

## SESSION 3 A

*NOTE: Sessions 3 A and B may seem a bit scary and dry. Not to worry; when we look at it in more straightforward terms, it will make sense. And to keep our minds from exploding, we'll be doing A and B as separate sessions.*

### INTERPRETING THE TEXT

John A. Broadus wrote: "To interpret and apply his text in accordance with its real meaning is one of the preacher's most sacred duties."

Interpretation of Scripture is the cornerstone not only of the entire sermon preparation process, but also of the preacher's life. A faithful student of Scripture will seek to be as certain as possible that the interpretation is Biblically accurate.

It is important for us to acknowledge that the task of interpreting Scripture (technically known as hermeneutics) is inevitably colored by our presuppositions, opinions, culturally conditioned preferences and prejudices, unique experiences, and individual gifts and talents.

#### Critical Studies of the Bible

Studies of the extant manuscripts of the Bible have taken four general directions: textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Whether or not a preacher is interested in using the evidence of these studies, he or she should be aware of them.

In textual criticism, scholars seek to determine the one authentic reading of a specific passage of Scripture from among the differing readings. ...As a case in point...teleious in 1 Corinthians 1:8... is translated "blameless." In the same verse, another manuscript... teleous which is rendered "mature" or "complete." Which manuscript is accurate? ....Such answers, obviously, are of varying degrees of importance to a preacher.... The majority of manuscripts may have the same textual reading, and a ... the rendering can thus be made with some confidence. (An exception, a minority reading where textual variation occurs only in older manuscripts.)

Source criticism relates in particular to the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the so-called Synoptic Gospels. The source critic seeks the original source of information from which these accounts came.

Form criticism ...probes the oral traditions assumed to have preceded the written documents.

Redaction criticism evaluates Scripture relative to why and how the Biblical materials are arranged. ....Presumes that the Biblical author had a particular theology in mind as he selected the materials to be used. ...For example, that Matthew looked on Jesus as the promised Messiah and thus arranged his materials around that theme. On the other hand, Mark based his writings on a servant-Messiah theology...

### HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

...Will help us as we prepare our own hermeneutical approach.

#### The Apostolic Perspective

Christian interpretation of Scripture begins, obviously, with Jesus himself. Jesus often quoted directly from the Hebrew Bible and added an interpretation. For example, Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 to describe His adversaries: "Those people honor me with their lips..."

## ESSENTIALS OF BIBLICAL PREACHING, *Fasol*

....Jesus set forth important principles for us in His interpretation of Scripture. We, too, must be true to the spirit of the text being interpreted even as we make strong, relevant, and accurate applications to our own day.

By Jesus, there were four ways in which New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament:

1. *Quotes that are virtually verbatim.* Perhaps these were quotes from memory and therefore not verbally precise
2. *Fragmentary quotations.* The New Testament writers apparently believed that a fragment of a full quote was sufficient at times. (We need to remember that their manuscripts did not have punctuations.) (ex. Heb 1:5 quoting Ps 2:7)
3. *Exegetical paraphrasing.* On several occasions a New Testament writer changed the wording of an Old Testament passage, apparently to underscore the meaning and intent... --Stephen's quoting of Amos 5:25-27 (Acts 7:42-43) Brings the real sense... adultery
4. *Composite quotations.* In some instances the New Testament writers combined quotations from different sections of a book or even from several books. Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17 and Luke 19:46 quote compositely from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 (Perception of the Temple)

### **The Allegorical Perspective**

Allegory is a method of interpretation that gives a specific word or phraseology a nonliteral meaning. The symbolic meaning is determined by the interpreter. ...Under what circumstances would an interpreter use allegory? ....Clement and Origen were the first to popularize this method. Clement taught that Scripture has three meanings: literal, moral, and spiritual. The literal rendering was considered mundane and elementary, whereas the spiritual sense contained the deepest meaning.

There are disadvantages to allegorical interpretation. For one, allegory can easily replace the intent of Scripture with the subjective purposes of the interpreter.

### **Creedal Perspective**

The many conflicts about Scripture interpretation that arose even in the New Testament times made the idea of an authoritative creed appealing to believers. The radical simplicity of having all questions of orthodoxy settled by a clear statement of dogma still appeals to many Christians. The problems with creedal authority are obvious. First, a creed attempts to reduce the infinity of truth to possibly over simplified formulas that our finite minds can handle. ...tends to make the creed as important as the Bible itself. ....may stifle the pursuit of truth as the creed becomes too authoritative. ...The value of a creed is that it gives us a common basis on which to discuss and pursue our insights into truth.

### **The Mystical Perspective.**

Similar to allegory for exposition... ....The mystics relied on what they called the "inner light" given by the Holy Spirit.

### **The Rationalistic Perspective**

...Generally asserts that the human mind is capable of determining the validity of anything purported to be "truth." ....We can learn from rationalism to use our minds more fully. The chief problem with rationalism, however, is that it disavows the existence of God, rejects the supernatural acts of God, and discounts the authority of Scripture, while virtually deifying the human mind.

### **Contemporary Perspectives**

## ESSENTIALS OF BIBLICAL PREACHING, *Fasol*

1. *Neo-orthodoxy* --generally accepts the Bible as authoritative but not necessarily infallible. ...emphasizes the symbolic interpretation of Scripture.
  2. *Demythologizing-existentialism* --Seeks to understand Scripture only in its relevance to the life of the interpreter
  3. *Grammatical-historical-theological methodology* --seeks to interpret Scripture by using rules of grammar, historical information, and basic theological analysis. ...Understand the meaning of the text...knowing the historical setting, puts the Scripture in context
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### DISCUSSION

1. AS YOU LOOK AT THE PERSPECTIVES, WHAT DO YOU SEE AS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?
  2. WHICH WOULD YOU EXPECT TO USE? WHY?
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### ***Inductive Study***

Our hermeneutical process is best begun by a repeated personal reading of the biblical text. (It is also important, especially on this first reading, to read the context of the text. The context includes the verses that come immediately before and after the text.)

### ***Deductive Study***

The next step is to consult various interpretive works to arrive at the desired goal of the hermeneutical process; an exegesis. "To lead or guide out." ...An exegesis, ...is a detailed interpretation of an individual Bible passage. The general resources for an exegetical study include:

- Critical commentaries (deal with structure and nature of the language of the text)
  - Devotional commentaries
  - Bible dictionaries
  - Bible encyclopedias
  - Bible handbooks
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### DISCUSSION

1. IN YOUR OWN WORDS; WHAT IS INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE STUDY?
  2. HOW DO YOU SEE THESE RESOURCES HELPING YOU?
  3. WHERE WOULD YOU GET THEM?
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## SESSION 3 B

### INTERPRETING THE TEXT

#### Literary Genre

The literary genre of a text tells the ...form of the material... Different types of literature call for different interpretive approaches.

1. *Historical* books (eg. Genesis, 2 Chronicles, Acts) --narratives of actual events... interpreted literally
2. *Wisdom* literature is inspirational or instructive (Psalms, Proverbs... which may contain generous symbolism...
3. *Apocalyptic* literature –Revelation, is extremely symbolic prophecy. The major challenge is to wade through the mystifying symbols

#### Historical Background

1. *Authorship*. Each Biblical author wrote in the context of his personality, his environment, and his cultural condition. Matthew, for example, was a tax collector...
2. *Dating*. Suggests its cultural context. ...For example, in 1 Cor 8, the problem of eating meat offered to idols had a definite cultural reference and Paul directed his remarks to that situation.
3. *Purpose*. ....can provide an important clue for interpreting a text.

#### Lexical Information

Lexical, or vocabulary, resources yield a fascinating amount of information about a text. ...The challenges of the interpreter of Scripture is to find what a word meant at the particular time it was used.

Example: The Hebrew word *al-panaya* literally means “to my faces.” *Al-pan-aya* is often translated “before” as in “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). “To my faces” is a figure of speech implying that God can see everywhere, or God’s face is everywhere. Therefore, we can understand this text to mean, “You shall have no other gods before me, beside me, behind me, beneath me, or above me—there is no room anywhere in the universe for any other gods!”

#### Grammatical Study

A study of the grammar of the original biblical languages is helpful.

##### **Example**

In the Greek, “It is finished” (*teleestatai*) is a verb in the perfect tense. The Greek perfect tense verb combines activity that is *ongoing* with activity *that occurred* at a given time.

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### DISCUSSION

CAN YOU THINK OF EXAMPLES WHERE EACH OF THESE ELEMENTS WOULD HELP YOU PULL A PROPER INTERPRETATION FROM THE TEXT?

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### Theological Resources

To relate a theological tool to sermon preparation, we will prepare the “CENTRAL IDEA OF THE TEXT” (CIT), the “MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF THE TEXT” (MOT), the Thesis, and the MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF THE SERMON (MOS)

1. A CIT is a fifteen to eighteen word past-tense statement... what the text meant then. ...the CIT is an interpretive statement. ...The more we steep ourselves in the meaning of text when it was written, the more intelligently we may deduce an eternal principle that also applies to today.
2. The MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF THE TEXT (MOT) is a broad description of its primary purpose or intent -evangelistic, Christian life
3. The THESIS of a sermon is a fifteen to eighteen word present tense application of the CIT. This is a critical step in interpretation. It is never enough just to know what the Bible meant then; we must always make application to now.
4. A MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF THE SERMON (MOS) is a statement of what the preacher hopes to accomplish with this one message, from this one text, for this one congregation, at this one time. This should be a concise, simple sentence.

Look at the relationship of the text to all the previously mentioned items. The CIT is a direct reflection of the text; the MOT is a broad description of the CIT; the Thesis is a present-tense application of the CIT. The MOS is determined by the Thesis. Since items two, three, and four are dependent on the CIT, all accordingly reflect the textual content on which the CIT is based.

To write a CIT, especially the first few times, the preacher should seek a unifying theme in the text. For instance, 1 Peter 1:3-12 has the unifying theme of “a living hope.”

...By using the CIT, MOT, Thesis, MOS method, the preacher provides maximum assurance that his or her sermon will have a strong relationship to its text.

#### EXAMPLE 1

**Text:** Psalm 37:3-7

3. Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
4. Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
5. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.
6. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.
7. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

**CIT** God promises to reward those who trust in him.

**MOT** Supportive

**Thesis** God promises to reward whoever trusts in him.

**MOS** That the congregation will claim the rewards that God promises by trusting him.

#### EXAMPLE 2

**Text** 1 Peter 1:3-12

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
4. to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,
5. who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
6. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,
7. that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

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8. whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,
9. receiving the end of your faith the salvation of your souls.
10. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you,
11. searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.
12. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven things which angels desire to look into.

**CIT** God provided through his Son Jesus an assurance that his salvation is everlasting

**MOT** Supportive

**Thesis** God provides an everlasting salvation through his Son Jesus

**MOS** To encourage Christians to face the struggles of life on the basis of our everlasting salvation.

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### LET'S TRY IT

**Text:**

John 15

1. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
2. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
3. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
4. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
5. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
6. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
7. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.
8. "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
9. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.
10. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

**CIT** (Central Idea of the Text):

**MOT** (Major Objective of the Text)

**Thesis** (Present tense application of the CIT)

**MOS** (Major Objective of the Sermon)

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