

From Bible To Bible Study

I. A Basic Method Summarized

Most important—get a good commentary or well prepared study guide.

A. Pray-- Our affections will largely help or hinder our interpretation in so far as we are willing to submit to God. Only God can create in us such a disposition that is genuinely willing to hear God's voice as He speaks through His Word. "Create in me a clean heart O God... !

B. Have access to Several Versions if Possible: You will want to recognize that you are at a significant disadvantage if you cannot work in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek since you will be attempting to study what amounts to a non-inspired text. You will also want to understand that there are different theories applied to translations. (Literal, dynamic, free, etc.) Furthermore, there are two major sources for the Biblical text itself. (Textus Receptus and Eclectic) Whereas you will not be able to escape these extra-Biblical realities, you can at least minimize these realities if you work with the following texts:

1. So as to have access to the Textus Receptus text, secure a *New King James*. (The text of the *New Geneva Bible*)
2. So as to have access to a more literal translation based on an eclectic text, you will want to have access to a *New American Standard Bible*.
3. So as to have access to a dynamic equivalence translation based on an eclectic text, you will want to have an Revised Standard (or New Revised Standard) or New International Version) or ESV (English Standard Version) I would make this my primary text,

(For example, why did the NIV impose a theology of "flesh" such as in their translation of Rom. 8, or why did they obscure the very significant fact that Paul choose to use one word "boast" three times in Romans 5:1-5, 11 as earlier used in Rom. 3:27, etc.?)

C. Pick Your Passage-- The fundamental unit of all language is not a single word, not even a single sentence, but the unit (paragraph or series of related paragraphs with a discernible start and finish) Look for the beginning and end of an argument, story or poetic piece of scripture. A "self-contained unit" may consist of a single sentence in the case of a proverb or perhaps several chapters of Scripture in the case of an historical story. (as in Genesis for instance)

D. Do a General Study of the whole Book of your passage FIRST

This is very important-- and is why I prefer expositional series so as to not exempt this very important step in exegetical method-- a step that takes quite some time so as to be hard to do every week or so... You will want to answer questions like:

1. Who wrote the book?
2. What were the historical circumstances?
i.e. when, where, how, why, etc.
 - What were the political factors?
 - What was the culture of that day?
 - To whom was the book written?
 - Was there a controversy that is being addressed?
3. What are the general theological themes emphasized in this book?
4. Look for key words often repeated and discern their "technical" use by the author.
5. What Genre is your book and how does this impact the way you interpret it:

See Handouts on Genre specific interpretation:

- Prophets
- Narratives
- Sermon on the Mount
- Gospels
- Epistles

As a rule, to understand the book as a whole, you will want to:

- Read the Book several times, getting the "big picture" even as you attempt to discern a general outline
- List the words most frequently used and do both thematic theological studies and word studies.
- Consult:
 - a. The Introduction in a Good Commentary—FRENCH??
 - b. A Bible Encyclopedia (G.W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, 1979)
 - c. A Biblical Survey/Introduction
 - New Testament: *A Survey of the New Testament*, Gundry
 - Old Testament: *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Harrison

E. Immediate Context:

1. Given a general outline of the book of the Bible you are studying, where is your passage?
2. What is the main point before and after your passage?
3. How does the author make the transition to your passage? Notice the key transitional words: - *therefore, moreover, but, otherwise, since, etc.*

F. Sentence Flow-- You want to notice the relationships between *clauses* (not verses, or sentences, since these may be artificial anyway)

1. Try to distinguish between supporting clauses and main clauses. (Notice particularly the verbs-- main verbs vs. supporting verbs)
2. Try to distinguish the various relationships between clauses in your passage. (see attached)

Two methods:

(See attached):

Discourse Analysis: Philippians 2:19-30

Sentence Flow: 1 Peter 1:3-6

G. Word Study-- You will want to make sure you understand the significant words in your passage. Don't assume you know the meaning. See how the word is used in the same Book you are studying, by the same author of other books of the Bible, in the Bible itself.

- a. You will then want to discern the "range of meaning" and then see which best fits the immediate context of your passage. (Imagine a X were your word shows up in other passages and fill in what the context suggests it means)
- b. You will want to be particularly careful to notice how the word is used by your author.
- c. Consult a good "lexicon" (dictionary) if you can discern the Greek or Hebrew word in it.

H. Theme Comparison: Where do you see the theme of your passage elsewhere in scripture—e.g. Compare and contrast.

1. Is your passage derived from another passage in the Bible?
Sometimes your bible will actually help you some by noting in the margins cross-references.
2. If you locate an cross-reference that your author has intentionally used, you will want to go back and understand the OT passage in its original context and meaning. Often times, the author will intend to import the whole contextual meaning of the previously revealed text merely with the use of an abbreviated phrase taken from that passage.
Often times, you will discover that your passage assumes knowledge of previous revelation-- the prophets will assume familiarity with the Mosaic law for instance (especially Deut.), NT writers will assume familiarity with both prophets and Moses. But rarely will they directly quote from previous books. You will there need to see if key phrases or even words are used in other portions of the bible.
3. How does your passage compare with the cross-references? Are words used in similar ways? If there is variance, what does it accentuate so as to provide a theological emphasis?

I. Discern and Understand the passage in its COVENANT (or Redemptive Historical) Context-- (c.f. Below)

A redemptive historical orientation is not some kind of dispensable exegetical luxury. At stake is nothing less than the right way of interpreting Scripture. At issue here is simply the fundamental principle that the

test is to be interpreted in the light of its context. In the case of Scripture, the redemptive-historical structure or framework established by Scripture itself is the contextual factor having the broadest bearing on a given text. (Gaffin, p.xxii)

1. *Step One: To relate the text to its immediate theological horizon. (immediate covenantal context)*

2. *Step Two: To understand the text in light of God's total revelation especially as ultimately revealed in the New Covenant.*

The Issue of Christ-Centered Interpretation:

c.f. Emmaus Road: Luke 24: 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

c.f. Heb. 1:1-3 Heb. 1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,

Each "book" of the Bible is ultimately ONE chapter in ONE book of redemption. Like a good novel, we must learn to read the Bible both forwards and backwards as to allow the more developed portions to inform the under developed portions, even if the embryonic portions give meaning to the mature portions. Thus, there is a Biblical Theology of the bible that must inform the way we interpret a given passage:

J. Draft a Main point-- Attempt to summarize the plain meaning of your passage, taking into consideration all the above. IF possible write it down in one sentence. This is called the "doctrine" of your passage.

K. Compare your "doctrine" to what the church consensus about what the scriptures principally teach about that doctrine. (e.g Compare to *Westminster Confession of Faith*, or *Heidelberg Confession*)

L. Significance-- You will want to carefully limit your application to only that which naturally and genuinely may be derived from the mainpoint. In some cases, your text may have "secondary" points, but they will related to the mainpoint in an obvious way. Your "application" then ought to be governed by the mainpoint. Also remember that many passages will not have a "to do" application. It may be informative in so far as you better understand the nature of your salvation such that you will be more thankful, for instance.

Some questions you may want to ask are, although not always intended to be answered by your text:

1. What does the mainpoint infer about your relationship to God?
 2. What duty does this passage teach in your relationship to God, to people?
 3. How might I change my understanding of God, His ways, redemption, etc. so as to "grow in spiritual understanding?"
 4. How does this passage challenge assumptions in my culture?
- etc.

II. The Use of Scripture In Ministry:

1) Use of Scripture in Leading a Small Group Bible Study by "Directed Discussion"

Each Bible Study can be divided into four basic sections,

- a. *point of contact*,
- b. *investigation*,
- c. *discovery*,
- d. *so what?*

About questions:

An "investigation" question will be very different than a "so what" question for instance. Also, while there is no hard and fast rule about asking questions, you will discover that there is an art to giving enough

information in the question but not too much information so that the participant will be led by it to discovery rather than confusion and embarrassment.

The most important thing to remember is that you want to avoid making the scripture say more than one thing at once. People instinctively know that if a passage can say anything then it says nothing which has certainly led to less confidence in the scripture being our only rule of faith and practice. So, a question like, "what does this passage, sentence, word of scripture mean *to you*" is never appropriate in the investigation section lest things get turned up-side-down and we become the talkers in revelation and God the hearer.

From Text to Group Study

Point of Contact-- You will want to engage the sympathy of the people in the group. The danger at this point is to say or do *anything* to get their attention. You might tell a joke, story or quote for instance that has nothing to do with the content of investigation. This will tend to undermine your credibility and encourage a license to make the scripture say something that it never intended to say. The study will be better served if you will reflect on the final inferences that are made in the "so what" section and introduce the lesson in a way that would help the participant begin thinking about that. It is often helpful to begin a theme and return to it at the end such as to tie the whole lesson together.

Investigation-- The important thing to remember at this section is that we are **not** searching for our own opinions. Your lead questions will want to drive a person to the text, less our own thoughts and feelings. We are listening, God is speaking, and this must be kept in mind throughout this section especially lest the word become a window into our own hearts rather than God's revelation. You will want to keep your comments mostly to the comments provided for you in the lesson unless you are qualified to interpret scripture. Example: How does our text divide itself? What words are repeated or emphasized that may be significant to understanding this passage?

Discovery-- Having investigated the text of God's word, we are now ready to summarize the main point. The idea is to state as clearly and plainly as possible the "good news" that is presented by our passage in a summary fashion. You may want to help the participant see the "good news" represented by the main point—which will require some grasp of theology as a complete system. One good rule is to always locate the main point in a category of theology. You may want to consult with your church "Confession of Faith" to know what your church understands the scripture to generally teach about the topic. Example: What is the issue that this text addresses in our Christian life? (Issue of revelation, sin, acceptance with God, godly living, the future, the church, our relationships with the world and/or one another—all of which fall under a category in WCF)

So What?-- If you have rightly divided the word of God in the investigation section, here is your second great opportunity to mess up. If we are careful about discerning the point of a passage, we are often lax in our application. Remember that your first level of application (when applicable) may be for the grace that instructs us to godliness and/or to deny worldly desires (Titus 2:11:12) Yet this ought to be honest with respect to what the text intended as by good and necessary inference. There may even be several levels of application, but the ultimate level will be to embrace Christ who in some way satisfies the burden of the text. For instance, the Bible certainly applies the suffering of Christ to our present call to "take up our cross and follow after Christ" in this present age. We might therefore rightly apply the passion of Christ to our passion such as to "share in the suffering of Christ" as exhorted in 1 Peter for instance. Yet whatever relevance may be drawn from this about the particular realities represented by the participants in the group, you will want to conclude with the ultimate level of significance that directs us to Christ's suffering as our vicarious substitute for the penalty of sin under the law. You would want to remind them that no sacrifice on our part could possibly increase our status with a Holy God. Only the perfect sacrifice of Christ can do this. We enjoy perfect status with God as adopted sons and daughters *in Christ*. Our "response" will be to put our hope and confidence in Christ for every spiritual blessing, looking less to ourselves and more to him resulting in growing thanksgiving,

spiritual rest and restoration. We are not therefore looking for the "moral" of the story so much as the "grace" of the story that is revealed in Christ.