

S T U D Y G U I D E

Knowing Scripture

R.C. Sproul



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Renew your Mind.

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Introduction

Christians need some basic guidance on how to interpret the Bible. Just a few principles of interpretation will go a long way toward helping the believer understand the Scriptures. Here are the easy-to-use skills for your own personal study. Through the course you will learn how to approach difficult passages, how to find the true meaning of each verse, and how to place each passage in its proper context. This series is sure to be helpful to all who seek to know God's revelation better. These lectures parallel R. C. Sproul's book *Knowing Scripture*. Listed below are the titles of each lecture.

Why Study the Bible?
Private Interpretation
The Science of Interpretation
Literal Interpretation
Literary Forms – Part I
Literary Forms – Part II
Reading the Bible Existentially
The Historical Narrative
The Explicit and the Implicit
Parallelisms
Scripture and Culture
Principle Versus Custom

A concluding lesson offers the opportunity to put together all the principles discovered in this series. A complete exegesis of a particular passage of the Bible is the goal of this lesson.

Why Study the Bible?

LECTURE

- I. The Christian today has little understanding of Scripture.
 - a. The Bible outsells all other books.
 - b. There is a religious fervor but a lack of Bible literacy.
- II. Two reasons are given.
 - a. The Bible is no longer relevant to our times.
 - b. The Bible is too difficult and boring
 - c. Luther sought to make the Bible available to the common man.
- III. The basic message of the Bible is clear.
 - a. Luther maintained that the message of redemption could be understood even by a child.
 - b. The principle of PERSPICUITY or clarity became the heart of the Reformation for Luther.
 - c. The Cross was primitive and obscene.
- IV. It is our DUTY to study the Bible.
 - a. God commands His people in Deuteronomy 6:4–9.
 - b. God requires diligent and careful study.
- V. It is our PRIVILEGE to study the Bible.
 - a. We find unbelievable treasures of wisdom.
 - b. We learn to live.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. Three reasons given for biblical illiteracy today are that the Bible is _____, _____ and _____.

2. Dr. Sproul contends that our reasons for not studying the Bible are not so much philosophical as motivational. We are _____!
3. When Luther argued that even a child could understand the message of redemption contained in the Bible, he was arguing for the _____ of Scripture.
4. The _____ offers a basis for the study of the Bible in passages like Deuteronomy 6:6–9 and 2 Timothy 3:14–17.
5. For the Christian, studying the Bible is both a _____ and a _____.

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. Which of the three myths of Bible study seem most troublesome to today's believers? Why?
2. List below some differences between reading and studying the Bible. Do these differences shed any light on why there is a lack of biblical literacy among Christians today?

Reading

1.

2.

3.

Studying

1.

2.

3.

3. In the space provided below, write a short four or five sentence paragraph outlining the “basic message of the Bible” as you understand it.
4. Now that you have looked at the importance of careful, diligent Bible study, what do you plan to do with this information this week?

I plan to . . .

A.

B.

C.

5. What feelings do you have when the topic of studying the Bible (as opposed to just reading it) comes up?
6. How has the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture affected your personal approach to the Bible?
7. What questions and issues does this lecture bring to focus for you?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 and Psalm 73, then seek to answer the following question: What is the difference between pleasure and happiness, and what does Scripture have to say about this difference that is so vital?

In *Knowing Scripture* Dr. Sproul observes:

Reflect for a moment. What happens in your own life when you act according to what you feel like doing rather than what you know and understand God says you should do? Here we encounter the ruthless reality of the difference between happiness and pleasure. How easy it is to confuse the two! The pursuit of happiness is regarded as our “inalienable right.” But happiness and pleasure are not the same thing. Both of them feel good, but only one endures. Sin can bring pleasure, but never happiness. If sin were not so pleasurable, it would hardly represent a temptation. Yet, while sin often “feels good,” it does not produce happiness. If we do not know the difference, or worse yet, do not care about the difference, we have made great strides in becoming the ultimate sensuous Christian (p. 29).

2. Read Psalm 19 where David celebrates God’s self-disclosure in Nature (verses 1–6) and in the Bible (verses 7–14). The word law (*Torah*) in vs. 7 refers not only to the legal portions of the Old Testament but also to the whole revelation of God in Scripture given up to the time of David. According to David, what can we know of God through nature? What further knowledge is given in the Bible? What specific benefits accrue to the person who abides by the Torah? Record your responses below.

THINK ABOUT IT

Now that you have listened to this lecture, it is time for you to study these ideas more completely. Using your Bible, work through one of the following exercises.

1. If you do not have a regular schedule for reading through the Bible, carve twenty minutes out of your hectic schedule for reading through a portion of the Bible each day. For example, you might want to read through the Gospel of John by reading three chapters each day (there are twenty-one chapters). Ask yourself one question

as you read; How does this passage speak to the issues and circumstances of my life today? Record your observations below, and at the end of the week ask yourself this question: What difference did the reading make?

OR

2. Take a week and read through Psalm 119. There are twenty-two sections, each section corresponding to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Read two sections a day and three sections on the last day. Keep a running tabulation of the following:
 - a. Psalmist's feelings about Scripture
 - b. What you learned about God
 - c. Benefits of studying Scripture

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 13-32 in *Knowing Scripture*.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. not relevant, too difficult to understand, boring
2. Lazy
3. Perspicuity
4. Bible itself
5. duty, privilege

Private Interpretation

LECTURE

- I. “That’s your interpretation!”
 - a. This could be the slogan for subjectivism.
 - b. Some people believe that a contradiction can exist in the Bible.
 - c. Luther and Rome feared that the Bible could be distorted if printed so all could read it.
- II. What was the issue of private interpretation all about?
 - a. The Roman Catholic Church tried to suppress it.
 - b. Rome felt that private interpretation would open a floodgate of iniquity and fragment the Church.
 - c. Fragmentation has been the price we have had to pay in order to make the Gospel available to all nations.
- III. There is only one correct meaning of any biblical text.
 - a. However, there may be a multitude of applications.
 - b. Truth is not contradictory.
 - c. Relativism takes the position that truth can be contradictory.
 - d. Satan used the “principle of contradiction” in the Garden.
 - e. The right of private interpretation carries with it the responsibility of correct interpretation.
 - f. Our interpretation must always be monitored and compared to the collective wisdom of others.
- IV. It is necessary to distinguish between EXEGESIS and EISEGESIS.
 - a. Exegesis is drawing out from a passage what is contained within.
 - b. Eisegesis means reading into the passage something that is not there.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. The Roman Catholic Church feared that _____ would open a “floodgate of iniquity” and fragment the Church.
2. In _____ we read the meaning out of the text.
3. In _____ we read the meaning into the text.
4. The right of private interpretation carries with it the responsibility of _____ interpretation.
5. A biblical text may have _____ meaning(s) but _____ applications (s).
6. _____ is present when the interpretation of a text is completely controlled by the interpreter.

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. What do you feel is the most important issue raised in this lecture?
2. How do you respond to the battle that raged between Protestants and Catholics during the Reformation?
3. What was Rome’s fear about the doctrine of private interpretation?
4. The most important issue raised in this lecture is _____ for the following reasons:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
5. Dr. Sproul writes, “Private interpretation opened the Bible for the laymen, but it did not do away with the principle of the educated clergy.” What value/priority do you (and your church leaders) put upon life-long Christian education? What provisions do you individually (and corporately) need to make to more firmly establish the place of adult Christian education?

6. What kinds of measures ought to be taken in your church to guard against eisegesis and promote sound ex?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
7. What do you know about the proliferation of cult and sectarian groups that substantiates the need to safeguard against eisegesis?
8. What other issues and questions does this lecture raise for you?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Now that you have listened to this lecture it is time for you to study these ideas more completely. Using your Bible, work through the following exercise.

Take a familiar Bible text like John 3:16 or 1 John 4:10 and meditate on it. Determine what is the “meaning” and the fifteen “applications”. Have you come up with the correct meaning of the text? How do you know?

Meaning:

Applications:

THINK ABOUT IT

- 1a. Read Matthew 13:1–9. Write down the one meaning you believe to be the true understanding of the passage. Write out fifteen applications and implications of this text for your life and church.
- 1b. Now read Matthew 13:10–23. Compare your one meaning discovered above with the central meaning Jesus Himself provides. What are the differences; how significant are the variations between the two? If there are differences, what consequences does this have for your implication/application section?
2. Read John 10:22–30. Write down the one meaning you believe to be the true understanding of the passage. Write out fifteen applications and implications of this text for your life and church.

How does the issue of private interpretation affect your reading and study habits? Does the Bible have the number one place on your agenda? Do you have

a study agenda? A place to study? A time to study? Do you have a basic working Bible study library? (See Chapter Six of *Knowing Scripture*). If you answered NO to any of the last five questions and would like to answer any with a YES, make an appointment with your group leader or Pastor to begin to implement a program for yourself.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The following books will shed further light on this topic.

R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* p. 33–43.

Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. private interpretation
2. exegesis
3. eisegesis
4. correct
5. only one, many
6. subjectivism

3

The Science of Interpretation

LECTURE

- I. Interpreting the Bible is both an art and a science.
 - a. Interpretation can be subjective.
 - b. True interpretation must be objective since there is only one true meaning.
 - c. As in other sciences, interpreting Scripture is governed by rules.
 - d. HERMENEUTICS is the science of biblical interpretation in which we seek to understand the message of the Scripture.
- II. Liberal theology challenged traditional methods of interpreting the Bible.
 - a. The Church was seen as an institution worth preserving for the betterment of the human race.
 - b. The traditional Church erroneously took the position that the Gospel should be made relevant to today's problems as though it was not already.
- III. There are three major methods of interpretation used today.
 - a. The GRAMMATICO-HISTORICAL METHOD IS THE CLASSICAL approach.
 - i. Grammatico-historical strives to discover the original meaning of the texts.
 - ii. Grammatico-historical seeks to bridge the gap between the time Scripture was written and the 20th century when it is being interpreted.
 - b. The RELIGIOUS-HISTORICAL method takes the view that religion along with everything else is evolving from the simple to the complex.
 - i. The "documentary hypothesis" claimed that the first five books of the Bible were authored by many men.
 - ii. The modern computer utilizing all available data has conclusively proven that only one man wrote these books.
 - c. The EXISTENTIAL method maintains that God speaks through the bible to each person directly from above.

- i. The authors wrote but we interpret in the present according to our own existential situation.
- ii. We have bought into a view of relativism that says there are no absolutes or abiding principles.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. Since there is only one true meaning of any given text, interpretation must be _____ .
2. Homiletics is the science of interpretation. True or False
3. The 19th century liberal wanted to discard the _____ elements in the Bible.
4. We do not need to make the Gospel relevant, we need only to _____ its relevance.
5. The _____ method of interpretation strives to discover the original meaning of the text, then bridge the gap between biblical times and our own.
6. In the _____ method of interpretation the Bible is not the Word of God, but it *becomes* the Word when God speaks directly to me through it.
7. The _____ method argues that, along with everything else, religion is evolving from the simple to the complex.

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. Which of the three major approaches to interpretation exert the most influence on today's evangelicals and why?
2. Do the religious-historical and existential approaches to interpretation offer any helpful insights about how to approach the Bible?
3. What are some ways to enable a local church or denomination to carefully uphold and practice the grammatico-historical method of biblical interpretation?

4. Does God say, “I wrote it; you interpret it”? Why or why not?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Interpret a passage of Scripture (for example, Genesis 1) using:

1. The grammatico-historical method
2. The religious-historical method
3. The existential method

THINK ABOUT IT

Now that you have listened to this lecture, it is time for you to study these ideas more completely.

1. In anticipation of future lessons, attempt to list those rules and guidelines which safeguard the interpretive process. Take into consideration the authority of the Bible, varying literary forms, cultural contexts, etc.
2. Read Dr. Sproul’s discussion of the grammatico-historical method in the book *Knowing Scripture* (pages 56–61) where he highlights the importance of carefully examining the grammatical structure and historical background of a passage.
3. Choose several of the terms used by Dr. Sproul in his book and lecture, such as “hermeneutics,” “exegesis,” or “existentialism” and look them up in a dictionary of theology. (You might start with *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker, 1987.)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 46–60 in *Knowing Scripture*.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. objective
2. False
3. Supernatural
4. Show
5. Grammatico-historical
6. Existential
7. Religious-historical

4

Literal Interpretation

LECTURE

- I. Why should we interpret the Bible literally?
 - a. Luther sought the literal sense (*sensus literalis*) of Scripture (the plain sense of the meaning of the text).
 - b. There is no hidden or mysterious meaning in the text.
- II. Spiritualistic interpretation turns the Bible into a book of magic.
 - a. “Lucky-dipping” is a popular method of interpretation.
 - b. God did not inspire passages of Scripture many years ago to tell us answers totally unrelated to the literal meaning originally intended.
 - c. God does use Scripture to speak to us, but the message is always consistent with the literal interpretation.
 - i. Augustine was moved by a passage in Romans.
 - ii. Jonathan Edwards was also converted by the literal interpretation of Romans.
- III. We must be able to recognize the literary form in which the Bible comes to us.
 - a. It is not always easy to discern the difference (example of Jonah).
 - b. Unbelief of the traditional meaning is not to be a reason for reinterpreting a passage to fit our beliefs.
 - c. Some have read prophecy into passages never meant to predict future events. This can also be a serious mistake.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. Literal interpretation looks for the “literal sense” of the passage and does not pay attention so much to literary forms. True or False

2. Since the Bible is the Word of God we dare not interpret it like any other book. True or False
3. Paul wrote his letters not in “Holy Greek”, but the common Greek of the market place. True or False
4. Fortunately for us, it is always easy to identify a particular literary form in the Bible. True or False
5. If we are unable to find the “plain meaning” of a text we should look for the deeper meaning. True or False
6. Augustine’s conversion through the Romans 13 text assures us that “lucky dipping” is a useful and reliable source of guidance. True or False

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. List below some differences between literal interpretation and a literalistic approach to biblical interpretation.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. State in a few sentences how your approach to biblical interpretation has been challenged or changed by the first four lectures of *Knowing Scripture*.
3. The most important point made in this lecture discussion time is . . .

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Now that you have listened to this lecture it is time for you to study these ideas more completely. Using your Bible and other suggested resources, work through one or more of the following exercises.

1. Read the book of Jonah in its entirety. As you read, list the arguments for and against an historical and poetical approach to interpreting the book. Which approach commends itself to you?

- a. Arguments *for* an historical approach:
 - b. Arguments *against* an historical approach:
 - c. Arguments *for* a poetical approach:
 - d. Arguments *against* a poetical approach:
2. Study the passage of Matthew 16:13–20. Notice the problem of interpretation that surrounds verses 18, 19, and 20. Each of the three verses has unique interpretive problems. Taken together the entire passage raises many difficulties. Apply the principles you have learned thus far to discover the meaning of this passage. (It would be important to have commentaries available for reference during this time of the lesson).

THINK ABOUT IT

This week carve out twenty minutes each day to sample a few of the diverse literary forms present in the Bible. If you have a commentary, do background work as you go along. As you read, ask yourself how an understanding of the particular form shapes your interpretation and application of the text.

<i>Monday</i>	Psalm 32, a didactic (teaching) psalm. The psalmist gives us advice for wise living.
<i>Tuesday</i>	Book of Ruth, an historical narrative. Look for examples and illustrations of a living faith.
<i>Wednesday</i>	Mark 4:1-20, a parable. Look for one central thrust
<i>Thursday</i>	Colossians, a first century letter. What are the theological and practical issues and problems that Paul addresses?
<i>Friday</i>	Mark 1–6, a “Gospel”
<i>Saturday</i>	Mark 7–12
<i>Sunday</i>	Mark 13–16

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 45–56 in *Knowing Scripture*.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. False
6. False

5

Literary Forms

Part I

LECTURE

- I. Language of appearances (phenomenological language) describes events as they appear to the naked eye.
 - a. Galileo's discovery that the earth was not the center of the universe embarrassed the Church.
 - b. We are talking here about matters of description—not matters of fact.
- II. Round numbers are often used.
 - a. Crowd estimates are used as with Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 people.
 - b. We use the same technique when describing crowds at mass gatherings.
- III. Hyperbole is used as an INTENTIONAL exaggeration of the truth in order to make a point.
 - a. "All Capernaum turned out," certainly did not mean that every man, woman, and child was there.
 - b. Jesus talked about the mustard seed being the smallest of the seeds. It illustrated a vast difference in the comparison made and should not be taken as scientific fact.
- IV. The metaphor was used to illustrate points by comparison to objects in nature or everyday experience.
 - a. "I am the vine."
 - b. "This is my body" has been interpreted differently by the Church fathers and represents a very difficult issue.
- V. Anthropomorphic language communicates in human terms, and the Incarnation was the ultimate example.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. _____ is the language of appearances—how events appear to the naked eye.
2. _____ is an intentional exaggeration of the truth to make a point.
3. _____ directly compares a well-known object with not-so-well-known object to make a point.
4. _____ describes God in human terms even though He is spiritual in nature.
5. The sun “rising” and “setting” is an example of _____.
6. God chooses to speak to us in human terms. The supreme example of this kind of accommodation is _____.

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. How would you explain to a non-Christian the truth that the Bible is both a divine and a human book?
2. On which side do you err? Do you tend to exalt the humanity of the Bible or the divinity? How do you know?
3. What do you think is the most important issue raised in this lecture and why?
4. What other issues does this lecture raise for you?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Study the “I Am” statements in John’s Gospel: John 6:35, 41, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5.
 - a. Compare these to a study of Exodus 3 (especially verses 13–14) in which God reveals His name to Moses.
 - b. Why did Jesus consistently use metaphorical language to reveal Himself.
 - c. Was there any confusion that resulted from this?
 - d. Did Jesus also reveal Himself in more propositional, non-metaphorical ways in John? If so, where?

- e. Do you find that such metaphorical language communicates more clearly to you? When you speak of Jesus to others (and especially to non-Christians), do you find it easier to use symbolic language, simile, and metaphor at times?
2. As R. C. states in the lecture, the Mormons believe God has a physical body with identifiable body parts (eyes, ears, arms, etc.).
 - a. What is the flaw in their hermeneutic that causes them to think this way?
 - b. Study some of these passages as found in Exodus 3:20, Deuteronomy 4:34; Isaiah 59:1; 64:1, 2; Genesis 11:5. What conclusions do you draw from these passages?
 - c. What are the Theology and practical problems that result from the Mormon view of God?
 - d. Suppose you were speaking to a knowledgeable Mormon. What Scripture would you use that goes beyond the metaphorical and speaks directly of the nature of God's being? (Example John 4:23, 24)
 3. In Ephesians 6:13–17, Paul uses metaphors to describe the armor of God. How much more effective is this than other means of description? List each and explain what Paul meant by each metaphor.

THINK ABOUT IT

This week take a closer look at Jesus' use of the literary forms discussed in this lecture by Dr. Sproul.

<i>Monday</i>	The purpose of parables? Matthew 13:1–23
<i>Tuesday</i>	The meaning of the parable of the sower? Matthew 13:1–23.
<i>Wednesday</i>	What is the theme of the parables in Matthew 25?
<i>Thursday</i>	What literary form does Jesus use to communicate truth about Himself and the Holy Spirit in John 7:37–44?
<i>Friday</i>	A look at Jesus' use of hyperbole: Matthew 6:2–4, 7:3–5, 23:23, 24; Mark 10:24–25.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Now that you have listened to this lecture, it is time for you to study these ideas more completely. Using the resources suggested, work through one or more of the following exercises. If you do not know where to obtain the reference works cited below, ask your Pastor for his assistance.

1. Read “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” for a careful discussion of literary forms and the authority of the Bible (www.reformed.org/documents/icbi.html).
2. Study Dr. Sproul’s section in *Knowing Scripture* on genre analysis (pages 49–54 and interpreting parables (pages 94–97), then read the article entitled “Parable” in *The New Bible Dictionary* (pages 932–934).
3. Read *The Cross and the Prodigal* by Kenneth E. Bailey, St. Louis, Concordia, 1978.) This is a penetrating study of the parable of the prodigal son as understood against background of Palestinian peasant life.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. Phenomenological language
2. Hyperbole
3. Metaphor
4. Anthropomorphic language
5. phenomenological language
6. the Incarnation

6

Literary Forms

Part II

LECTURE

- I. Personification attributes personal, human characteristics to inanimate objects.
 - a. “The hills clapped their hands” is an obvious example.
 - b. The passage about Balaam’s ass is in question.
 - i. Personification appears normally in poems.
 - ii. Some say that this passage is an example of a fable teaching a moral lesson.
 - iii. The story, however, is written as a narrative simply conveying facts about a miracle.
 - c. The serpent in the Garden of Eden raises questions in the minds of skeptics concerning the entire issue of the fall of man.
 - d. The Tree of Life sounds like a symbol, but it appears in the context of historical prose.
- II. The historical narrative describes actual events that occurred.
 - a. It is the historical aspect that is under attack today.
 - b. The Bible is redemptive HISTORY.
 - c. Our faith is dependent upon these events having actually occurred: a real Jesus, a real cross, a real risen Lord.
 - d. Characteristics of historical narrative are:
 - i. A setting in time or real historical place
 - ii. A prose style
 - iii. The presence of genealogies
 - iv. No obvious moral teaching

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. _____ attributes human characteristics to inanimate objects.
2. Neither Balaam's donkey nor the snake in the garden actually spoke; these are examples of the mythical element in the Bible. True or False
3. _____ concerns events that actually happened.
4. Christ's resurrection from the dead could be historical or mythical. In the end what really matters is having faith. True or False
5. The characteristics of historical narrative are:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. Dr. Sproul argues that it is critical to have a faith rooted in historical events—especially when we come to Christ's resurrection. What would life be like on Monday morning if Christianity were not rooted in history in the way Dr. Sproul suggests? From a more positive perspective, how does the historical validity of Christianity enable you to face the difficult way ahead?
2. Some "liberals" have given up belief in the supernatural; that is, belief that God has, does, or will break into the historical process in "non-natural" ways. How different are you? Note below the ways in which you feel God has been supernaturally present in your life this week.
3. The most important issue raised in this lesson was:

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. The messianic prophecies in particular speak of the future supernatural intervention of God in history. Their fulfillment occupies much of the New Testament account of Jesus' life and of His second coming. Study these passages and not any

- hermeneutical problems that might occur. Genesis 3:15; Deuteronomy 8:15–19; Isaiah 9:2–7, 7:10–14, 11:1–5, 40:9–11, 53:1–12; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9–10; Malachi 3:1; Luke 2:1–20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelation 5:1–14, 21:1–7.
- a. Are these intended to be literally fulfilled in history?
 - b. Decide if there is any element of personification, metaphor, phenomenological language, hyperbole or anthropomorphic language being used. How might this alter the traditional interpretation of these texts?
 - c. As a result of your study, are you more or less certain about the literal fulfillment of these prophecies in the incarnation of Christ? Are you more or less certain about His literal second coming at some future time in history?
2. How do you interpret portions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation? Using the principles learned thus far, apply them to specific passages and state why you have drawn your particular conclusions.
- a. Isaiah 6:1–13
 - b. Ezekiel 1:1–3:15
 - c. Revelation 5, 12, 13

THINK ABOUT IT

Using the suggested readings below, take fifteen minutes each day this week to acquaint yourself more thoroughly with the differences between personification and historical narrative.

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Monday</i> | Identify the narrative and poetic elements in Genesis 1–3. |
| <i>Tuesday</i> | Read Numbers 22–24 and decide for yourself the literary form of Balaam’s talking donkey. |
| <i>Wednesday</i> | Read Isaiah 55 and identify the different literary forms present? |
| <i>Thursday</i> | Read John 1:1–18 and 1 John 1:1–4. Is John describing an historical event? How do you know? |
| <i>Friday</i> | Read the accounts of the empty tomb in Matthew 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; and John 20:1–10. Is an historical event being described? |
| <i>Saturday</i> | Read about the appearance of the risen Christ in Matthew 28:11–20; Luke 24:13–53, and John 20:11–21:25. Is this myth or history? How do you know? |

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 68–75 in *Knowing Scripture*.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. Personification
2. False
3. Historical narrative
4. False
 - a. Time or place setting
 - b. Prose style
 - c. Presence of genealogies
 - d. No obvious moral teaching

Reading the Bible Existentially

LECTURE

- I. We should read the Bible as people who are intimately, personally, and passionately involved with what we are reading.
 - a. Read the Bible stories as though they were written to you personally.
 - b. Read between the lines and live the life situations of the biblical characters.
 - i. Think how Abraham felt about sacrificing his son.
 - ii. Put yourself in Aaron's place after losing two sons at the altar.
- II. Look for the drama contained throughout Scripture.
 - a. The Bible is not simply communicating information.
 - b. The full range of human emotions is present.
 - c. Even Hollywood recognizes the wealth of drama of the Scriptures.
 - d. There is great human emotion behind the Levitical passages concerning the process of recognizing leprosy.
 - e. The dietary laws of the Old Testament created the background leading to the fiery furnace.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. Reading the bible existentially involves reading the stories as if they were written to _____ .
2. Reading between the lines is not profitable because it is easy to read the meaning in rather than read the meaning out. True or False
3. It is important to try to feel what the biblical characters felt in their life situations. True or False

4. The Bible seeks to communicate only information about God and various life situations. True or False
5. The full range of human emotions is expressed in the Bible. True or False
6. It is important to distance ourselves from the Bible stories so we can objectively interpret them. True or False

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. How does reading the Bible existentially differ from the Existential method of interpretation discussed in lecture three?
2. What are the dangers of reading the Bible existentially? What are the benefits?
3. When was the last time a biblical passage came alive for you? What was the biblical passage? What were the circumstances surrounding this experience? How would you go about recreating that situation?
4. Other issues or questions raised by this lesson:
5. Now that you have looked at the importance of reading the Bible existentially, what do you plan to do with the information this week?
I plan to:
 - a.
 - b.

THINK ABOUT IT

Now that you have listened to this lecture, it is time for you to study these ideas more completely. Using the resources suggested, work through one or more of the following exercises.

1. How do you read the Bible? Soren Kierkegaard read the Bible daily as a lover would read a letter from his beloved. Is this your posture in Bible reading? Choose a short book, perhaps one of Paul's letters, and read it as if it were a love letter from your beloved. Record below any observations you might have:

2. Pick a book of the Bible that you would really like to read, preferably a narrative portion like 1 Samuel or the Book of Acts. Divide the number of chapters in the book by seven, then read through the whole book in a week. Read the book “existentially,” incorporating the principles highlighted by Dr. Sproul’s in this lecture.
3. Rent a movie that attempts to retell a biblical story and watch it with some friends. How much legitimate “reading between the lines” has the writer or producer done? How much illegitimate reading? Does the cinematic retelling add to or detract from the original biblical narrative?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Read through Galatians in one sitting, jotting down the major themes that Paul addresses. Read the letter again, but this time note all the emotions Paul expresses as he writes. How do the intellectual and emotional elements fit together? How do you respond to the emotional content? What is Paul so exercised about?

Major Themes:

Paul’s Emotions:

2. Jesus seemed to create drama, heightening it at times in his encounters with people. Study the following passages and identify the dramatic elements. Read between the lines and add what you believe to be legitimate elements untold in the narrative. Read each story aloud, communicating the emotions and intensity that would have originally been present. Finally, notice this about each passage: we tend to downplay the dramatic. Yet Jesus, who was sovereign and in control of each situation, heightened the dramatic Why?

Mark 8:31–33

John 11:1–44

Matthew 8:23–27, 8:28–34

Matthew 23:1–39

John 19:1–16

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 65–68 in *Knowing Scripture*.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. me
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. False

The Historical Narrative

LECTURE

- I. The historical narrative must be interpreted by the didactic.
 - a. Do not set one portion of Scripture against another.
 - b. Didactic passages were inspired to teach and give interpretation of narrative passages.
 - c. The gospels were designed to relate what happened while the epistles that later explains which view is to be taken.
 - d. Christ's passions are told in narrative form and several viewpoints could be taken of Christ's death. It is the epistle that later explains which view is to be taken.
- II. Do not draw conclusions from narratives only.
 - a. The angel's words stopping Abraham from slaying Isaac can be misinterpreted. Abraham's faith in God was being tested and not God's faith in Abraham.
 - b. Mormons have erroneously taken the position that God has a physical body from the Genesis account of man being made in the image of God.
- III. We should not necessarily model our behavior after Jesus' behavior.
- IV. We should not imitate Bible heroes in all things.
 - a. Imitate only that which God praised in them.
 - b. Avoid that which God calls sinful in those and other passages.
- V. Be careful of conclusions drawn from activities and practices of the early, first century Church.
 - a. While the Church was pure in one sense, it was also immature in many ways.
 - b. The principle of property held in common practiced by the early Church has been mistaken as a mandate for communism.
 - c. Speaking in tongues came at a "Pentecost" for every group that was mentioned in the Great Commission.

VI. Remember that:

- a. The Bible interprets the Bible.
- b. The Holy Spirit is His own interpreter.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. The _____ is to be interpreted by the _____.
2. The primary intent of _____ is to tell the story.
3. The primary intent of _____ is to interpret the story.
4. The _____ primarily tell the story of Jesus while the _____ primarily interpret the story.
5. Three events in Jesus' life that we ought not to imitate are _____ , _____ , and _____.
6. Two helpful rules to follow in imitating the lives of biblical characters are 1) _____ what God praises and 2) _____ what God condemns.
7. It is wise to imitate all that the New Testament Church said and did because they were uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. True or False

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. In a number of places, Paul urges his readers to imitate him and the other leaders of the early church. (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:7; Philippians 4:9) In what ways should we imitate Paul? How should we not imitate Paul?
2. Respond to Dr. Sproul's suggestion that the question we ought to ask in any given situation in life is not, "What would Jesus have done?"; rather, the important question is, "What would Jesus have me do?"

3. On page 69 in *Knowing Scripture*, Dr. Sproul explains that while the Epistles do interpret the Gospels, the Gospels are not therefore less authoritative than the Epistles. He also notes that “it has been fashionable to put the authority of Jesus over against the authority of the Epistles, particularly Paul’s Epistle. People do not seem to realize that they are not setting Jesus against Paul so much as they are setting one apostle such as Matthew or John over against another. We must remember that Jesus wrote none of the New Testament, and we are dependent upon apostolic testimony for our knowledge of what he did and said.” What are the practical implications of this approach to the authority of Scripture?
4. What other issues or questions does this lecture raise for you?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Use a synopsis of the Gospels and read through the passion narratives (Mark 14–16, Matthew 26–28, Luke 22–24 and John 18–21), noting the different viewpoints on Jesus’ death and resurrection. Now read 1 Corinthians 15 for Paul’s authoritative interpretation of the passion event. What additional information does Paul give that the Gospel writers do not give? You might want to use Burton Throckmorton’s *Gospel Parallels* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1949) for studying the passion narratives.

THINK ABOUT IT

Now that you have listened to this lecture, it is time for you to study these ideas more completely. Using the resources suggested, work through one or more of the following exercises.

1. Read the book of Judges and fill in the columns below entitled IMITATE and DO NOT IMITATE with incidents from the lives of the Judges.

IMITATE

DO NOT IMITATE

What difficulties did you encounter in separating historical information from didactic?

2. This week read through the Gospel of John (three chapters each day) asking the following questions. What is purely historical information? What is didactic? Whom should I imitate? Whom should I not imitate? What in Christ’s life should I imitate? What commands must I obey?

3. **STUDY** a number of commentaries and see what the commentators have to say about Gen 1:26. Now read an article in a theological dictionary on the “Image of God.” Are you now better able to refute the Mormon interpretation of this important passage?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 68–75 in *Knowing Scripture*.

Read one of the classic works on imitating Christ. Does the work further your understanding of how and how *not* to imitate Christ? The classic devotional on the life of Christ is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a’ Kempis.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. historical, didactic
2. historical, narrative
3. didactic passages
4. Gospels, Epistles
5. His circumcision, His Sabbath observance, and His cleansing of the Temple
6. Imitate, avoid
7. False

The Explicit and the Implicit

LECTURE

- I. The implicit is to be interpreted in light of the explicit.
 - a. The explicit statement is made forthrightly, directly, and clearly—what the Scripture actually say.
 - b. The implicit requires rational powers of deduction to draw inferences from the text.
- II. Inferences drawn from implicit passages are often passed off as clear, unambiguous teaching.
 - a. The concept of the Trinity is taught based upon passages that do not explicitly teach that concept.
 - b. John 20:26 is often used to argue that Jesus' resurrected body could pass through solid objects.
 - c. 1 Corinthians 11:10 is cited as proof that angels are attracted to women with long hair.
- III. A more serious problem is drawing inferences from the implicit that violate explicit teaching elsewhere in Scripture.
 - a. Does fallen man have the moral ability to choose Jesus Christ for himself?
 - i. John 3:16 says nothing explicitly about man's moral ability to choose Christ.
 - ii. John 6:44 explicitly teaches that NO man has the moral ability to choose Christ unless God enables him to do so.
 - b. Words in English can have more than one meaning.
 - i. The word "salvation" is used three ways in Scripture.
 - ii. The word "lord" can refer to Christ's kingly position or be a form of polite address.
 - c. Every passage of Scripture must be measured and interpreted against the whole of Scripture.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. _____ is to be interpreted in light of the _____ .
2. The _____ is stated clearly and directly in the text.
3. The _____ is drawn by inference from the text.
4. 1 Corinthians 11:10 is proof positive that angels are particularly attracted to women with long hair. True or False
5. In careful exegesis, inferences drawn from the implicit in a text should be used to challenge the obvious explicit meaning of a text. True or False
6. John 3:16 clearly teaches that all people have the moral ability to choose Christ. True or False
7. In Greek and Hebrew, just as in English, words can often have more than one meaning. True or False

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. Can you think of recent situations where you have seen a not-so-obvious inference from a passage overturn the obvious clear meaning of the passage?
2. Dr. Sproul notes some of the dangers of drawing inferences from text. Why is it important, though, to draw inferences? Can you think of any doctrines in your religious tradition that are based on inferences from text or group of texts? Are these legitimate or illegitimate inferences?
3. The Bible explicitly teaches that there is only one God and that God is One. The doctrine of the Trinity is taught implicitly. If the implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit, should we reject the notion that God is Triune for the notion that He is One? If not, why not?
4. Have you done any word studies in the Bible lately? What word did you study, and how many different ways could the particular word be used in Scripture?

5. What strikes you as the most important issue raised in this lesson? What other issues or questions have come to mind during the course of this week's study?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Now that you have listened to this lecture it is time for you to study these ideas more completely.

1. Are you satisfied with Dr. Sproul's exegesis of John 3:16 and 6:44? Divide the class into four groups, and John's Gospel into four sections. Each group should read its entire section of John's Gospel, collecting passages that speak explicitly and implicitly about a person's ability or inability to come to Christ apart from the Father's drawing. At the conclusion of the study each group should report back to the class as a whole. Does your further study support Dr. Sproul's conclusion about the relation between John 3:16 and 6:44?
2. Study the important biblical passages on the role relationship of men and women (Gen 1-3; Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; Galatians 3:23-29; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18, 19; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 3:1-13, and 1 Peter 3:1-7) Seek to separate what is taught explicitly and implicitly. What is explicitly taught about the relationship between men and women? What legitimate inferences may be drawn about the relationship between men and women in the home, church, and society?

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Read Dr. Sproul's section on the meaning of words in *Knowing Scripture* (pp. 79-85). What is etymology and how does etymology of a word shed light on its usage? How important is the context of a word in determining its meaning? Earlier in this series, Dr. Sproul argued that any given biblical text can have only one intended meaning. On page 82 of *Knowing Scripture* he talks about words that have multiple meanings. If any given word may have multiple meanings and if a text is made up of such words, how can Dr. Sproul argue that any given text can have only one intended meaning?
2. Develop inductively a doctrine of the Trinity. Take three sheets of paper and write "Father" at the top of one, "Son" at the top of another, and "Holy Spirit" at the top of the third sheet. Divide the papers into three columns with the headings "Names Attributed", "Powers Attributed", and "Response Demanded". Now look up all the occurrences of the words "Father", "Son", and "Holy Spirit" in the New Testament using an exhaustive concordance, and record your findings in the appropriate columns. Are there attributes of deity ascribed to all three persons? Read an article on the Trinity in a theological dictionary. You might try the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker) or *The New Bible Dictionary* (Eerdmans). On the basis of your study, is the doctrine of the Trinity a legitimate or illegitimate inference from the New Testament?

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. implicit, explicit
2. explicit
3. implicit
4. False
5. False
6. False
7. True

Parallelisms

LECTURE

- I. What is a parallelism?
 - a. Synonymous parallelisms present the same idea, but in a slightly different way.
 - i. Proverbs 19:5
 - ii. The Lord's Prayer, "... lead us ..."
 - b. Antithetic or contrasting parallelism presents an idea contrasting or comparing two lines. Proverbs 13:10 — "Pride brings trouble, humbleness brings well-being."
 - c. Synthetic parallelisms build to a crescendo.
 - i. Psalms 92:9
 - ii. Matthew 7:7 "Ask, ... seek ... knock."
 - d. All three forms are clearly poetic.
- II. Is 45:7 in King James Version presents a problem.
 - a. "I form the light, and I create the darkness." (KJV)
 - b. "I make peace, and I create evil." (KJV) "I bring prosperity, and I bring calamity." (Modern versions)
 - c. Much confusion results from awkward or inaccurate translations.
 - d. Scripture interpreting Scripture prevents many errors and misinterpretations.
- III. The Bible presents principles in a number of ways.
 - a. Casuistic law presents a principle and is characterized by "If ... then ..." phrasing.
 - b. Apodictic law is characterized by "You shall" or "You shall not."
 - c. Proverbs presents precepts by way of vignettes of practical wisdom and are not intended to be moral absolutes. (Proverbs 26:4, 5)

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. _____ parallelism presents the same idea, but in a slightly different way.
2. _____ parallelism presents an idea comparing one contrasting another idea in two lines.
3. _____ parallelism builds to a crescendo.
4. _____ law presents a principle and is characterized by “If . . . then . . .” phrasing.
5. _____ law is characterized by “You shall” or “You shall not.”
6. _____ present precepts by way of practical wisdom.

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. How does Dr. Sproul resolve the Theological problem in the King James Version of Is 45:7 using interpretive rules for parallelism? Is his resolution satisfying to you? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Why is it important to distinguish among case law, apodictic law, and proverbs? What practical problems could arise from a confusion of these different principal forms?
3. The most important interpretive issue addressed in this lecture is:

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Now that you have listened to this lecture it is time for you to study these ideas more completely. Using your Bible, work through the following exercise.

1. In Leviticus 11, Moses sets down the food laws for Israel and concludes with an apodictic statement, “You shall not eat . . . !” (verses 43–44). If apodictic laws contain moral absolutes binding all believers for all time, is it not incumbent upon us to change our eating habits in light of this biblical command? If not, why not? (You might want to study Mark 7:1–23 and Hebrews 8–10.)

2. The death penalty is commanded for both adulterers and children who curse their parents. Should we consider rewriting the constitutions of our churches to accommodate this command? Should we at least write our congressman to lobby for a new law in the land?
3. Read through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) and identify all the different literary forms employed by Jesus in this important discourse. Now go through the Sermon carefully, and use your new interpretive tools to interpret and apply this discourse to your life.
4. Read through the book of Proverbs and identify examples of case law, apodictic, law, and proverbial wisdom. Were you able to separate out the different forms? Has the ability to distinguish these forms enhanced your understanding of this book?

THINK ABOUT IT

This week, acquaint yourself with some of the forms you learned about in this lecture by reading the biblical passages listed below:

<i>Monday</i>	Examples of synonymous parallelism: Mark 3:24–25 Matthew 7:7–8; Luke 6:27–28.
<i>Tuesday</i>	Examples of antithetic parallelism: Mark 8:35; Luke 16:10; Matthew 7:17–18
<i>Wednesday</i>	Examples of synthetic parallelism: Matthew 23:5–10; Luke 12:49–51.
<i>Thursday</i>	Examples of step parallelism: Mark 9:37; Matthew 5:17; Matthew 10:40.
<i>Friday</i>	Examples of chiasmic parallelism (where a “crossover” or inversion occurs: ab//BA): Matthew 7:6; 23:12; Mark 8:35.
<i>Saturday</i>	Read the first four of the ten commandments. (Deuteronomy 5:6–15) Ask the following questions for personal application: What do I regret? What should I confess? For what am I thankful? What shall I do?
<i>Sunday</i>	Using the same set of questions above, meditate on the “Second Table of the Law” (Deuteronomy 5:16–21).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 85–90 in *Knowing Scripture*.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. Synonymous
2. Antithetic
3. Synthetic
4. Case
5. Apodictic
6. Proverbs

Scripture and Culture

LECTURE

- I. What is the problem of transcultural communication?
 - a. Other cultures and languages do not necessarily adequately express difficult concepts foreign to them.
 - i. The native may not have a word in his language for the concept of God's love.
 - ii. A child in a city ghetto may not be acquainted with sheep—an object of much discussion and example in the Bible.
 - b. Jesus' curse on the fig tree is often not understood.
 - i. Jesus' act has been criticized as unfair and arbitrary.
 - ii. Blossoms were present, indicating the presence of fruit, but Jesus was using the tree as an object lesson.
- II. Are the principles in Scripture able in every case to be transposed across the centuries and applied to the life of the Church today?
 - a. The role of women in the home and the church is a point of controversy today.
 - i. The Bible does teach the subordination of women in the home.
 - ii. Allowing women certain tasks in the church that are prohibited in Scripture does cause some Christians to go against their conscience.
 - b. The question is one of rejecting what may be only a local custom or violating an enduring principle
 - i. A principle is a teaching, admonition, or precept that is transcultural; it applies to all people in all cultures and in all ages.
 - ii. A custom is a principle governing people at particular time and in a particular locality.
 - c. It would be a serious offense against God to dismiss a principle as simply a local custom having no authority over us today.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. The two-fold problem of transcultural communication involves first _____ and _____.
2. The Bible teaches the subordination of women to men in the home and church. True or False
3. A _____ is a teaching, admonition, or precept that is transcultural; it applies to all people in all places, in all ages.
4. A _____ governs a particular people in a particular place at a particular time.
5. To keep from falling into the error of dismissing all of the Bible as custom, it is most safe to assume that all of Scripture is principle. True or False
6. It is more serious to dismiss a principle as a custom than to elevate a custom to the level of principle. True or False

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. What differing views about Scripture and culture are held by Christians? Which view is closest to your own? Are you still comfortable with this view after Dr. Sproul's lecture?
2. Do you agree with Dr. Sproul that it is more serious to dismiss a principle as a custom than it is to elevate a custom to a principle? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. The most important issue raised by Dr. Sproul in this lecture is:
4. Other questions or problems that come to mind as a result of this lecture:
 - a.
 - b.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The class should be divided into several groups, and each group is to study the same material. After 25 minutes, each should report their findings and defend why they have distinguished between custom and principle as they have. Read and carefully distinguish between what is purely cultural and not intended to apply to your life, and what transcends culture and must be applied. Use the columns below to record your findings. The suggested readings include 1 Corinthians 5–11.

CUSTOM

PRINCIPLE

THINK ABOUT IT

1. In the lecture, Dr. Sproul talks almost exclusively about cultural conditioning and the B, but in the book (pages 104–106) he addresses the problem of cultural conditions and the reader. He writes, “The problem becomes more acute when I realize that not only is the Bible conditioned by its cultural setting, but I am conditioned by my cultural setting as well. It often becomes difficult for me to hear and understand what the Bible is saying because I bring to it a host of extra-biblical assumptions. This is probably the biggest problem of ‘cultural conditioning’ we face.” (page 104) Read this section in *Knowing Scripture*. Do you agree with Dr. Sproul that the problem of the reader and cultural conditioning is probably the biggest problem we face? What can the student of the Bible do to counteract this problem?
2. Read through the book of Leviticus this week, distinguishing between custom and principle, and asking what is applicable for your life and what is not.

<i>Monday</i>	Leviticus 1–4
<i>Tuesday</i>	Leviticus 5–8
<i>Wednesday</i>	Leviticus 9–12
<i>Thursday</i>	Leviticus 13–16
<i>Friday</i>	Leviticus 17–20
<i>Saturday</i>	Leviticus 21–24
<i>Sunday</i>	Leviticus 25–27

APPLICABLE

NOT APPLICABLE

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 101–106 in *Knowing Scripture*.

Read “Christianity and Culture” by W. A. Dyrness in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, pages 212-216. This is a good place to start in understanding the relation between cultural conditioning and the Bible as well as cultural conditioning and the reader. The article also contains a good initial bibliography on the subject.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. understanding the biblical cult, applying what I understood to our times
2. True
3. principle
4. custom
5. False
6. True

Principle versus Custom

LECTURE

- I. How can we know whether Scripture is teaching a principle or simply communicating a custom?
 - a. It used to be the custom for women to wear hats in church to cover their heads.
 - b. First Corinthians 11 states that covering the head is a sign of subordination to the man.
 - c. There are four ways to interpret this passage.
 - i. As pure custom where both the head covering and subordination to the man are for that particular time and place only.
 - ii. As pure principle where we are to implement all aspects everywhere and at all times.
 - iii. As partly principle (version A) showing subordination in SOME way.
 - iv. As partly principle (version B) showing subordination and submission by covering the head, but partly custom in allowing for differences in how the head is covered.
- II. Practical guidelines to help in determining what is principle and what is custom.
 - a. Examine the Bible for apparent areas of custom.
 - i. Language
 - ii. Styles of dress
 - iii. Monetary systems.
 - b. Allow for Christian distinctives in the first century.
 - i. Never assume that everything the Bible says merely reflects the cultural situation of the day.
 1. First Corinthians 11 is often interpreted as Paul telling women to cover their heads so as to not appear as the Corinthian prostitutes.
 2. Paul gives a reason for covering the head which is based upon submission appealing to the creation ordinance.

- c. Be aware of creation principles.
- d. When in doubt, do not violate what may be a principle. This is the principle of humility.

CHECK YOURSELF

If you want to be sure that you understand the main ideas of this lecture, test yourself by taking the following quiz.

1. The approach of _____ suggests that both the head covering and subordination of woman to man in the 1 Corinthians 11 passage were for that time and place only.
2. The approach of _____ suggests that all aspects of 1 Corinthians 11 must be implemented everywhere and at all times.
3. If you find a creation principle, you can be sure that you are dealing with a temporary custom. True or False
4. Language, styles of dress, and monetary systems are indicators of the presence of cultural motifs. True or False
5. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul appeals to a creation ordinance indicating that women must be subject to their husbands. True or False
6. The principle of humility suggests that when in doubt we should treat a passage as a principle rather than merely as a custom. True or False

Answers are found at the end of this lesson.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED

1. Look over the four possible approaches to the “head covering” passage in 1 Corinthians 11. Are you satisfied with Dr. Sproul’s resolution of this problematic passage? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Do you agree with Dr. Sproul final guideline—when in doubt, do not violate what may be a divine principle? Is it more serious to treat a possible principle as custom than it is to elevate a custom to the status of principle? (Later you might want to read Dr. Sproul’s more complete discussion of this problem on pages 111 and 112 of *Knowing Scripture*).

3. What do you feel is the most important point made by Dr. Sproul in this lecture?
4. What other problems or questions come to mind as you ponder the contents of this lecture?
5. As a result of this time of reflection and interaction, this week I plan to:
 - a.
 - b.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Dr. Sproul has addressed the problem of cultural conditioning and the Bible in these last two lectures, but he has only touched on the problem of cultural conditioning and the reader. What are some cultural biases or customs that you bring to the Bible that keep you from hearing its eternal message? What are some practical guidelines for clearing these biases away so that we may allow the Word of God to shape our lives?
 - a. Cultural biases
 - b. Guidelines for dealing with these biases
2. Study the foot washing passage in John 13:1–20. Work together as a class to determine why some denominations consider it necessary to practice this as a binding principle, and why others understand it only as a local custom that is not binding today.
 - a. Binding principle
 - b. Local custom

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Study the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Which of these today are regarded as principle, which as custom? In particular, reflect upon the keeping of the Sabbath. How is it that while most would theoretically preserve it in principle, most would also *practically* dismiss it? How can we account for this? Does it have to do with the four alternatives R. C. provides in the outline? How do you interpret this commandment?

2. Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Find at least three examples where an abiding principle is taught by Jesus, but which also has a cultural outworking to it. Rewrite the principle Jesus teaches with a cultural outworking suitable to our culture.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, read pages 106–108 in *Knowing Scripture*.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOURSELF

1. pure custom
2. pure principle
3. False
4. True
5. True
6. True

Putting It All Together

- I. The text
 - a. Read the passage over in several translations.
 - i. Note discrepancies in translations
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - b. Record the following:
 - ii. Questions or problems that come to mind
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - iii. Parallel or related passages that come to mind
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- II. The Context (Every text has a context and its interpretation depends upon identifying the context.)
 - a. Where does the text begin and where does it end?
 - i. Begins
 - ii. Ends
 - b. What comes before and what comes after the text? What, if any, bearing might they have upon the interpretation and analysis?
 - i. Paragraphs before and after?
 - ii. Chapters before and after?
 - iii. Books before and after (placement in the Canon)?
 - c. What is the historical context of the passage? (Use a Bible Dictionary, the Introduction to a commentary, or the Introduction to the particular book in a study Bible.)
 - i. Where does it fit in biblical history?
 - ii. What were the prevailing political, social and economic conditions behind the passage? (This step could be done more thoroughly outside of class.)

- iii. Who wrote the passage?
 - iv. Why was it written?
 - v. To whom was it written?
 - d. What is the literary context of the passage? Does it occur in an historical narrative, wisdom literature, Gospel, letter, or poetic book?
- III. Interpreting the text
 - a. Note important grammatical features—questions, statements, commands, etc.
 - b. Identify key words and phrases.
 - c. Do word studies (This step could be done more thoroughly outside of class. See pages 124 and 125 of *Knowing Scripture* for suggested resources.).
 - d. Theological issues
 - i. What does the text tell us about God?
 - ii. What does it tell us about mankind?
 - iii. What problems or questions does the text raise or answer?
- IV. Applying the text
 - a. Read several commentaries. (See *Knowing Scripture* pages 118–119.)
 - i. Where do the commentators agree or disagree?
 - ii. Where do you agree or disagree with the commentators? Make any adjustments in your interpretation.
 - b. Think through applications.
 - i. To whom does the text apply? All people of all times or specific groups?
 - ii. What in the text does not apply to twentieth century hearers?
 - iii. What in the text does apply?
 - iv. To what areas of life should the text be applied?
 - c. My personal responses:
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.

FOR FURTHER STUDY ON THESE ISSUES SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fee and Stuart. *How To Read the Bible For All It's Worth*. Zondervan.
 Douglas, J. D. *The New Bible Dictionary*. Eerdmans.
 McCartney and Clayton. *Let the Reader Understand*. P&R.
 Nickelson, Berkeley. *Interpreting the Bible*. Eerdmans.
 Nicole and Michaels. *Inerrancy and Common Sense*. Baker.
 Sproul, R. C. *Knowing Scripture*. InterVarsity Press.
 Sproul. *Scripture Alone*. P&R
 Terry, Milton S. *Biblical Hermeneutics*. Zondervan.
 Young, Robert. *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. Eerdmans.

SUPPLEMENTAL AUDIO TAPES AVAILABLE FROM LIGONIER MINISTRIES:

Authority and Inspiration of Scripture. R. C. Sproul.

The Doctrine of Scripture. Parts I and II. R. C. Sproul.

