

Seven Vital Questions Answered On Bible Interpretation

My soul languishes for your salvation; I hope in your word.
Psa. 119:81

1) Introduction: Why Is this class on Bible Interpretation important?

- Because we are handling nothing short of the only means to our salvation!
My soul languishes for your salvation; I hope in your word. Psa. 119:81

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the the life was the light of men.. And the Word became flesh and dwelth among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . John 1:1-4, 14

“Sir, Bring us to Jesus!”

(Engraved into the Old Wooden Pulpit in a Presbyterian Church, Pitts. PA)

- The Exclusive Lordship of Christ
From a Biblical point of view, the purpose of interpretation must be to receive and respond properly to the word of God... His word is truly inescapable. God's communication to us always displays his Lordship. That is, it displays his authority, his control, and his presence... Within a Christian framework, the law, the world, and the self go together. God has authority over all, God controls all, God is present in all. . Vern Poythress
- The Spiritual Leaders “Black Bag” (Tool Box, etc)
All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [2Tim. 3:16](#)
- Because Christ warns us that the days leading up to Christ’s return will not only be characterized by "false teaching" but that there will be a natural affinity for it so as to take all possible precautions against it,
2Tim. 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires,
1Tim. 4:1 now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

Because Christ tells us to watch carefully lest false teachers bring harm to the church,
2Pet. 2:1-2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned.
2John 1:10 Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching;

Because Christ warns against assuming the position of a teacher without due caution,
James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Because Christ warns us that many will want to be teachers who may not be qualified,
1Tim. 1:7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

Because Christ commands that those who do teach false doctrine be removed from teaching,
Titus 1:11 they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach.

Because Christ commands that all believers are to be discerning in what they receive from teachers as measured by the "standards" (canon) of sound doctrine according to the scripture.
2Tim. 1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus,
Acts 17:11-12 they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, including not a few Greek women and men of high standing.

LC #160

What is required of those that hear the Word preached?

It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

Because Christ intends for the ministry of "teaching" to be passed on through the succession of apostolic faith into subsequent generations.

2Tim. 2:2 and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.

2) What are some of the challenges we face in interpreting the Bible?

- We are morally challenged: The problem of lordship such as to hear only what we want to hear.

Rom. 8:6-8 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able {to do so}; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Solution: Dependency upon the Illumination work of the Holy Spirit

We acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. WCF 1:6

*Eph. 1:18 having the eyes of your hearts **enlightened**,*

1 Cor. 2: 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised/

- We are Culturally Challenged: What feels right may not be right—for example:

Individualism: "It's all a matter of one's own own, *private*, Interpretation"

- The revivalist of the Second Great Awakening... argued (as the secularists had a century earlier) that his revelation was not properly mediated by either tradition or theology; it came directly to each individual through personal experience. As a result, the individual became the arbiter of what the Bible did and did not say. The new evangelical coalition attached little importance to the aid of the past or even the present community of interpreters in matters of biblical interpretation. External authorities were jettisoned and divine authority was internalized-- a strategy not altogether different from that of the Enlightenment.

○ Rick Lints, *Fabric of Theology*

- Compare:

- **1Tim. 3:15** if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.
- **Eph.4:11** And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Populism (Democratization): "The *common* sense of the majority is right"

In America the principal mediator of God's voice has not been state, church, council, confession, ethnic group, university college or seminary; it has been quite simply, the people... the impulse to rework Christianity into forms that were unmistakably popular... and democratic in at least three respects: it was audience centered, intellectually open to all, and organizationally pluralistic and innovative.

Nathan Hatch, "Evangelicalism as a Democratic Movement"

Compare:

Matt. 7:13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 14 For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matt. 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

Anti-Intellectualism: "*Less is more*"

Expecting that great freedom of thought would generate great ideas, he found instead that Americans easily became "slaves of slogans. Expecting to find priests, he found politicians."

N. Hatch about Tocqueville

Compare:

Rom. 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.

2Cor. 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

3. What are some common misunderstanding to keep in mind when interpreting the Bible?

- Misunderstanding of what the Bible is All About

Knowing what you are looking for:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. John 5:39

*“In other words, the reader decided what he or she was looking for-and then found it. But what was found was no longer the story of God's saving work in Christ.”
(Michal Horton).*

C.f. “Knowing What You Are Looking For, Michael Horton

- What it's NOT about!
 - Natural History (e.g. Modern Science although with some scientific implications that natural science can't discover such as “directed or undirected evolution, etc)
 - Note Genesis 1-3 and “Two Creations???”
 - Political History (e.g. History of Israel as a geo-political nation, although Israel was that for a time within its typological purpose within the covenant of redemption) Reconstruction of nations based on ancient israel civil codes...
 - Note Rom 9: “Not all Israel is Israel”
 - Self-Help Manual (Practical “How to” although there are good practices but as ultimate related to being reconciled to God such as our true source of human flourishing)
 - Note:

- What it IS about!
 - Revelation of God's glory revealed through Salvation!
 - Note two books of Revelation: Creation-Redemption (also described as common grace and special grace, or “nature and grace,” etc) wherein is known as creator and redeemer respectively.
 - As special/Redemptive Revelation:
 - (a) the Bible as a narrative of saving events,
 - (b) its Christ-centered focus, and
 - (c) the unity of the canon as a presupposition of the promise- fulfillment pattern of the testaments, at least points us in the right direction.

Example: Benediction Blessing and the S Cycle (c.f. ppt)

- Sanctified (Flourishing under God's gracious Lordship,)
- Sin/Idolatry (rejecting God's Grace In Lordship such as to “do what it right in our own eyes

- Servitude (being delivered over to whatever is right in our own eyes)
- Supplication: Repentance and Faith
- Salvation: Grace of Reconciliation back unto Sanctified under God's gracious benediction

Illustrating the importance:

Example: Genesis: Faith or Science? C.f. ppt)

- Misunderstanding about the nature of revelation in the Bible: "Verbal Inspiration"

A Book of Revelation, but how!

The Bible is God's word in human words—The message of God becomes "incarnate" in Scripture wherein the location of the meaning is not in the subjective intuition of the human author, nor in the subjective intuition of the human interpreter, but in the words/sentences/paragraphs/books themselves as themselves inspired by God through the Holy Spirit in humanly attainable words.

1 Cor. 2:12-14--Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.}

2Pet. 1: 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Tim.3:16- *all scripture is inspired by God...* (perhaps better "ex-pired"-or "God-breathed out"-- not scripture breathed into writers but rather scripture breathed out by God through the words of men-- the words themselves-are a creative act of God.

"Data based" meaning: The importance of this is that the lordship of Christ is protected in so far as there is only ONE meaning to a passage (revelation) even if there may be many forms of application (illumination). Such meaning can be objectively regulated by humanly accessible rules of communication reflected in scripture such that we are commanded to "test" the spirits" by words of scripture.

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1Th. 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good.

Acts 17:11 they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

- Misunderstandings about the infallibility of the Bible (Inerrancy)

it is to be received because it is the Word of God (1.4), ... (such as we can have a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture... (1.5)

Key: The Bible *is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses* (Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy, Article 9)

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life... (WCF 1.6)

- Misunderstandings about the clarity (accessibility) of the Bible (Biblical Perspicuity)

Note: Clarity vs. Easy

WCF 1.7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all:¹⁵ yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

2Pet. 3:16 *as Paul does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*

When it comes to our approach to Bible hermeneutics, it is sometimes easy to forget the obvious. But if scripture IS a communication from God to us, it is not to obscure His will for us and our salvation but to clarify it; it is not to diminish God's sovereignty over us but to expand it; it is not to blunt God's glory but to amplify it.

Vern Poythress

- Misunderstandings about the sufficiency of scripture: (Cessation of Revelation until the return of Christ)

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men... WCF 1.6

... those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased...(WCF 1.1b), ... unto which nothing at any times is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men..." (WCF 1.6)

- *Heb. 1:1-3—God “spoke”... not “speaks”*
 - *Eph. 2: 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*
 - *Rev. 22:18* I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book,
 - The Word-Deed-Word Principle of Biblical revelation where “redemption and revelation coincide
 - Therefore, It is as important to respect what the scripture does not say or address as it is to be faithful to what it does.

- Misunderstandings about the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation:
 - Holy Spirit and Revelation: The Holy Spirit plays an objective role, not subjective, in biblical *inspiration*. As contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, revelation (meaning) is now ceased until the return of Christ.. C.f. above

 - Holy Spirit in Illumination: active in us subjectively such as to give us “eyes to see and ears to hear,” it is a vital aspect of our ability to discern what God is telling us through scripture.
 - 1 Cor. 2: 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

 - “The Holy Spirit plays a subjective, not objective, role in biblical interpretation. In reconciling our sinful hearts to God, he promotes within us a similar desire to love and serve God as we have to love and serve our natural parents. Further, he particularly gives us the desire to embrace and receive the things of God. In doing this, he makes us willing to work hard to understand scripture, and willing to embrace the conclusions of our study of scripture. David Gordon*

- Misunderstanding about the role of the Church in Biblical Interpretation:
 - WCF1.5.** *We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture.*
 - 2Th. 2:15* *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*
 - 1Tim. 3:15* *if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*
 - Note: “tradition” of the church as passed down through the ages by “confessions” is a general consensus of what the scriptures principally teach such as to read the Bible communally and not just individually in a manner

that can best prevent against our own personal/cultural/intellectual blind spots

WCF 1.6. *The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.*

Col. 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human **tradition**, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

The church is accountable to scripture and cannot impose any moral obligation upon someone except when can be discerned by good AND necessary consequence from scripture... It's the second condition that separates us (most "reformation" informed denominations) from both the Roman Catholic and Charismatic traditions that hold to various forms of continuing revelation..

(Break?)

4) What are the major steps that are involved in faithfully interpreting the Bible:

The following steps go from broad to more specific, but are not necessarily the kind of thing that is neatly done in a series, as one discovery may bounce you back into a previous step, etc.

A. Pray—Pray that God would search your heart and expose whatever biases that might prevent you from being open to hear God speak to you through scripture. We want to come to the scripture with no other "agenda" than to submit to Know God through Jesus Christ and submit to his grace bearing lordship. Our personal affections can 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. " Will want to discover not only a right doctrine, but a right doctrine from the right text, lest force the text to speak.

B. Have access to several versions: The second best thing to reading the Bible in its original language is to utilize several versions of translations. First, there are two primary sources for the text of the Bible that are represented in the New King James (*Textus Receptus*) and most other translations (ESV, RSV, NAS, NIV, etc) as related to an Eclectic Text (*Nestle Aland Novum Testamentum*). Secondly, different versions reflect different approaches to translation, some more literal and others more dynamic. A suggestion of what Bibles to utilize are as follows:

1. As a primary text, the ESV (English Standard Version) as as based on an eclectic text and roughly between a literal and dynamic translation.
2. As a secondary text so as to have access to the Textus Receptus text, secure a New King James. (The text of the *New Geneva Bible*)
3. 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*.
4. So as to have access to a more dynamic equivalence translation based on an eclectic text, you will want to have access to the Revised Standard (or New Revised Standard) or New International Version.

AS to how this might work, you will notice different English words in different versions, or different sentence structure, etc. In some instance, the same word will be translated in different English within even the same passage in a dynamic translation with the attempt of making it more clear, but then this too could obscure a point that is being made by the repetition of the same word... For example, the NIV assumes a particular meaning/theology of "flesh" in Rom. 8 that could obscure another meaning potentially. The more dynamic, the more clear perhaps but also the more misleading perhaps—it makes more interpretive choices. Again, the NIV will obscure the very significant fact that Paul choose to use one word "boast" three times in Romans 5:1-5, 11 that picks up a theme using that word that was made earlier in Rom. 3:27, etc.?) A more literal translation might preserve the consistency in a way that will enable the interpreter to see a pattern.

C. Pick Your Passage-- The fundamental unit of all language is not a single word, not even a single sentence typically, but a 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) That being said, a particular sub-point might be what the teacher is looking to emphasis such as to focus on an imcomplete unit, but then be sure to reach the sentence in context (see below.

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

This is very important-- and is why I prefer expositional series as not to exempt this very important step in exegetical method—In doing a ‘Book Study,’ some of the questions you will want to answer are:

1. Who wrote the book? What do we know about him?
2. What are the circumstances for writing the book? Most books of the bible are situational since it is written to/for a particular community that is faced with particular issues/challenges, etc.
3. What is the general theological themes emphasized in this book?
4. Are there certain key words often repeated and how specifically are they being used—

e.g. their “technical” use by this particular author in this particular situation.

The easiest way to do a book study is to first read the whole book (can skim in obvious places) one or two times and then consult a good commentary (ask a pastor as different series are better for different books generally), A Bible Dictionary and/or a Good Encyclopedia..

E. Discern type of passag. Each genre has an interpretive “key” that you will want to keep in mind. For instance:

- Prophets—The Key here is to think of prophets less as a future-teller/predictor and more as a covenant executor. In short, much of what the book will be doing is applying the book of Deuteronomy to the life of Israel, even as the promised curses and/or blessings of the covenant will be the source of a prophetic prediction. E.g. God said if you do this, then... and the prophet merely reiterates this as applied to a particular situation or fulfillment
- Narratives: The key here is not to lose sight of God as he is always the main character. Even in a book like Esther or Song of Songs where God is not, or hardly not, mentioned explicitly.
- Sermon on the Mount—The key here is to not forget what covenantal context Christ under. Many of his sayings are informed by the Old Covenant even as to direct us to the fulfillment of that Covenant in Christ. So for instance, the Lord’s Prayer is a Messianic prayer as fulfilled in Christ’s coming. Or the “altar” that one is to leave in order to be reconciled to someone is NOT the Lord’s supper but pertaining to a thanksgiving offering. Again, much of what Christ is doing is exasperating self-righteous as to what the full meaning of the law is such as to bring them to humble reliance upon the substitutionary work of Christ on our behalf at the cross, etc.
- Gospels- The key here is that the gospels are not first a history (though they are based on historical fact, but a theological vision concerning the meaning of Jesus the Christ. They each have a major theme with a particular community in mind such as to tell the story of Christ in a way to accentuate that theme. For instance, John’s gospel want to reveal Christ as the fulfillment of the temple to the Sadducee sect of Jews that focused primarily on the Temple aspects of Jewish spirituality. The story is largely told with a focus on the various temple feast as background leading to a different “commission” in chapter 20. etc. John’s gospel therefore will reflect a very different chronology of events as compared to Matthews gospel that is more focused on the Pharisee sect of Jews and the them of Christ’s fulfillment of the law and his focus on Christ the King less than john’s focus on Christ the priest.
- **Epistles=** The key here is to apply the new covenant to Christian spirituality in particular contexts of particular churches. They are letters, some more

systematic than other but all situationally focused, even if like in Ephesians the “situation” is as a general template for the Christian life to a network of church plants.

F. Take note of the 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.*

G. Discern the Sentence Flow-- You want to notice the relationships between *clauses* (not verses, or sentences, since these may be artificial anyway) Try to distinguish between supporting clauses and main clauses. (Notice particularly the verbs-- main verbs vs. supporting verbs)

H. 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 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)
- c. You will want to be particularly careful to notice how the word is used by your author.
- d. Consult a good commentary if you can discern the Greek or Hebrew word in it.
- e. DON'T put much weight on a 'root word" approach to word studies. Often this will be very misleading as words are uses in all sorts of dynamic ways through time.. Case in point, the English word "nice" is related to a root word "dumb." Or even in our day, we see a work like "sick" being uses as a compliment "that was sick!"

I. 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 by noting in the margins cross-references.
2. If you locate a 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 with the use of an abbreviated phrase taken from that passage.
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 Covenantal Context (“Redemptive Historical” Context)--

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 text 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,

As to the relation of the OT to the NT- the key thing will be to discern how the text is related to any one or more aspects of the covenant in relation to God/Christ as Prophet, Priest, King (or Law, Temple, Kingdom)

1. **Is it a “moral” related law/curse/promise?** – Most likely you will discern how in the NC, Christ fulfills his moral law and in doing reveals the greater depth of the law than was typically being practiced in the 1st century. “you have heard It said, but I say to you....” This of course gets to the issue of law and gospel. In short, we discern how redemptive history is the story of being reconciled to God by works of the law, albeit works fulfilled on our behalf by Christ such as to be credited to us by grace through faith alone. Having been set free from relying upon our law keeping to gain God’s approval such as to fear the law’s condemnation, we are now reconciled to the law as means toward being set free from the tyranny of sin... Saved by grace through faith alone though faith is always accompanied now by works of the law, etc..
2. **Is it a Temple related Law/curse/promise—**The key here will be to discern how Christ fulfills the rituals of the temple by his own death, resurrection and ascension. To be clear, the transition from Old to New Covenant is not a transition from temple to no temple, but from temple, to temple fulfilled in Christ, to temple now mediated

by the Holy Spirit wherein Christ is mediated to the world. Therefore, the outward temple of the OC was largely typological (outward signs pointing to spiritual/eternal realities, this remains true today albeit by rituals that are different (Lord's supper, baptism) as to express their fulfillment in Christ. And yet, we don't move from an organized religion to an unorganized religion, or a spirituality of people and place to no people and place—rather the people and place of the new covenant temple church is informed by the work of Christ as the fulfillment of the temple.

3. **Is it related to a Geo-Political Civil Law Law/curse/promise**—The crucial issue here is to realize that the geo-political kingdom of God was typological as to foreshadow a spiritual kingdom. For instance, if in the OC the promised land was geo-political destiny in Canaan, we know now that it is presently a “kingdom not of this world” albeit awaiting its geo-political reality when “heaven meets earth” in the final resurrection (c.f. Rev 21). Again, if it is true that the promises and curses of the Old Testament had temporal health, wealth and prosperity as its object, we know that was only to foreshadow a spiritual health, wealth, prosperity in the NC that is now focused on our reliving the witness of Christ in the world by means of “taking up our cross” and following him.

In short, to discern the covenant context of a passage is to discern its meaning as to the point of the whole Bible-- 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:

Discern especially the Redemptive Historical Trajectories :

- Creation-New Creation (both redemptive in nature, above)_
- Covenant-New Covenant
 - Not Law vs. grace, but Redemptive Covenant foreshadowed(anticipated by historical type) to Redemptive Covenant fulfilled
- Temple-New Temple
 - Converting Rites: Circumcision(cutting)-Baptism(drowning) (same meaning and use as representing death unto life)
 - Renewal Rites: Temple Sacrifice/Passover-Lord's Supper
- Image of God (1st Adam)-Image of God (2nd Adam) or Image fallen, fulfilled and restored
- 3 Uses of the Law—
 - Law guilt: (We are by covenant contract with God as our Creator-Lord justly condemned in our rebellion against God and His Lordship..

- Law satisfied by Christ On Our Behalf (We are justified by works of the law, just not by us!) God doesn't just annul the law-covenant, but by grace satisfies the law for us.
- Law Lamp- No longer afraid of the law's condemnation- we set free to obey the law unto life more abundant as the law becomes a "lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path"

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

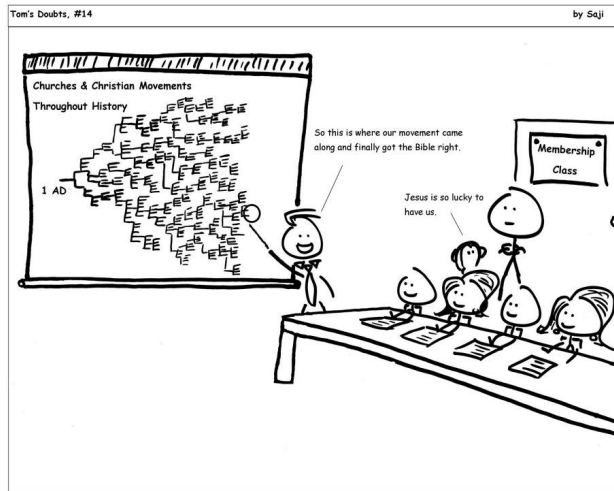
K. Compare the relevant doctrines (beliefs) that your passage addresses with a trusted Church consensus as to what the scriptures principally teach about that doctrine (belief).

This is sometimes called Confessionalism since we use "Confessions of Faith" to help us do this.

Confessionalism is the process whereby the church adopts a corporate consensus as to what the scriptures principally teach, based upon shared exegetical conclusions and utilizes this consensus as the basis for Christian faith, practice and unity when acting as a church. Stated plainly, the *confessional* church is any church whose identity is most essentially "what it believes" and whose beliefs drives "what it does."

Confessionalism allows us to compare the relevant doctrine(s) to what the scripture principally teaches about that doctrine according to the consensus of the church over many generations and across many socio-economic-ethnic identities through us of a "Creed" ("Confession of Faith"). Given our tradition, two very good confessions of faith are the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (and Larger and Shorter Catechism) and *The Heidelberg Confession*)

The Wisdom of being "confessional" in our approach to Bible Interpretation is perfectly illustrated by the following image:



Therefore, what doctrines are relevant to your passage? (Doctrine of God, Creation, Humanity, Sin, Justification (Forgiveness and Grace), Sanctification (Becoming Holy), Saving Faith, Life after Death, etc. In an attempt to curb whatever unbalanced view that you might be tempted to have of that doctrine from your text isolated from both the rest of scripture and the communal interpretation of scripture over the years, compare then to a confessional understanding of that doctrine—this will save you many a theological error!~

L. Significance or “Take Home”-- You will want to carefully limit your application to only that which naturally and genuinely may be derived from the main point. In some cases, your text may have "secondary" points, but they will be related to the main point in an obvious way. Your "application" then ought to be governed by the main point. 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 main point 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.

5) What are some common interpretation fallacies that we should avoid?

6) How do we move from Bible interpretation to Leading a Bible Study

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.

7) How do I move from Bible Interpretation to Discerning God's Will?

- **Two Wrong Views:]**

- View #1: There is NO so called "divine blueprint"**

- View # 2: There IS a "divine blueprint" AND it is our duty to find it!**

- Charismatic Method: The Blueprint revealed "In Word and *a word*"

- Illus. Landscape Design: Letter of basic instructions with architectural Drawings

- Mainstream Method: The Blueprint revealed in “Word and Sign”
Illus. Landscape Design: Letter of basic instructions with tools and plants provided
- **A Third (Right) View: There is a Divine Blueprint, but it is mostly kept secret to us, and we discover the way that we are to go “step by step” *in the discovery of divine wisdom***

View #3 Applied: The Search For “Divine Wisdom”

Divine Wisdom discovered in word relative to “the system”

Assumptions:

1. God has a specific and detailed plan for each Christian’s life (blueprint) there IS a specific plan of God for individuals
2. God DOES NOT will to reveal it all at once
3. Scripture doesn’t speak to everything directly, BUT SCRIPTURE IS SUFFICIENT FOR DIVINE WISDOM EVEN FOR THE LEAST THINGS by Biblical Wisdom Applied!

AGAIN: Assumption -- There IS an individual and specific plan for every Christian, but it is strictly and intentionally kept secret... God does NOT normally reveal anything about it to us.. it is information that is for now at least for God’s use alone as he directs the affairs of our life... we simply discover it after the fact!

OUR RESPONSIBILITY: To live according to divine wisdom—

E.g. In this view, divine guidance has nothing to do with discerning this secret plan and using it to make decisions. Guidance rather is given by God when he gives us insight into issues and choices so that we make the decisions with divinely inspired wisdom. Guidance comes, in short, by God making us wise... there is no seeking for the clues or signs, there is no need for a direct word... e.g. step by step—God is in the system therefore we trust that he is in the system and that in due course, as we need, it, we will be wise unto wise decisions. Again, the wisdom view does believe in divine guidance and does believe there is a sovereign plan, but that God’s guidance comes gradually as to include everything, every experience, every training, every knowledge of Scripture—that has accumulated up to the point when the decision must be made--- His guidance is mediated by the illumination (not revelation) of our minds and hearts in keeping with the Scripture! ..

Illustration: The Darkroom

First two views assume darkness and therefore need a guiding hand to lead us through unfamiliar and dark room....

Charismatic—by audible/supernatural instructions.. turn right, turn left... stop.. e.g. “ a word from the Lord, dreams, divine “intuitions”, strong sense of.... etc.

Mainstream Christian—by shuffling along with a stick seeking the clues of where the wall turns left or right, etc...

Divine wisdom—takes into account the things he/she has learned over the years about rooms—and knows that most rooms in the 20th century have light switch near the door... and uses it... —so that we walk in light, even though the light doesn't tell us where to walk straight and turn... we have the “light” to know this anyway!

Summary:

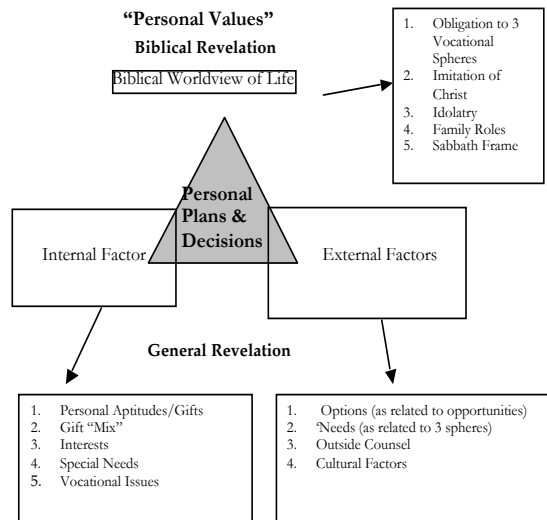
- 1) God does have one specific plan for your life
- 2) The events and choices of your life irresistibly and sovereignly work that plan in every detail... one cannot flunk out of it.. it has all our mistakes, blindnesses and sins accounted for in advance.. e.g., God's all encompassing providence...

Note: WCF chapter 5...

Discerning the Will of God The Three Circles

- i. Inner circle: Prohibitions
- ii. Middle Circle: Positive Commands
- iii. Outer Circle: Biblical Worldview (Wisdom)

**Three Dynamics in
Personal Decision Making (Work the Triangle)**



A Systems Approach to Divine Guidance

- There IS an individual and specific plan for every Christian.
- It is strictly and intentionally kept secret... God does NOT normally reveal anything about it to us...
- Divine guidance has nothing to do with discerning this secret plan and using it to make decisions.
- Guidance is given by God when he gives us insight into issues and choices so that we make the decisions with divinely inspired wisdom. Guidance comes, in short, by God making us wise... there is no seeking for the clues or signs, there is no need for a direct word...
- An approach that stresses the Sufficiency of Scripture coupled with divine Providence over time, Godly counsel
- Step by step—God is in the system therefore we trust that he will guide us to discover his perfect and good will *step by step*.
 - (Col.1:9-10, Philip.1:9-11, Eph.5:15-17, James 1:5-7, 13-17)