

Disclaimer: This document was written simply as an outline for my lecture. It is not meant to be read as a paper. Consequently, it has not been thoroughly proofread and there are formatting and punctuation peculiarities throughout. This is being made accessible only as an aid to learning to be used in conjunction with the lecture. Finally, as the careful observer will notice, I have a tendency to re-shape the presentation of this material given the needs of the moment; thus, there is significant divergence between what is written and what is delivered orally.

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL INTERPREATION:
How to Read, Study, and Interpret Scripture

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Date: 9/13/18

LESSON ONE

WHY THIS CLASS IS NEEDED

Directly flows from the nature of Scripture

I. The Purpose of Scripture (2 Tim 3:14-17) – What it does ([Slide 2](#))

*Discuss: Read 2 Tim 3:14-17. Answer the question: what does this text teach about the purpose of Scripture?

A. Provides Wisdom for Salvation ([Slide 3](#))

1. *Wisdom*: How to understand and live in God's world in a way that leads to salvation.

2. *Through faith in Christ Jesus*: This wisdom is mediated by and through Jesus.

a. He is the ultimate embodiment of God's wisdom

- b. He is the ultimate source of this wisdom (His life and teaching)
- c. Gaining this wisdom requires a trust in Jesus
 - 1) We must recognize Him as the source of it

B. Teaches us Doctrine (Right Belief)

C. Training in Righteousness (Right Living)

D. That we might be complete and equipped for all that God has called us to do.

II. The Nature of Scripture – How it does it [\(Slide 4\)](#)

A. It comes from God (Divinely Inspired and Authoritative)

1. Inspiration: God's Spirit works throughout each step of the production of Scripture in such a way as to produce a book that is at the same time both a human and divine word.

2. Authority

B. It is trustworthy and true (Infallible and Inerrant)

1. Infallibility: Since Scripture is the word of God, and both God and his word are true, the Scriptures are fully trustworthy and incapable of error. (E.g. Ps. 51:6; 119:43, 151; Jn 17:17)

2. Inerrancy: The Scriptures are without error (in the original manuscripts), meaning that everything they affirm to be true is true.

C. God's word is central to everything He does. When He creates He does so by His word. When He redeems, He does so by His word. God reveals himself to His people by His words. Since the Scriptures are where God has preserved His word, they are a means of revelation of God himself. They are the chief way that we get to know Him.

D. It is Sufficient (provides what we need)

1. Scripture provides for us all the divine truth that we need in order to do what God has called us to do. (2 Pet 1:3ff)

E. It is Clear (Comprehensible)

1. Not all parts of Scripture are equally easy to understand, but that which is required for salvation can be understood if one reads the Scriptures in the manner in which it was meant to be read.

2. "Scripture is always clear enough for us to carry out our present responsibilities before God . . . Scripture is not exhaustively clear to anyone. It is not clear enough to satisfy anyone who merely wants to gain speculative knowledge of divine things. It is rather morally sufficient, practically sufficient, sufficient for each person to know what God desires of him." John Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*

F. It bears witness to Jesus (Slide 5)

1. All Scripture points us to Jesus, and Jesus reveals to us who God is.

a. The OT points forward to Jesus

b. The Gospels present Jesus to us

c. The rest of the NT unpack the meaning of his life and teaching

G. It comes through human authors and editors who expressed these divine truths in the language and forms of their day.

1. God reveals His timeless truth in ways that were comprehensible to the cultures to which they were given, with its common language, concepts, images, etc.

2. If we are not part of the original audience's time and culture, we must then become familiar with the language, culture, and concepts of the original audience so that we might hear the word of God as they would have heard it.

H. Through it, God continues to speak so that in Scripture we encounter not just the word of God to them back then, but the word of God to us today. What Scripture says, God says.

1. All of the Scriptures are said to be "God-breathed," that is from the mouth of God. It is God's speech to us (2 Tim 3:16).
2. The word of God is living and active, penetrating the depths of the hearer's being (Heb 4:12).
3. Throughout the Scriptures, God interacts with His people by both His word and Spirit, and so how we respond to His word is the same as how we respond to God Himself.
4. Furthermore, in the Bible, God's presence, action, and identity are so closely tied to his word that, in John 1, Christ is actually called the *Word*. This is because He is the one who is sent by the Father and reveals God to us.
5. Finally, we see that from the way that Jesus taught and the Apostles read and wrote Scripture, that Scripture contains God's truth which continues to be relevant past the time of the original audience. In this way, God uses the Scriptures to continue to speak to His people.

H. The Spirit enlightens our hearts so that we recognize it is true (1 Cor 2:6-16).

III. Implications for Us: What then does this imply for how we read Scripture?
(Slide 6)

General Implications

With confident expectation:

- Confident in God's ability to speak to us in a way that we can understand.
- Confident in the trustworthiness of God's word.

- Confident that in it and through it we encounter the words of the living God to us today.
- Confident that the Spirit will help us.

With earnestness:

- Recognizing that these are the very words of God that lead to everlasting life and so they are worth our time and energy

With humility and patience:

- Recognizing that reading well is difficult and that it is a process that will take time.
- Recognizing that the Bible was a book written to be read over and over, and that one part links to another so that each time you read it you understand every other part better and better.
- Recognizing that God's truth has come to us in Scripture through human authors in their own unique voices, styles, and situations. If we want to know what God says to us through them, we have to first know what God said to them.
- Recognizing that this will involve a lot of hard work and study.
- Recognizing that both Scripture and history reveal to us the danger of misreading God's word and how easy it is to do when we approach the text with corrupt motives or fail to learn the importance of reading in community.
- Recognizing there is a right way and a wrong way to do it, and we need to be humble to learn where we are doing it right and where we are doing it wrong.

Further Implications:

A. God's word is instrumental in His dealings with humanity, and has been the means by which—along with the Spirit—he has called, led, redeemed and sanctified His people. Furthermore, he continues to do the very same thing today by his same word, which itself points us to the very Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

B. In the Scriptures God speaks through the words of men in such a way that they reveal divine truth infallibly, without error.

C. While we might be able to understand the message or meaning of particular Scriptures (as the corrupt kings of Israel did with the prophets and the Pharisees did with Jesus), we cannot recognize the truth of God's words apart from the work of the Spirit in our hearts.

D. When we read Scripture, we are reading God's word to a specific people at a specific time in history. Consequently, God's timeless truth has been revealed in a time-bound form. Thus, we need to understand the form in order to understand the truth that it is revealing.

1. It is true, *not* maximally precise.
2. Ordinary speech, not technical speech.
3. Communicated in pre-scientific language, using pre-scientific concepts and linguistic conventions.
4. We must know enough about the original authors language and culture, to actually know what they were intending to communicate.
5. We have to learn to read the Bible the way they would have read it, according to the literary rules and concepts of the day so we can understand what they were getting at.

E. Due to sin, ignorance, historical and cultural differences, unbiblical thought patterns or presuppositions, tradition, the complexity and mystery of spiritual truth, and the like, all of us at some point misinterpret the text. The good news is that God's grace is sufficient to cover our mistakes, and the whole of Scripture is there to balance us. However, that doesn't give us an excuse not to try.

- If someone you value and love is going through a ton of effort to communicate with you, it's not very loving to not try and understand them.
- What Scripture is communicating is so important that it is worth the effort.
- We grow closer to God in the process.

F. Scripture formed and shaped the Church, not the other way around. And thus, it is in the Church that we truly learn to read Scripture. By reading and learning to read Scripture in the Church, we are protected from dangerous heresies.

- When we read and study in isolation, thinking that somehow we can figure it out all on our own, we fail to learn from history: that's how heresy erupts. We all have blind spots. The Spirit works through the community, the whole body of Christ, so that by challenging and encouraging one another as we pursue Jesus together, we help one another along. And we keep one another from straying.
- That's what creeds are for. They are the boundary markers of what is orthodox and what is not.
- We must recognize that Christian history is full of examples of what we need (more than just the Spirit) to read the text correctly. We have many examples of sincere Christians who disagreed with one another over a bunch of issues, and have justified all kinds of behavior and beliefs with Scripture that we would now recognize as unbiblical and dangerous.

In summary, what Scripture says is what God says. So the question is, what are the Scriptures saying?

Because of the historical nature of revelation (God spoke at specific times, in specific ways, regarding specific situations), if we want to be responsible Bible-readers, we need to first understand what God was saying back then, before we can understand what He is saying today.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We are going to do an overview of the principles for doing just that: figuring out what God said, and then how we apply this to today to know what He is saying. Sometimes it is the same exact thing, or sometimes it has been altered.

This will involve reviewing some general reading strategies. Then we will talk through principles for interpreting all of the various genres of Scripture.

Summary

The Bible is not primarily a rule book. It is not a magic book to manipulate the universe. It is not there to answer all of our questions about God.

The Bible is a complex collection of theologically-shaped narratives, poems, and letters that ultimately point to, and center on, one man: Jesus Christ.

This Bible is intended to teach us how to live in relationship with our Creator that we might find eternal life.

The Bible is . . .