological, and archaeological data. There is a synopsis of Church history, notes on obscure passages, suggested Bible readings and more.

Bible Atlases

Aharoni, Yohanan and Michael Avi-Yonah. The Macmillan Bible Atlas. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

This fine atlas contains 262 maps with an integrated text that illustrates every biblical event that conceivably lends itself to cartographic interpretation.

Day, John, ed. Oxford Bible Atlas. (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

A concise atlas newly revised to bring into account recent archeological findings.

Grollenberg, L. H. (ed.). Grollenberg's Atlas of the Bible. trans. of 2nd Dutch ed. trans., and ed. by J. M. H. Reid and H. H. Rowby. London: Nelson and Sons, 1957.

A scholarly work with many illustrations and a text

summarizing Biblical history. It has fine maps.

Pheiffer, Charles F. Baker's Bible Atlas. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973.

Complete with maps, both general and detailed, and a chronological text of the Bible times.

Wright, G. E. and F. V. Filson (eds.). The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1945.

A standard among Bible atlases which outlines ancient history with the biblical events, as well as those related to secular history.

Introductions to the NT

Tenney, Merrill. The New Testament: A Survey. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.

The historical background is very good.

Guthrie, Donald. Introduction to the NT. 3 vols. London: Tyndale, 1964.

Outstanding and some consider it absolutely necessary. It is a model for handling the difficult problems associated with special introductions.

Introductions to the OT

Archer, Gleason L., Jr. A Survey of O.T. Introduction. Chicago: Moody Press, 1964.

This is perhaps the best conservative OT introduction available.

Unger, Merrill F. Introduction Guide to the OT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951.

Unger's has long been a standard textbook in seminaries and Bible Colleges. It is still a fine treatment of OT issues from a conservative viewpoint.

Literary Genre

Fee, Gordon D. and Stuart, Douglas. How to Read the Bible for all its Worth. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

Excellent! Here is an illustrative treatment of the interpretive

rules concerning each genre.

Critical Commentaries

Alford, Henry. NT for English Reader. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983.

Alford was possibly the leading commentator of his day. An Evangelical Anglican with an excellent grasp of the Greek text. Premillennial.

Bruce, F. F. (ed.) The New International Commentary on the NT. 18 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984 (reprint).

One of the best overall contemporary series. Conservative, Reformed. Some volumes, such as Romans, are outstanding. It is based on the Greek text but written in a way that those without Greek may benefit.

Gaebelein, Frank E. (ed.). The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.

Fine commentary set written by various conservative scholars; although some books are better than others.

Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

A concise conservative commentary by three British scholars (Presbyterian & Anglican) of the 19th Century. Jamieson & Brown are Postmillennial, Fausset is premillennial. Reliable historical and grammatical exposition.

Lange, John P. Commentary on the Holy Scripture. 12 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960 (reprint).

An exhaustive exegesis and exposition of the whole Bible by a group of German scholars of the past century. Consistently conservative, mainly amillennial. There are thorough exegetical, historical, theological, and homiletical treatments.

Tasker, R. V. G. (ed.) The Tyndale NT Commentaries. 21 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981.

Well organized and outlined with excellent introductions. Especially useful for zeroing in on the principle point of a passage. It is written by solid scholars from a conservative

viewpoint, though mostly an amillennial orientation.

Tyndale O.T. Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Excellent. Even better than the NT.

Wuest, Kenneth S. Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek NT. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966.

Here are helpful studies from the Greek, especially for English readers on various NT books and topical areas. It is conservative, pre-millennial, and dispensational.

English Concordances

Strong, James. The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. New York: Abingdon Press, 1955.

A good general concordance. Hebrew and Greek words are not noted in the main body of the concordance but are indicated in special appendages.

Young, Robert. Analytical Concordance to the Bible. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1910.

An excellent tool. Probably the best English concordance available. A supplement on archaeological data by William Foxwell Albright is decidedly a plus in this concordance.

Greek & Hebrew Texts

Green, Jay, P. The Interlinear Bible. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, revised, 1983.

OT and NT interlinears. Small print. Greek is the TR.

Marshall, Alfred. The NIV Interlinear Greek-English NT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.

Greek is based on the Nestle text.

Greek and Hebrew Concordances

New Englishman's Greek Concordance of the NT. Wilmington, Delaware: Associated Publishers & Authors, 1972.

Each word is listed in Greek with its English transliteration, followed by English citations. A section in the back, lists the English words with their Greek translations keyed to the page

on which they are found.

The Englishman's Hebrew & Chaldee Concordance of the O.T.
5th ed. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1890.

For the student who has a limited use of Hebrew, this dictionary should be of more help than Young's English concordance. Occurrences of words are listed by the Hebrew words rather than their English translations. All citations are in English, with the word in question given in italics.

Greek and Hebrew Lexicons

Wilson, William. O.T. Word Study. McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing Co., no date.

Very useful for those with limited Hebrew skills. Words are listed in English with their Hebrew translations and meanings below.

Davidson. Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the O.T.
Mac Dill AFB, Florida: Mac Donald Publishing Co., no date.

Parses verbs, declines nouns and defines words. Requires a basic Hebrew background.

Vine, W. E. An Expository Dictionary of NT Words. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, no date.

Limited in scope and depth, but it is helpful, especially for those limited in Greek.

Moulton, Harold K. Moulton. Analytical Greek Lexicon. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.

A thorough and concise dictionary of each Greek word in the NT. Each verb is parsed and each noun is declined. Very useful for those with limited Greek skills.

Basic Greek & Hebrew Grammars

Goodrick, Edward W. Do it Yourself Hebrew and Greek.
Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1980.

Designed to give a basic introduction to the languages. Its best feature is explaining how to use various Bible study tools which require some knowledge of the Biblical languages.

Yates, Kyle M. The Essentials of Biblical Hebrew. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938.

Well written. May serve as an introductory grammar as well as an intermediate book on syntax.

Goetchius, Eugene Van Ness. The Language of the NT. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

An excellent beginners grammar.

Dana, H. E. and Julius R. Mantey. A Manual Grammar of the Greek NT. New York: Macmillan, 1963.

This is the best organized, hence the handiest of all the grammars. It suffers from poor illustrations in places.

Theologies

Chafer, Lewis S. Major Bible Themes. Chicago: Moody Press, 1926.

A concise treatment of the basic doctrines and possible objections to them.

Chafer, Lewis S. Systematic Theology. 8 vols. London: James Clarke & Co., 1953.

Premillennial, dispensational. Good overall. Excellent on soteriology. It is a classic in the field of systematic theology. Everyone will always want to know what Chafer says.

Scofield, C.I. The New Scofield Reference Bible. New York: Oxford Press Nelson and Sons, 1969.

An excellent study Bible with many cross references and theological notes on important passages.

Hodge, Charles Systematic Theology. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986 (reprint).

Probably the leading Presbyterian theologian. It is without question a classic in the field of theology. Post-millennial.

Thiessen, Henry C. Lectures in Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949.

A comprehensive introduction to systematic theology. It has been a classroom textbook for more than 30 years. Pre-millennial, dispensational.

Appendix B

Online Resources for Biblical Exegesis

Today there are numerous, excellent biblical resources online. From commentaries and systematic theologies to lexicons and biblical encyclopedias and nearly everything in between; furthermore, one can access them for free.

Apologetics

Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry

<http://carm.org/>

Several apologetic articles on various topics.

Apologetics at Alpha & Omega Ministries

<http://aomin.org/>

Several apologetic articles on various topics.

Bible Atlases, Maps, Archeology

Guided Biblical Archaeology Tour of the Holy Lands

<http://www.digbible.org/index.html>

Excellent pictures and historical information on locations where archaeology and the Bible intersect.

The Jerusalem Archaeological Park

<http://www.archpark.org.il/intro.asp>

Excellent virtual reproductions of period archaeological sites as they would have appeared at the time as well as historical notes, biographies, and much more.

Archaeology and the Bible

<http://christiananswers.net/archaeology/>

An interesting site, though a bit busy, seeks to provide answers to various archaeological issues as well as other issues of concern.

Bible Versions

Bible Gateway

Read, listen to, or search Scripture in the language or translation of your choice. Several advanced tools including commentaries, dictionaries, topical indexes, and historical data.

Wholesome Publishing

<http://www.ewordtoday.com/comments/>

Classic Bible Commentaries.

Jewish & Church History

The Book of Enoch

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/boe/>

The Bible History Old Testament by Alfred Edersheim

http://philologos.org/_eb-bhot/

A standard among history books.

The Jewish Roman World of Jesus

<http://religiousstudies.uncc.edu/people/jtabor/>

A fine historical account.

The life and Times of Jesus by Alfred Edersheim

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes.toc.html>

A classic.

Christian Biography Resources

<http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/bio.html>

Lexicons & Greek NT & Hebrew OT Tools

NetBible

<https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Matthew+1>

Many very useful tools: a parallel interlinear English and Greek, commentary, articles.

Blue Letter Bible

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/index.cfm>

Many excellent tools: commentaries, dictionary, word studies, charts and outlines.

Greek New Testament

<http://wesley.nnu.edu/gnt/index.htm>

Greek NT with parsing. Keyed to Strong's Concordance, with instant reference.

Strong's Concordance with Hebrew and Greek Lexicon

<http://www.elijah.com/lexicon.html>

A classic.

Science and the Bible

Answers in Genesis

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/>

Scientists and theologians defend the Biblical young earth understanding of creation. Many resources available.

Answers Research Journal

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/arj>

Scholarly scientific journal articles defending the Biblical young earth understanding of creation.

Creation Research Society

Scholarly scientific journal articles defending the Biblical young earth understanding of creation.

Creation Research

<http://www.creationresearch.org/>

A society of trained scientists committed to special creation.

Institute for Creation Research

<http://www.icr.org/>

Articles by many trained scientists committed to special creation.

Theologies

Theological Foundations, by Robert C. Cook, Th.D.

http://www.ancientlight.org/Theology/Cook/about_theoframeright_WRC.htm

An excellent and exhaustive evangelical, dispositional, pre-millennial systematic theology. On a personal note, Dr Cook was my theology professor at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary and this was our primary textbook.

Various Study Tools

Bible Gateway

<http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/>

Reading, research, and listening to Scripture online, in the language or translation of your choice. Among other tools, it has advanced tools to search the Bible by keywords or verse.

Bible Monk

<http://www.houlton.net/monk/ha.htm>

A very nice source of various Bible study tools: commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, lexicons, concordances, various Bible versions, and more.

Bible.org

<http://bible.org/>

Various tools.

Crosswalk

<http://www.crosswalk.com/>

Online Bible study tools: commentaries, interlinear Bible, parallel Bible, concordances, dictionaries, encyclopedias, lexicons, history, sermon helps and illustrations.

Study Light

<http://www.studylight.org/>

Excellent source for many tools: interlinear, parallel Bible, commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, encyclopedias, lexicons, histories, creeds, sermon essentials, audio resources, religious art work, devotionals.

Works of Classic Christian Literature

Ethereal Classics Christian Library

<http://www.ccel.org/>

Alphabetical listing of the classics of Christian literatures, commentaries, early church fathers, histories, sermons, meditations, etc.

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