

Interpretive Methods | Part II

We continue with the fundamental steps of a God-centered and Christ-centered interpretation. All the previous weeks provided over-arching themes from Scripture so that we can more easily navigate the particulars of Scripture as we interpret them for us today. Today we conclude with *Elucidation* (sub-step: Correlation) and finally *Application*.



ELUCIDATION

- Interpretation (step 1) focuses primarily on the text at hand. Interpretation ought to be centered foremost within the parameters of your text.
- Correlation (step 2) means examining how one passage fits in with other passages on the same topic or theme in order to more fully interpret your text.

Step 2: Correlation

- Correlation assumes what we call *Macro-Observations*: Observations beyond your text in the rest of Scripture that help to elucidate your particular text.

Considerations

1. Word and Structure

- Look for repetition of the words and phrases in other parts of the book. Patterns.
 - CAUTION: Sometimes a single appearance of a word can be more significant than repetitions of it, do not assume low frequency means less important.
 - Note the chapters before and after your text, then the whole book. This clarifies the context.
 - Considering the logical flow, your text *will* fall within an overarching structure.

2. Topical Correlation

- Take time to observe the entire book where your text resides, if possible, read the whole book.
 - Note the genre(s) of the whole book: history, poetry, prophecy, epistolary, apocalyptic, etc.
- Link passages that address the same topic or overlapping topics. This is where systematic theology matters. Are there other places in Scripture that clarify doctrinal confusion in your text? (e.g., marriage, justification, elder, anger)
 - What other verses in your book help further elaborate on your passage, then the whole of your chapter, then the adjoining books, then the whole of your testament, then the entirety of Scripture, Genesis to Revelation? Use references in your Bible.

3. Redemptive Correlations

- How does your passage link texts dealing with successive periods of time? This is known as redemptive history, whereby God works out in time his plan for the history of creation, fall, redemption,

consummation.

- **Remember:** All of Scripture has its fulfillment in Christ as we live under the Covenant of Grace. You must interpret with this in view, following the method of Christ (Luke 24:44ff).
 - o Typology (type/antitype); The Law: Forms & Functions; Union with Christ

4. Historical Correlations

- Are there other places in Scripture that clarify the historical background of your passage?
 - o The Psalms of David → Samuel, Kings, or Chronicles
 - o The Letter to the Ephesians → Acts 18-20
- Observe the historical and cultural background and setting (a more disciplined endeavor)
 - o CAUTION: Using outside sources can be difficult to navigate. Remember outside sources are subject to human depravity and fallibility. But this does *not* mean we should abandon their use altogether.

REMEMBER: 1. Use correlation but know that it may confuse you if you're not familiar with the whole Bible, so handle with care. 2. As you apply your text, the focus should be your text (e.g., Mt 18:21 explicitly focuses on forgiveness and not repentance like Luke 17:3-4. Why?).

APPLICATION

- The application of our text presumes something significant before we finish our study. Whether for personal study, bible study, or to teach a class, we are not merely readers of God's word. We are theological teachers of God's word. At some point, you will impart what you believe you learned from the text.
- There is room for doubt, and it is okay for us to struggle and, to an extent, to doubt. But good theology arises from a contrite heart that wants to lovingly know and speak the truth (Eph 4:15). The goal is not a creative, permissive, open, free-wheeling study. The goal is to sit under your Lord and Master and walk in his ways.
- The destination is for God to transform us (Rom 12:2). Yet we are responsible for the conclusions we draw. Therefore, patience and gentleness are extremely important here. It takes time, and not every moment affords the time for all corrections of theology or practice (or warrants them).

Considerations

- Generally: Ask and answer questions about what you should believe or what you should do on the basis of the passage. If you see it, you *should* do it.
- Some texts are simply doxological.
 - o Actively praise God. Remember we study God's word in the presence of God. He is there with you. Talk to him, glorify him.
- Some texts are explicit commands:
 - o Prepare questions that help connect commands to your life.
 - o Perhaps write down questions that encourage application for yourself (e.g., What encourages me to believe I have not received God's mercy when in fact I already have?). Consider questions that encourage application to *our* time as the church (e.g., What pressures encourage the church to think that salvation is our own doing?).

- Some texts have implicit commands often gathered from other explicit references.
- Is there a fallen condition focus? (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, Bryan Chapell). This is an identification of that place in the passage that humanity all shares and needs the grace of God. It connects the biblical writer to all modern readers by connecting that sin(s) to Christ's gospel and the gospel to the reader (e.g., guilt, shame, sexual immorality, boasting)
 - o Do I need to repent?
 - o Remember Jesus fulfills it!
- Beware of man-made traditions, or personal preferences made into commands, or conclude "God literally spoke to me." Your conclusion is sanctified wisdom, not God *verbally* speaking to you.

Further Points of Reflection

- Consider formulating 3-4 overarching applications for your study based on your *application points*.
 - o Think of personal, social, or cultural idols that relate.
 - o Where is the call to repent (fallen condition focus)? "Stop, let me go to the Lord in prayer."
 - o Where is the call to faith? "Stop, let me call upon the Lord for faith."
 - o What illustrations are appropriate to the text for learning purposes?
 - o Are you part of a study on this text: Consult other believers. What are their circumstances, needs, and ways in which they see the text as relevant to them?
- If teaching, think about your audience, and adapt the applications to them without veering off your text.
 - o What should they do differently because of this passage?
 - o How would this text challenge *this* person and *that* person differently? Or similarly?
 - o Perhaps homework is warranted?
 - o Make application of every major point and minor points as you can. Include illustrations.
 - o Prune accordingly. You cannot say everything 😊
 - o Asking Questions
 - Support your outline with the verbatim questions that will facilitate the discussion toward those truths you hope to convey.
 - Ask for personal illustrations from participants to support their points, where possible.

Ephesians 2:1-10	OBSERVATION	ELUCIDATION INTERPRETATION & CORRELATION	APPLICATION
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	1 You are to remember how it was before you were a Christian. What if raised a Christian? Contrast what would have been...
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?	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.	2 A dead lifestyle of disobedience implies trespassing and sinning. Satan (all things) is also under the feet (authority) of Jesus (Eph 1:22) on account of the gospel (1:19-20).
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.	3 This "nature" is inherited (imputed). It is there from birth, born with these selfish passions (Rom 5).
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.	4 This love was before the foundation of the world. An eternal plan to accomplish, display his love for us (Eph 1:4-5).

Ephesians 2:1-10	OBSERVATION	ELUCIDATION INTERPRETATION & CORRELATION	APPLICATION
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 happens to us - "with him" and "in him"	5 Union with Christ! (Eph 1... in Christ 1:3, in him v4, in the Beloved v6, in him v7, unite all things in him v10, v11, v12, v13
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).	6 Heaven has broken into earth and spiritually brought us to him v1-3. The head of salvation is Christ: Covenant of Grace!
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.	7 This infinite grace will be seen at the consummation, for our benefit (Rev 21:5-7; 22:5).
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 repeat? 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.	8 cf. Rom 12:3 8 Even our own faith is from God. I can't work for it! Attending church or receiving sacraments won't make me right with God. They are a godly response to his grace received.
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 set one over against others.	9 My sanctification does not justify me before God (Rom 3). 9 Don't boast! Don't allow other Christians to do it either. Remember the freeness of God's love. A haughty local church is weird
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 creator of our whole new life, includes good works planned before. Hence, we do not boast in good works, integral as they may be to our new existence	10 Those works are addressed for us in Eph 3, 4-6. Unity in the church is highly emphasized. 10 God planned for good to flow from new life. Keep God's commands (moral law is good!). Where am I lazy with God's commands? Be alert for opportunities to do good. These are "God's plan for your life."

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