

SECTION 5

An Overview of the Hermeneutical Process

SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERPRETING THE TEXT OF SCRIPTURE

(A Summation)

I. STUDY THE BOOK AS A WHOLE.

1. Consider the questions of date, authorship, recipients, and purpose (general matters of introduction.)
2. Develop an outline of the entire book (study Bibles and commentaries will be helpful).
1. Examine the relationship of the passage under consideration in both its near and far context.

II. ESTABLISH THE BEST TEXTUAL BASE POSSIBLE:

1. Use the original language if you can.
2. Compare various versions and translations.

III. INVESTIGATE THE TEXT LINGUISTICALLY (E.G. WORD BY WORD).

1. Make a lexical (definitional) study of crucial words.
2. Research the passage for key words, phrases, and ideas.
3. Track the verbs!
4. Cross Reference.

IV. EXAMINE THE FORM OR FORMS OF THE MATERIAL IN THE PASSAGE.

1. What is the literary type (history, poetry, prophetic, apocalyptic)?
2. What literary devices are used?
3. Is there any indication of the life situation from which the material came?

V. ANALYZE THE STRUCTURE OF THE PASSAGE.

1. Determine if the material constitutes a literary unity.
2. Is there a logical sequence of ideas present?
3. Isolate the basic themes or emphases.
4. Outline the passage you are studying. Use the outline as the framework for your teaching.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETATION

1. The context rules when interpreting the text.
2. The text must be interpreted in light of all Scripture.
3. Scripture will never contradict itself.
4. Scripture should be interpreted literally (or naturally according to its genre).
5. Do not develop doctrine from obscure or difficult passages.
6. Discover the author's original intended meaning and honor that meaning.
7. Check your conclusions using reliable resources.

“The Task of the Interpreter”

The interpreter must bridge the gap or horizon between the cultural elements that are present in the text of Scripture and those in our own times. One proposal to bridge this gap is called by some “ethnohermeneutics,” which recognizes three horizons in cross-cultural interpretation: 1) the culture of the Bible, 2) the culture of the interpreter, and 3) the culture of the receptor. Care must be exercised not to let the second and third horizons dictate the message of the first horizon.

The early church fathers used the terms “condescension,” “accommodation,” and “acculturation” to deal with cultural matters in the text. In their view, the cultural view, the cultural aspects of the Scriptures, were meant to make the truth more accessible and to assist us in applying the text to our own day.

When interpreting cultural aspects of Scripture, three options are available. We may (1) retain the theology taught along with the cultural-historical expression of that principle, or (2) retain the theology of a passage, but replace the expression of the behavior, or (3) replace both the principle and the practice. Five guidelines for doing this are: (1) observe the reason given in the text for a cultural element, (e.g. why is there a head-covering required in 1 Cor. 11:2-16?) (2) modify the cultural form but retain the content, (3) avoid all practices integral to pagan culture, (4) retain practices grounded in the nature of God, and (5) adjust when the circumstances alter the application of a law or principle. But above all, be hesitant and humble in all cases where we are uncertain.

HOW TO STUDY AND TEACH THE BIBLE

What does God want my people to know?



The Purpose
(Moving from the “Then” to the “Now”)



What does God want my people to do?

“Bridge”

The Study
(Working in the past)

The Message
(Working in the present)

What was the main point then?

The Main Idea of the Text
(MIT)
“Heart”

The Main Idea of the Message
(MIM)
“Heart”

What is my main point today?

- Theme: What is the biblical author talking about?
- Complement: What is the biblical author saying about what he is talking about?

- Theme: What am I talking about?
- Complement: What am I saying about what I am talking about?

- Find the seams
- Analyze the argument
- Outline the text

Structure the Scriptures
“Skeleton”

Structure the Message
“Skeleton”

- Outline the Message
- Complete Sentences
- Present Tense Sentences
- Tie all Points to the Text

Study the Scriptures
“Flesh”

Teach the Scriptures
“Flesh”

Observation
Interpretation

Introduction
Body
1. Body
2. Illustration
3. Application
Conclusion
(Invitation)

ANALYZING THE TEXT

Verse 1 (1/4 page to full page)

Verse 2 (1/4 page to full page)

Verse 3 (1/4 page to full page)

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1. Pray.
 2. Track the verbs and parse them.
 3. Look for key words needing definition.
 4. Look for repetition of phrases and words.
 5. Look for seams in the text which will inform the number of points and the nature of the teaching outline.
 6. Note the near and far context.
 7. Search for helpful and supporting Scripture.
 8. Write out any and all observations and applications you see in the text.
 9. Examine your study aids and write out any helpful insights (note the source for future reference when appropriate).
 10. Look for theological truth and avenues the text logically supports.
 11. Merge your exegesis into the outline structure of your teaching.

TITLE FOR THE TEXT

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1. Pray
 2. Make it interesting, an "attention grabber."
 3. Relate it to the Main Idea of the Text (MIT) and the Main Idea of the Message (MIM).
 6. Create a title which can be fed by the main points of your message.
 7. Make it relevant.

OUTLINING THE STUDY

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1. Pray.
 2. Let your exegesis drive and determine the outline.
 3. Have as many major points as the text naturally demands (locate the seams).
 4. Make sure major points and subpoints arise clearly and naturally out of the text. Be able to see your outline in the text.
 5. State your points in the present tense and complete sentences. Be clear, concise and true to the text.
 6. Make your points the application of the message. (Let them inform, instruct and inspire your people as to what they should do.)
 7. Make sure your major points connect with the title and the MIT and MIM.
 8. Make sure your subpoints connect with the major point they support.
 9. Do not overload your people with more than they can intellectually digest! (Teaching outlines are a great idea.)
 10. Cover and fill the skeleton of your outline with the meat and marrow of the exegesis.
 11. Write out your study merging all aspects of your preparation with a view of exalting our Lord and edifying your audience here and now.
 12. Practice reading your text repeatedly and out loud. Remember: it is a sin to read God's Word poorly.