

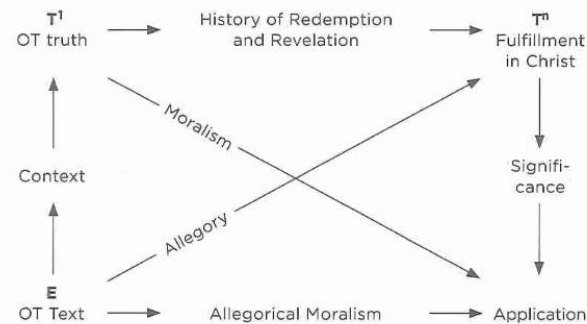
Interpretive Methods | Part I

Over the next two weeks we will delve into the fundamental steps of a God-centered and Christ-centered interpretation. All of the previous weeks provided over-arching themes from Scripture so that we can easily navigate the particulars of Scripture as we interpret them for us today.



AN INTERPRETIVE GRID

- One of the great tendencies of any Christian reading a passage of Scripture is to begin with the text and move immediately to application.
- Let's not miss what the Scriptures are actually saying for themselves (meaning), and then what the Scriptures are saying to us (application).
- An interpretive diagram adapted from Ed Clowney.¹



- This can be applied whether one is in the Old Testament or the New Testament.
- The event (E) in a particular *context* symbolizes a truth (T¹) of God's revelation. This is a truth to the first power. It continues through God's historical revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ (History of Redemption and Revelation), that is, the truth to the nth power (Tⁿ). The *significance* of its fulfillment in Christ is interpreted by us through the Scriptures and then *applied* by our listeners.
- Three destructive pathways to avoid:

1. **Allegorical Moralism:** When we remove a detail from its context and apply it immediately to ourselves with no reference to the context in Scripture, Christ, or his gospel.²

i.e. The boundaries of the twelve tribes in Joshua 13-19, a man concludes "The boundaries needed to be established; therefore, my wife needs to establish proper boundaries between work, family and rest."

¹ Iain M. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013), 15.

² Duguid, 14-18.

2. **Allegory:** When superficial details of a text are used to find obscure references to Christ where none was originally intended.

i.e. “A Christian author argued that the reason the tent pegs of the tabernacle were partly in the ground and partly out of the ground was to teach us that the gospel is not just about the death of Jesus Christ (that part in the ground) but also about the resurrection (the part above the ground).”

3. **Moralism:** Rightly understanding the truth of the passage in the light of the original context, but when the truth of the passage is brought to bear on us, there is no reference to the fulfillment of the truth in Christ.

i.e. Dare to be a Daniel.

An objection:

Person 1 “These verses can’t possibly mean that!”

Person 2 “Well, what are your theological assumptions?” “What is your hermeneutic?”

- Keep in mind all of the foundational “30,000ft” material we have already learned from the previous weeks: Eyes on Christ, the Covenantal Settings, Context, the Law of God, Promise & Command. These three steps will aid us in drawing proper lines from text to application.

Step 1: Ignorance	→	1 Observation: <i>What does it say?</i>
Step 2: Misunderstanding	→	2 Elucidation (Interpretation + Correlation): <i>What does it mean?</i>
Step 3: Inaction	→	3 Application: <i>How does it change us/me?</i>

OBSERVATION

- To observe a text is to ask, “**What does it say?**” When we have read the Bible for many years, many passages may become “over familiar” to us. We *think* we know what the text says and in conclusion we cease to observe what it *really* says, and in so doing, we fail to read it properly.
- We need to condition ourselves to always “be looking” as we read Scripture and never shortcut the observation step regardless of how familiar we are with a text.

Observational Toolbox:

1. Note each word, each phrase, and each arrangement of words into sentences (diagraming a sentence).
 - Remember that one word can have more than one sense (context-driven).
 - Note the use of words: Literal, Dual Meaning, Symbolic
 - Ask all kinds of questions, particularly, “What does this word mean, and what does it contribute to the passage?”
 - Diagram the sentence
 - Consult lexicons particularly in original languages, if capable.
2. Ask who, what, when, where, how:

- Who is writing? Who is mentioned? What is said, What are they doing?
 - Where are we? Where in history? Where is the setting?
 - When did this happen?
 - How is this connected to the wider context, the whole book, the testament?
3. Answer even the questions that have an obvious answer.
 4. At first, concentrate on what the passage says, not on the rest of the Bible.
 5. Beware of bringing in a lot of other ideas (exception: In the application step, judging legitimate applications will involve some knowledge of the general teaching of Scripture)
 6. Don't leap too quickly into elucidation and application.
 7. Don't jump to commentaries or the Greek/Hebrew text. See how closely you can study the passage in English. The main point is to discipline ourselves to study the text first-hand.

Ephesians 2:1-10	OBSERVATION	ELUCIDATION	APPLICATION
1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins	1 "You" Who does Paul have in mind? Cf. v.3. Sing. or Pl.?		
2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-	2 Past time, when? Pre conversion? "World" in what sense? "prince" = Satan? "Sons of disobedience" = who? Why described so?		
3 among whom we all once lived in the passion of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.	3 "Us" v. "you" in v.1 Jews? Before and after here. Strong desires Flesh includes what? "Wrath" -from God? Now or in the future? "Rest" -pagans?		
4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,	4 "But" is contrast. "God" -the Father? Love and mercy from God. He loved us the past? When?		
5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-	5 Living/dead. "With Christ" -how? Allusion to v.1. When? "Grace" connected with mercy and love.		
6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,	6 "With Christ" again (vv5,6). "Seated" -meaning? "In Christ" -why? See v.7.		
7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus	7 What are coming ages? "Show" to whom? "Grace" "saved" theme. "Kindness" = "mercy" of v.4		
8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this not of your own doing; it is the gift of God,	8 Why repeated? Why faith? "This" is what? Contrast between yourselves and God.		
9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.	9 "Not" contrasts works, what works? Why is boasting tempting?		
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.	10 God working what? "In Christ" -why repeated? "Works" vs. v.9 What is the difference? Works prepared, how? We actors v. God?		

ELUCIDATION

- Elucidation is an effort to understand the meaning of the text.
- The interpretation of a text happens not only from the text itself (classical *interpretation* methods) but from its relationship to the other parts of Scripture, *correlation*.
- Correlation means examining how one passage fits in with other passages on the same topic or theme, and it coincides with our convictions regarding *Scripture interprets Scripture*. “Elucidation in the fullest sense includes not only attention to the meaning of our passage, but also attention to the relation of its meaning to other passages.”³
- The elucidation step has two sub-steps.

Sub-Step 1: Interpretation

1. Understand the passage itself in distinction from other passages.
2. Answer your questions raised under “Observation” where possible. Not all texts can be interpreted with precision without “Correlation”!
3. Unpack any obscurities.
4. Note how the parts reinforce and qualify one another.
5. Make inferences about general principles embodied in the passage.
6. Draw conclusions about the main points and overall structure of the passage.

³ Vern Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 65.

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1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins	1 “You” Who does Paul have in mind? Cf. v.3.	1 “You” may be Gentiles. Dead spiritually. Powerless to change ourselves	
2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-	2 Past time, when? Pre conversion? “World” in what sense? Prince = not King, Satan? ‘the spirit’ related? Power of the air? “Sons of disobedience” = who? Why described so?	2 “World is used in an evil sense. Two kingdoms with two heads. Satan is a powerful ruler. All unbelievers are subject to him, whether they know it or not.	
3 among whom we all once lived in the passion of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.	3 “Us” v. “you” in v.1 Jews? Before and after here. Strong desires Flesh includes what? “Rest” –pagans? “Wrath” –from God? Now or in the future?	3 Being “of the world” means being disobedient to God. It can be pleasant (for a time). God’s wrath (righteous anger) and judgment are real against Satan and his subjects.	
4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,	4 “But” is contrast. “God” –the Father? Love and mercy from God.	4 God’s kingdom is antithetic. He brought us in by pure grace and gift.	
5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-	5 Living/dead. “With Christ” –how? Allusion to v.1. When? “Grace” connected with mercy and love.	5 Christ is model and representative. What happens to Christ must happen to us “with him” and “in him”	
6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,	6 “With Christ” again (vv5,6). “Seated” –meaning? “In Christ” –why? See v.7.	6 We are alive, raised, seated (given power).	
7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus	7 What are coming ages? “Show” to whom? “Grace” “saved” theme. “Kindness” = “mercy” of v.4	7 We are a display forever of God’s goodness.	
8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this not of your own doing; it is the gift of God,	8 Why repeated? Why faith? “This” is what? Contrast of yourselves, God.	8 Faith relies on God, hence is opposite of boasting in what I have done (works). Faith itself is a gift of God.	
9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.	9 “Not” contrasts works, what? Why is boasting tempting?	9 Boasting in self denies the true work of God alone and opposes God’s kingdom.	
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.	10 God working what? “In Christ” –why repeated? “Works” vs. v.9 What is the difference? Works prepared, how? We actors v. God?	10 God is the creator of our whole new life which includes good works planned before. Hence we do not boast in good works, integral as they may be to our new existence by new “creation.”	

