

CORRECTING FREQUENTLY MISUSED PASSAGES

Week 1

INTRODUCTION

- Handling the Word of God requires precision and careful attention to proper methods of Bible interpretation
- Central to this is getting to the Author's intent...God alone is the arbiter of what He means through what He has revealed through the Word
- Hence the appropriate question is not "What does this verse mean *to you*?" but rather "What does this verse mean?"
- Failure to approach the Word of God carefully causes passages to be easily ripped from their context, misappropriated, and misapplied resulting in convoluted interpretations
- Playing fast and loose with the Scriptures presents many hazards...hazards that result from a failure to understand the historical setting, failure to pay attention to historical context, and failure to properly interpret a passage before applying it
- In today's Christian culture, there are numerous examples of how passages have been twisted and contorted to prove a point they were never intended to
- This leads to a propensity to treat God's Word as a smorgasbord of truth...taking only what we want but leaving the rest

12 PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

2 Timothy 2:15 ~ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

- Interpreting the Bible requires paying careful attention to the rules that govern the interpretive method
- Hermeneutics: The rules of Bible interpretation...the principles by which exegesis is practiced
- Exegesis: The act of using rules of hermeneutics to draw out the meaning of the text

[Hermeneutics] stands in the same relationship to exegesis that a rule-book stands to a game. The rule-book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. The rules are not the game, and the game is meaningless without the rules. Hermeneutics is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.

Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 11

- Football has rules, as every game must: no holding...pass interference is not allowed...intentional grounding is prohibited...more than 11 men on the field is against the rules
- These rules are meant to govern how the game of football is played...ignore the rules or disobey the rules and there will be a penalty
- Such is the case with Bible interpretation...rules must be followed to arrive at the correct meaning of a passage and, if they are not, an infraction of interpretation will occur
- The rules for interpreting the Bible have 2 sources:
 1. The everyday, sensible rules of language that make communication possible -
 2. The character of God

1. The Clarity of Scripture

- The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are clear enough for the common person to understand
- This is the “perspicuity” of Scripture – The Bible is intelligible, understandable, easy to comprehend
- Every Christian, guided by the Holy Spirit, can comprehend in its pages all that is necessary for salvation and holy living
- Granted, there are some difficult passages; not all parts of Scripture are able to be understood easily

2 Peter 3:15-16 ~ just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

- But, generally the Scriptures are written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by ordinary believers

Psalms 19:7-9 ~ The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

Psalms 119:130 ~ The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

2. The Accommodation of Revelation

- For our benefit, God chose to reveal Himself in terms that we can comprehend
- God uses items which are familiar to men in order to make truth understandable to them, unfolding truth through the use of illustrations, analogies, anthropomorphisms, etc.
- Like an adult speaking to a child, God stoops to our level and describes Himself in ways that we can understand

Psalms 34:15 ~ The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous And His ears are open to their cry.

John 6:48 ~ I am the bread of life.

John 10:11 ~ I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

3. The Harmony of Scripture

- There is one, unified, consistent, harmonious system of belief in the Bible such no part contradicts another part
- The fact that the Bible was written by nearly 40 different authors, over a period of 1500 years, in 3 languages with no contradictions argues for one divine Author
- Because the Scripture was spoken by God who knows everything and never lies, the Bible harmonizes with itself
- Therefore, if two or three different interpretations of a verse are equally possible, any interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of any other Scripture must be ruled out
- Examples:
 - 2 Sam 24:1 vs. 1 Chron 21:1
 - Romans 4:1-5 (shows that men are justified by faith apart from works) vs. James 2:14-26 (shows that those who are saved by faith will have works that are the fruitful manifestation of real faith)
- Two passages may not teach the same essential thing; yet the two things two different passages teach will fit harmoniously within a system in unity; they will coordinate and not contradict

4. Normal Interpretation

- We take the Bible at face value – we read the Bible following the reading practices we would consider normal for any other document
- When interpreting Scripture, assume the most natural, obvious meaning of a word or phrase taking into consideration the history, culture, and author
- “When the plain sense of the scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”
- This does not mean a strict, wooden-headed literalism or letterism which does not take into account figures of speech, figurative language, and allegories
- Rather, we start with the literal meaning, and if it doesn't make sense, we switch to consider possible figurative meanings

5. One Meaning of Text

- Although a text may have many different applications, it has only one meaning – the meaning intended by the original human author, moved by the Holy Spirit
- There is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study, but a given text may speak to a number of issues
- “Interpretation is one, application is many”

A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.

Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 205.

- Thus, the goal of all Bible interpretation is to uncover the singular intent of the original author through the proper use of context, word study, cross reference, knowledge of manners and customs, historical background, etc.

6. Interpretation, Then Application

- The interpretation of the Bible is the foundation upon which application can stand securely
- This truth may be seen in several distinctions we make between interpretation and application: 1) A distinction in **number**; 2) A distinction in **authority**; 3) A distinction in **order**
- The incorporation of application into the hermeneutical process leads inevitably to multiple meanings for a single passage
- It also leads to wanting to personalize the verse before finding out what the original author meant
- Rushing to application before discovering God's meaning is a sign that *you* want to control the text

7. Context

- A text of Scripture is given its true meaning only when it is considered in relationship to the words, sentences, and paragraphs around it
- “A text without a context is a proof text”
- Context determines meaning; a word is a word through the words around it

8. Progressive Revelation

- God does not reveal Himself all at one time but does so gradually over the course of time
- God initiated revelation, but He did not reveal His truths all at one time...it was a long and progressive process...what was partial was added to
- This does not mean that the Old Testament is inferior to the New Testament or that the Old Testament doesn't contain any mature ideas

- Rather, it points to the general trend that while there were truths that were only partially revealed, discussed, or developed in the Old Testament, in the New Testament those truths have been more completely understood

Hebrews 1:1-2 ~ God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- Thus, we must take into account the then-current state of revelation to properly understand a particular passage...we must be careful to not read the NT back into the OT, to not force NT meanings into the OT (i.e. can't read statements in the NT about the church being included into the New Covenant as evidence that the church has replaced Israel)

9. Grammar and Syntax

- Grammatical interpretation deals with the arrangement of words into sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books
- If words are the units of language, then sentences are the units of thought - a sentence is a complete thought, and when sentences are organized and arranged in a paragraph, very complex and profound thoughts can be expressed
- The human authors, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have arranged the sentences, paragraphs, etc. in such a way that the exact meaning that God intends is found in the text
- Therefore, in order to understand the mind of God in the Scriptures, the grammar of the text must be understood correctly (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, patterns, contrasts, comparisons, repeated words)

10. Historical Appropriateness

- Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in light of biblical history; thus, we must interpret a passage in such a way that our treatment of it is fitting, appropriate, or in harmony with the historical situation at that point in Scripture
- Areas of historical/cultural study: Politics, Clothing, Legal, Religious, Architectural, Domestic, Economic, Agricultural, Geographical, Military, Social
- A good Bible interpreter always makes sure that his interpretations are appropriate to the history of the biblical era

11. Word Study

- To understand a passage of Scripture, key words within that passage must be defined accurately
- The detailed and thorough study of the individual words of a passage can yield amazing fruit in our understanding of a text since words are the most basic building blocks of communication
- Words themselves can communicate complex ideas or simple grammatical concepts, but one of the most important steps in understanding an author is to understand the meaning of the words he uses

12. The Checking Principle

- It is good for a student to check his understanding of a passage against the interpretations of Bible scholars from the ages of Christianity
- It is impossible for us to know all of the geographic, historical, and interpretational issues in a passage – information Bible scholars spend a lifetime accumulating
- Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and other Bible study tools can shorten that process considerably

Matthew 18:18-20

Matthew 18:18-20 ~Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

The Abused Interpretation

- This passage has been misinterpreted in a number of ways:

1. Binding and Loosing Demons

- This passage is a favorite for those who engage in spiritual warfare and use this text to encourage binding demonic forces and loosing angelic armies

The strong man is a satanic personality in charge or responsible for a stronghold. It is a fortified entity that Satan builds to exalt himself against the knowledge and plans of God. Satan always tries to operate under the cover of darkness. The only thing that exposes him is the light (illumination) of God's Word. As long as Satan's strongholds remain concealed, the strongman is safe. As soon as the strong man is identified – *half of the victory is established...* You must bind the strongman! Remember, **whatever you bind or loose on earth, the angels of God are MANDATED to enforce your command in the heavens.**

Paula White, <http://paulawhite.org/binding-the-strongman-2016/>

When we bind something, we declare it unlawful (or evil) based on God's word. Because we stand as co-heirs in Jesus Christ, we have his authority to execute this judgment on the forces of evil... Our faith in God's word releases the power from heaven that binds (or ties up) the evil we are facing. Similarly, when we loose something on earth, we "permit and declare [it] proper and lawful on earth" based on the scriptures. Everything that we loose or bind must be in accordance with God's word.

<https://truthinreality.com/2012/08/15/prayer-of-warfare/>

- This passage has been used by many as a promise of supernatural power and heavenly authority... that believers can harness the power and presence of Christ in spiritual warfare

2. Empowering Prayer Meetings

- Many assume this passage refers to the presence of Christ which is guaranteed when small groups of believers meet together for Bible study and prayer

Every Christian needs to be involved in a small group within their church, whether it is a home fellowship group, a Sunday school class, or a Bible study. This is where real community takes place, not in big gatherings. If you think of your church as a ship, the small groups are the lifeboats attached to it. God has made an incredible promise about small groups of believers: "*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.*"

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Drive Life*, 139

- The emphasis then is on the power of group prayer... the power of praying with other people

The Correct Interpretation

- We must first start with understanding the context of the passage...specifically, we must look at what the preceding verses tell us about the meaning of the text

Matthew 18:15-17 ~ If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERYFACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

- Clearly, the context is about church discipline...God is prescribing the steps to be taken when a believer is caught in sin
- Confronting a sinning believer starts with just one person, then involves 2-3 people, and, if necessary, the whole church must be enlisted to urge the unrepentant believer to turn from their sin
- Since vs. 18-20 come immediately following vs. 15-17, all of Christ's instructions about binding and loosing and Christ being in their midst must be understood in the context of church discipline
- In other words, vs. 18-20 mean that when church leaders gather together to confront unrepentant sinners, they have heavenly backing
- Church leaders who practice church discipline are simply declaring what God has already declared
- This is evident from the verbs in vs. 18 ~ Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound (future perfect passive) in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven (future perfect passive)

The sum of it all means that any duly constituted body of believers, acting in accord with God's Word, has the authority to declare if someone is forgiven or unforgiven. The church's authority is not to determine these things, but to declare the judgment of heaven based on the principles of the Word. When they make such judgments on the basis of God's Word, they can be sure heaven is in accord. In other words, whatever they "bind" or "loose" on earth is already "bound" or "loosed" in heaven. When the church says the unrepentant person is bound in sin, the church is saying what God says about that person. When the church acknowledges that a repentant person has been loosed from that sin, God agrees.

MacArthur Study Bible note on Matthew 16:19

- This is the same idea as Peter (and by extension other believers) being given authority to act on behalf of God:

Matthew 16:18-19 ~ I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

- So Jesus assures His people that He Himself acts with them when they work to purify the church
- The "two or three" referred to in Matthew 18:19-20 do not refer to Christ's presence at a prayer meeting since Christ is always present with His people even when they are alone
- It refers back to the two or three witnesses involved in step two of the discipline process...those witnesses have determined the repentance or lack thereof of a sinning brother or sister on the Lord's behalf
- So a careful study of the context of this passage and the tenses of the verbs brings great clarity to this issue