

**Critical Considerations
for
Biblical Hermeneutics**

**Because Meaning and Interpretation
Are Important for Every Christian Leader**

**by
Stephen Isaac ThD.**

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Contents

Introduction

Critical Consideration One:

The Interpretive Process - Defining Meaningful Distinctions

Critical Consideration Two:

The Approach - Inductive and Deductive

Critical Consideration Three:

Pre-Conceptions and Pre-Suppositions

Critical Consideration Four:

Meaning - Issues of Author's Intent and Student Interpretation

Critical Consideration Five:

Contextualization - Context and Text, Text and Meaning, Meaning and Contextualization

Critical Consideration Six:

Contextualization - Text and Meaning (Interpreted Through Grammatical Analysis, Syntactical Structure, Key Word and Semantic Range)

Critical Consideration Seven:

Contextualization Realities - Time Passage, Geography, Culture, and Linguistics

Critical Consideration Eight:

Nuances of Language and Communication - Evolving and Enduring

Critical Consideration Nine:

Literary Genre - Analysis and Intent

Critical Consideration Ten:

Biblical and Systematic Theology - The Relevance and Significance for Both

Critical Consideration Eleven:

Contrast and Compare - Revelation of the Spirit and Theological Interpretation

Critical Consideration Twelve:

Sermonizing and Homiletics - The Word Rightly Divided and Righteously Fulfilled

Critical Consideration Thirteen:

The Impact of Prayer and the Influence of the Holy Spirit on Hermeneutical Outcomes

Critical Consideration Fourteen:

Conclusions

Reference and Resources:

Resource Samples: Hermeneutic Plans and Development Assistance

About the Author:

Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics
(Because Meaning and Interpretation
Are Important for Every Christian Leader)

Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics was written to introduce or re-introduce the foundational principles and best practices of Biblical and exegetical interpretation to the community of Christ that seeks not just knowledge of the Bible, but an accurate understanding of the intended meaning of a divinely inspired text - God's Word. The desired outcome was to move Biblical Hermeneutics away from being merely an academic process or intellectual exercise and to build a bridge of understanding and practical use for pastors, teachers, preachers, leaders, and Bible-based communicators.

...Stephen Isaac ThD.

...And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:19-21

Forward

Dr. Stephen Isaac has been a great friend and colleague for a number of years. We first met when he began work on his Doctoral Degree and I was honored to be an advisor in that work. I have always found him to be a dedicated student of the Word and a devoted Pastor to the church he leads. His teaching has impacted the lives of so many people which is evident throughout the community he serves.

The excellence of his treatment of the Word will be evident as you read this book. His passion for teaching the Bible is well known by his congregation, but his calling to equip the teachers and preachers of the Word has resulted in this detailed, scholarly work.

He has taught much of this material in university but with the release of this book, students all over the world can now access these principles and procedures. This will be a valuable resource for all who desire to study and teach the Word of God with accuracy and excellence, whether the new minister or seasoned leader. It will continue to be a valuable resource for the university professor or Bible school teacher as well as the authors who want to "rightly divide the Word of truth".

Though he has done much writing, he only began to publish his work since publishing his first book, "Love Beyond Love". This book established Dr. Isaac as a valuable resource to the Body of Christ and I'm looking forward to more work from him in the future. I recommend you search for more titles by Dr. Isaac. I'm sure you'll get as much from them as I do.

Dr. Greg Linnebach

Dissertation Review Board

Primus University of Theology

Forward

Back in the dark ages, when dinosaurs roamed the earth, I was in Bible College. As a young man, zealous for ministry and biting at the bit to get out there and lead a dynamic youth group, the time spent in the classroom seemed tedious at best. Theology, Soteriology, Pneumatology, all compulsory classes that made the days move like molasses in winter.

Then something happened, it was as if the sun appeared from out of the dark clouds on a December day. One of those compulsory classes was going to change my world. I couldn't even pronounce it, let alone know what it meant. It was simply titled, "Hermeneutics." With no expectation I entered class that semester, not knowing that my ministry matriculation would take a turn that would render me hooked for life.

The entire concept of contextual and exegetical study of scripture, exhausting all aspects of outside and inside influences to truly learn what the Bible means, was both foreign and exhilarating at the same time. To a preacher's kid who had a Sunday School "doctorate," I realized just how "bible knowledge challenged" that I was. Biblical hermeneutics opened a whole new world to me.

Maybe that's why I have been drawn to the work of Dr. Steve Isaac. As a friend and one who has been personally influenced by him, I can say without reservation that he possesses a passion to "rightly divide the word of truth." In *Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics*, Steve takes a deep dive into the case for prioritizing truth in biblical interpretation and how to get there. With a practical approach, he makes the labor of exegesis excitingly achievable for

even the faintest among us, which is undeniably something that all of us could use in our own personal study of Scriptures.

In the over 30 years of friendship with Steve, I've found him to be compelling in his love of the Word and a challenger of conventional, worn-out theological processes. As you read *Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics*, I am confident that you will find that Steve is taking us down roads to spiritual depth that we haven't considered before now.

This book has appeared at just the right time, in just the right place. As a nation and as the Church, there has never been a greater need to know what Scriptures are meaning and how to find out, than right now. With the general population becoming less engaged with an often, watered-down, truth starved, message presented from pulpits, the need for straight forward truth-speakers is imperative in seeing a Great Awakening arrive and change our land. Enter, *Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics...* not just another textbook, but a book with a text that will equip and change all of those who will allow it. All of those who love truth.

Happy Reading,

Brad Baker

Dream City Church

Forward

I have found that preaching and teaching the Word of God is one of the most satisfying things I do, but to do it accurately is one of the most challenging things I do. Over the years I've listened (in person and on-line) to many sermons. Some have impacted my life and others, not so much. I grew up in an era and organization which prided itself on its understanding of the Bible. Many things were taught as that, but looking back, many of those things actually were not "Biblical."

I believe during my years at seminary that I truly fell in love with the Word of God. It was during those years that I fell in love with preaching that Word, too. But I want to make certain I am doing so accurately. I'm sure all of us have said, written, emailed, or texted something that was understood incorrectly (or at least in a manner we didn't intend), and then communicated to others. When that happens part of us wants to shout out, "No, that is not what I said."

I guess there is something in me that fears meeting the likes of Moses, David, Matthew, Peter, or Paul and them pulling me aside to say, "Bill, I know you had the best intentions but what you said about what I wrote, was not even close." That is why I believe the Holy Spirit continually drives me to be as prepared as I possibly can before communicating the Word of God to someone, or someone's. What does that mean? Well, that is where Dr. Isaac's book *Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics*, comes into play. As communicators of the Bible, Dr. Isaac says, "[we] possess the great privilege and tremendous responsibility of comprehending the ancient text, arriving at its correct meaning, and conveying its significance to people in their own time and culture so they may apply it to their lives."

I truly appreciate Dr. Isaac's desire to "ignite" a passion for the interpretive process and to assist in creating a sound hermeneutical plan. How could a good communicator of the Bible desire anything less? Sure, it is going to take and investment of time and study. Some may even be thinking, "I don't have time to do all that work." But in the long run it will be worth it. And thank God for a myriad of resources that are available at our fingertips. One does not have to possess multiple earned degrees to be both an Old Testament and New Testament scholar and to effectively communicate the Word of God.

Whether you have "been to seminary" or have just recently become a Christ-follower, this book can help better equip you to divide the Word of Truth righteously and rightly. From its pages you can feel Dr. Isaac's commitment to sound hermeneutics. One aspect of the book that spoke to me was from *Critical Consideration Three: Pre-conceptions and Pre-suppositions*. We must be careful to not allow predetermined conceptions and influences to taint and narrate our understanding of the text. I feel this is where many of us drop the proverbial ball.

I would imagine that most of us have spent the better part of our preaching careers working on our delivery, the flow of our message, how to drive it all home, and how to call people to follow Jesus. More than likely, we have not spent as much time utilizing a sound hermeneutical approach to our study. *Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics* helps with that.

This book is probably not something you can easily listen to in your ear buds at the gym; its going to take some time to carefully read and process. But I believe you will be a better communicator of the Word of God if you do. In the end, if you begin to engage in just some of what Dr. Isaac writes about and start developing and utilizing your own hermeneutical plan and process you will

become more proficient and accurate in delivering the author's intended meaning, and you will become a much better and more faithful communicator of the greatest book on the planet.

Bill W. Martin

Lead Pastor

MovementChurch.online

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Hebrew 13:7

Introduction

The Holy Spirit inspired the original writers of the Bible. Although they wrote its text through human understanding and natural experiences while living in everyday and ordinary life circumstances, the Bible is unquestionable as God's Word to His people. Consequently, God's Word (the Bible) has both natural-spiritual and temporal-eternal relevance. The mysterious reality is the conscious knowledge that its authors spoke and wrote to people who lived centuries ago in another part of the world, speaking different languages and having different cultural values, virtues, and vices. Therefore, to discover its mysteries and meanings, one must employ a well-comprised and Spirit-led approach to interpreting the Bible. Moreover, that is precisely where hermeneutic study steps forward to take its rightful place in the role of biblical interpretation.

Some have explained Biblical Hermeneutics as *the prudent process used for interpreting the meaning of the Scriptures to those who sincerely and diligently seek them*. We can start there. The etymology for the adjective use of the word hermeneutics originated in the 1670s. It derives from the Greek *hermēneuein*, which means "to explain, interpret or to translate." In contrast, *hermēneia* [noun] means "requiring an interpretation or translation." The word and its context have evolved. Current uses have found a specific and profound context within the

theological and seminary communities. Biblical Hermeneutics is now widely recognized as a standardized plan and prioritized principles used to exegete and interpret what a scriptural text means. One follows the hermeneutic process to contextualize what the written text is endeavoring to communicate. A well-designed and spiritually healthy outcome for the layered process of Biblical Hermeneutics should be consistent and contain two fundamental components:

Content - an objective content/subject matter; a fundamental or characteristic part or quality. The Bible is the content and substance. We work from the premise that the Bible is the authoritative, Holy Spirit-inspired, and eternally revealed Word of God. Though the hermeneutical process uses other reliable sources and resources, they are tools to navigate and discover the author's intended meaning. In the right and righteous interpretation of the biblical text - the Bible itself is the central source and substance of divine truth.

Form - an intentional action plan with direct regard to interpreting and finding the meaning of scriptural substance (comparing and contrasting, evaluating, analyzing, and applying). That must start with developing a workable and disciplined hermeneutical plan. One can develop a good plan by employing methods and structures that can be:

Commanded - Managed - Utilized

A reliable hermeneutical plan must be functionally productive, and that will only happen when the user can command, manage, and fully utilize the plan they have designed. Therefore, one of the chief objectives I have set for this book is

to ignite a passion for the interpretive process and to assist in creating a sound hermeneutical plan for those wishing to move forward. That plan will include but not be limited to proven hermeneutical practices such as:

- **Biblical, Historical, and Literary Context**
- **Fundamental Grammatical Analysis and Syntactical Structuring**
- **Sound Doctrinal and Biblical Theology Comparisons**
- **Informed Conclusions and Relevant Contextualization**
- **A Biblical Look at the Role of the Holy Spirit (Prayer, Revelation, and Meditation of God's Word)**
- **Purposeful Application (Sermonization, Teaching, Informative Presentation)**

With the informed development of one's Hermeneutical Plan as the first objective, the next consideration would be choosing a chronological format and structural layout for that plan. Some of the more valuable and practical options for an effective plan are as follows:

- **Basic Bullet Point**
- **Formal Outline with Alphabetized or Numerical Points**
- **Spreadsheet with Columns**
- **Tables, Graphs, and Diagrams**

The aim of Biblical Hermeneutics is that at all points of interpretation and seeking understanding of Scripture, we take the Bible as it is—the final form of the ancient *Hebrew, Hebraic, Aramaic*, and the *koine Greek* texts we possess. The sincere student should desire not only the knowledge of God's divine truth but also its *intended meaning and wisdom* - the two are distinctly different, yet in the context of God's incarnate Word to us, they have a profound unity and connection. One can become evident as a spiritual revelation, while the other can be developed and concluded rationally. One divinely apprehended, the other academically comprehended. The two should not be polarized in opposition but rather implemented as a compliment.

It is essential to understand that all promising approaches to Biblical interpretation should be respected and honored as a "*right and righteous*" process and not simply an academic endeavor. The "*right and righteous*" process is one in which there is a value given and commitment made to the higher standard for theological interpretation while maintaining an open mind and heart to the insights of true spiritual revelation and inductive (evidential) reasoning.

There is a clear need for understanding and implementing even basic levels of sound and standardized biblical hermeneutics among leaders globally who are answering the rising call to Christian ministry as pastors, teachers, influencers, and mentors. Many of those need access and opportunity to gain knowledge of biblical truth and doctrine. At the same time, others need knowledge and practice of reliable processes for biblical interpretation. Then some are more in need of the well-reasoned and Spirit-led contextualization of Scripture. The passionate and diligent student of Scripture can see that the comprehensive and

consistent process of righteous Biblical interpretation is relevant and significant to the needs of present-day Christendom.

What the Bible means by its sacred text has a profound significance not only to the global Christian Church but to its pastors, teachers, and emerging leaders. Therefore, commitment to a comprehensive and consistent process of Biblical hermeneutics is equally as authoritative and essential in our efforts and effectiveness to unbelievers as those we disciple and serve.

If, as a lifelong learner and committed student of the Bible, there is a well-designed or stated outcome process for interpreting Scripture, it will include those two (previously mentioned) hermeneutical components – **Content** (Word) and **Form** (study plan). For example:

As a pastor and teacher of God's Word, the desired outcome is to influence and equip people with the righteous and rightly divided Word of Truth. Therefore, the commitment is to Spirit-led excellence, personal integrity, and scholastic discipline in the study and interpretation of the Bible. The vow is to practice fidelity to these commitments in preparation to effectively and humbly teach, preach, and write God's inspired and Spirit-revealed Word for the people of God.

The passionate and disciplined student of Scripture will not carelessly overlook reliable sources or omit proven resources of substance that lead to a greater

depth of understanding and a more accurate interpretation of Scripture. These are called *critical considerations*. When critical sources of contextual and textual consideration are overlooked or omitted in the hermeneutical process, both the hearer and the presenter have experienced a great disservice in the learning process and the presentation of Biblical truth. The first example of disservice is in the limitation of personal spiritual growth from the lack of depth and understanding to the unreliability of the flawed foundation needed to build strong faith and accurate beliefs. The second would be signs that the commitment and need for veracity and fidelity in one's teaching and preaching are compromised. Communicating (preaching, teaching, and writing) God's Word requires trust (pure motive and righteous intentions) between the presenter and the hearer. The hearer must trust that the presenter of God's Word has taken every right and righteous step and used every reputable and trusted source to ensure that his interpretation and communication of Scripture is accurate and not erroneous, sloppy, or pragmatic.

The content for *Critical Considerations* was written and compiled to introduce and teach the best practices and fundamental ideas of Biblical Hermeneutics to any who seek depth of Biblical understanding by discovering the author's intended meaning of the text they wrote. It is also a vehicle for creating conversation and hermeneutic strategies around those critical considerations I have confronted in forty years of pastoring. This process was highly significant in developing personal hermeneutic and interpretive strategies for weekly application and spiritual growth. The information and research discussed in this book will also provide the reader with a baseline for one's level of hermeneutical knowledge and proficiency. The presented processes have assisted this author not only towards effectiveness in Biblical interpretation but also significantly

changed the limited lens and bandwidth of spiritual perspectives and the understanding of other biblical perspectives and processes.

This hermeneutical effectiveness also tackles the ongoing challenge of specific "go-to" points of Biblical reference and comfortable theological preferences. There must be a healthy tension between the comfortability of teaching what one knows and the uncomfortable process of increased new learning and digging deep to understand what one does not know or fully understand. Maintaining a commitment to considerations critical to Scripture's accurate interpretation creates productive tension that stimulates and leads to new learning and continued growth. The following content introduces and encourages *fourteen critical considerations* for the hermeneutical process.

Critical Consideration One

The Interpretive Process: Defining Meaningful Distinctions

Let's start with a sobering look at the idea of a standardized or structured plan for the interpretive process of Biblical text. We can see the need for greater understanding and urgency regarding the interpretive processes of Biblical hermeneutics and the distinctions between validity and relevance and viability and necessity. The viability and necessity for biblical hermeneutics have not always been best decided or discovered in the halls of self-affirming seminaries, institutions of higher learning, and intellectual affectation. In far too many instances, the institution ends up talking only to itself about a knowledge of something only they know. This can easily be perceived as a form of "spiritual or intellectual elitism." This broken institutional and intellectual cloistering can no longer remain the benchmark for Biblical study which is too essential to be inaccessible, misunderstood, and underutilized by untrained pastors and teachers. No, the real viability and necessity for sound hermeneutic processes and standardized plans used for right and righteous biblical interpretation is most needed and best discovered within (equipping) and without (evangelism) of the global Christian Church. It is where we accurately teach, preach, practice, and process the many patterns and paradoxes of God's principles, sound biblical doctrine, and veracious theology.

The Church is where people who need meaning and hope from the right and righteously divided Word of truth find it. The knowledgeable student and passionate teacher of Scripture must be remarkably mindful of these realities, always seeking the knowledge and understanding of Biblical interpretation and its critical significance to our world and to the Church. Biblical hermeneutics is not a place to get lost - it is the place to be found.

We can now move forward with defining and familiarizing ourselves to the point of comfortability and confidence in those distinct interpretive structures and plans and how they effectively fit within the interpretive process and practical function. Then, simply moving forward into a “right and righteous” practice of consistently seeking the author's context and intended meaning for a particular biblical text is a faithful step of great significance. Once done, adding other proven interpretation and analysis methods becomes a natural progression. The following statement provides some definitions for some of those distinctions in biblical interpretation.

It is correct to assume that the interpretive process of biblical text must involve the development of a standardized structure for study and a careful adherence to a set of interpretive principles (hermeneutical plan) that can be applied (exegetical application) to objectively "draw out" of a scriptural text the author's intended meaning. When this process is soundly and thoroughly implemented it can present the following:

- **Historical, Theological, and Linguistic Context**
- **Personal Understanding and Fidelity to the Author's Intended Meaning**
- **Relevant Contextualization to Present-day Hearers and Readers of the Word of God.**

The content provided in *Critical Considerations* is not voluminous, but it is substantial and contains a challenging amount of concepts and rules for interpreting Scripture. One who truly seeks to understand and righteously communicate God's Word accurately should be aware of what they do not know or understand and be willing to do something about it. The Bible student or

teacher/pastor must embrace this as a critical and essential process in protecting all involved from the spiritual dangers of interpreting Scripture solely through pre-determinations and pre-conceptions, or assumptions and conjecture.

To provide a baseline for building out a sound and standardized hermeneutical process, we can start with a small glossary of ten basic and distinctive terms that introduce a common understanding for navigating that process for the intentional and serious-minded Bible student.

Biblical Hermeneutics: This is the standardized process, prioritized principles, and interpretive rules one has embraced for a consistently more effective and accurate interpretation of Scripture.

Hermeneutical Plan: The standardized process and methodology for interpreting the scriptural text to uncover the author's biblical, historical, and literary context, leading to the right and righteous interpretation of that author's intended meaning. That standardized process must include a wide range of semantical, grammatical, and syntactical structures unique to both the original language and spiritual context. The Hermeneutical Plan that illuminates and righteously interprets Scripture must also build a bridge to present-day readers and hearers of relevance and significance. The good hermeneutical plan brings life to the hearer and reader of the Word of God, not death.

Exegesis: "Exegesis" comes from a Greek compound word that means drawing, guiding, or pulling out from. Therefore, "exegesis" came to refer to the act of interpretation because it carried the notion of "leading or drawing out" of a text its meaning. Exegesis is the disciplined application of the standardized principles and rules used in the interpretation and meaning of a chosen text,

simply using one's hermeneutical process or plan to discover scriptural meaning.

Eisegesis: When pre-conceptions or pre-understandings influence and override the interpretive process; or when dogmatically reading a pre-determination into the text. The exact opposite of exegesis, "eisegesis" means to lead, push, or guide. When looking for evidence that confirms personal pre-understandings while ignoring the details in the text that refute it, this manipulates the righteous and scholarly process and concludes that the text "means" what one has already believed or pre-determined it to mean. The result silences the authority of the biblical text even while it is being claimed and proclaimed. In some way, the reader's understanding still needs to be submitted to the full intent of the writer. His bias governs and skews interpretation.

Exposition: The oral or written communication of the meaning of a chosen Biblical text in its intended meaning to original hearers. This communication builds the "bridge" of relevant meaning for present-day hearers. A "good" Biblical exposition must move both the communicator and the hearer of Scripture from its original context, to a careful and insightful analysis of the text, and then back to a sound context for present-day application and understanding of the text.

Scriptural Pre-Suppositions / Pre-Understandings: The collective assumptions, attitudes, determinations, and learned responses the student of Scripture (either knowingly or unknowingly) brings to the interpretive process of any given or chosen text.

Sola-Scriptura: The Latin phrase meaning; Scripture alone. A commitment to Sola Scriptura leads to a broadened commitment to a sound hermeneutic

process—to how one can both right and righteously study and interpret the Bible. Hermeneutics matter because the process determines whether we, in practice, hold to Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone). Every time we open our Bibles, we need to approach and utilize that time to seek, above all, an understanding of what Scripture says - to work a sound and practical hermeneutical process that includes all that Scripture says - eliminating the potential for intentions, excuses, or purposes that undermine any of scriptures implications and understanding. Sola Scriptura leads to a hermeneutic standard of absolute surrender so that what we have in the end is the authority, revelation, and order of Scripture and nothing but the Scripture.

Context: Context uses understanding the bigger picture to interpret smaller parts more accurately. In earnest and deliberate Bible study, one must consider the broader context within a passage. Not grasping the whole before endeavoring to understand its parts ensures that interpreting the biblical text is questionable before even getting started. Statements and proclamations have no meaning apart or "cut and pasted" from their context. If one were to say, "I am all in," you would most likely ask, "What do you mean by 'all in'?" and then, "How can I do that?" Without a particular circumstance or situation to give the context, the statement is irrelevant and meaningless. In Scripture, the context provides the circumstance and situation to support the text. There is no meaning apart from context, only the potential for numerous possible meanings. That is not a right or righteous luxury we have with interpreting Biblical text.

If someone were to yell out in a crowded room, "Right." How would anyone having heard the shouted word "Right" know what is meant by it? Perhaps the shouter meant, "Yes, you are right," or "Write this down," or "Move to the right," or "Let's perform this rite," or even "This is our God-given right." Without a

context, any of those interpretations are possible, and the shouter's intentions without having that context are never known.

Two areas of context must be established at the beginning of any Biblical interpretation: the Historical context and its Biblical context. Under the first category (historical context), we study introductory material, background, and periodical resources about the book and author to determine the setting and audience. Under the second category (Biblical context), we use an inductive approach to trace the thought and theological development of a book. Both aspects are necessary before one can begin a detailed analysis of a particular passage of biblical text. However, the historical and Biblical contexts provide the foundation for constructing a chosen text's in-depth (author-intended) meaning. Interpreting the author's intention will likely stay intact with a solid contextual foundation.

Etymology: The history of a [linguistic form](#) (such as a word) shown by tracing its development since its earliest recorded occurrence in the language where it is found, by tracing its transmission from one language to another, by analyzing it into its component parts, by identifying its cognates (comparable words) in other languages, or by tracing it and its cognates to a common ancient/ancestral form in an ancient/ancestral language.

Semantics and Semantic Range: Tracing the uses and meaning of a word from its original periods. Semantics and semantic range are much more than an etymological study of a word or words. Semantic study and range allow for the linguistic evolution and general uses of a word or words from other periods and move those words forward to find relevant uses and meanings. For example, we are simply tracing a word from what it meant then to what it means now. Most of us will never be engaged in the type of detailed research described within the

robust parameters of advanced academic semantic studies. We will need more time to retrace each use in its original context and reorganize the results based on recent semantic theory. However, we can remain effective and knowledgeable with primary sources like BDB (A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament) or BAGD (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature), or, for those who might not be fully comfortable interpreting from the original languages there are excellent resources such as EBC (Expositors Bible Commentaries), and uses within the in-depth commentaries.

Indeed, those who are pastors, teachers, missionaries, and scholars in related fields will not always have the time to do primary research. Nevertheless, if we know the theory behind original intent, historical and linguistic context, and the study of biblical semantics (advanced word studies), we can use secondary tools with greater understanding and comprehension. If we know what is involved in developing a semantic range, we can adequately use those practical semantic studies developed for us with effective and trusted results.

Critical Consideration Two

The Approach: Inductive and Deductive

Defining the Inductive and Deductive Approach

The common link to the term *Inductive Approach* is with the word evidential. Evidential, when defined in a hermeneutical context, is a sound and systematic commitment to the evidence in and around the text allowing for that evidence to determine our understanding of the meaning of the text - wherever that evidence may lead. In a similar context, the *Deductive Approach* is used synonymously with pre-conception: a commitment to certain assumptions (whether stated or implicit) that we have learned or allowed to determine or set forth our understanding of the meaning of the text.

In the best practice of proper biblical hermeneutics, an inductive approach to the study and interpretation of the Bible is initially the most needed. Why is that? Simply put, the inductive approach is best suited for understanding both the comprehensive and the specific and detailed nature of the Bible while leaving room for preserving foundational and fundamental truths, sound doctrine, and tested theology. That Biblical nature stands outside of ourselves and has its intended message waiting to speak to us, a message founded and emerging from its religious, social, linguistic, and historical context. **As we study and seek its meaning, the Bible calls us to hear its message on its terms - not our own. The Bible seeks to speak God's truth - not our own.** It is a truth that challenges our pre-suppositions rather than simply forming ourselves to them. Induction is the approach to historical and human context, including culture, literature, language, and, most importantly, the divine.

Conversely, deductive is the approach of pre-determined understandings or presupposed processes and formulas that can often promote a self-established, closed-off, and narrow dogmatic system. The inductive approach gives more opportunity for exploring realities that have an existence of their own and are not contained or defined by a systematic or personal dogma that have been pre-determine for them.

An inductive approach to Bible study has two essential aspects: an inductive attitude making room and possibility for greater understanding and revelation of scripture, and an inductive process that constructs and supports an inductive spirit and attitude. An inductive process is possible only when an inductive attitude precedes it. However, both must be present, and both are essential for the genuine study and interpretation of the Bible. The sign of an inductive attitude is whether a genuine openness characterizes one's approach to the conclusions (interpretations) revealed by biblical evidence. This "*open to learning what I do not know*" attitude is the inner strength of the inductive approach. Therefore, any specific hermeneutic process that might be considered inductive has its outer expression rooted in sound doctrine and practical application.

The deductive and inductive approaches are mutually exclusive. Yes, the deductive attitude can be overly dogmatic, authoritarian, and categorical yet does not exclude its entire approach and value to the interpretive process. At the same time, the inductive attitude can miss and marginalize the significant role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process, often projecting as elitism or even an arrogant and separatist mindset. Both are approaches and attitudes are dangerous when exercised through *absolutist extremes*, and the result is often

less than right and righteous or sound and reliable. In some doctrinal understandings, or Biblical patterns, principles, and standards, absolutism is essential. However, in the interpretive process of Scripture the absolutist must give more than nominal consideration to the possibility of interpretive or human error and be ever ready to re-align to accuracy and fidelity. That is best achieved when there is a willingness to change when revealed or shown to be wrong and then must be open to challenging contextual dialogue or critical considerations. Furthermore, the absolutist is often concerned with seeking supportive proof texts for a position already held (cut and paste theology). One could best describe the dogma of the absolutist mindset by saying, *“My mind is made up; do not confuse me with the facts.”*

The deductive approach is often motivated by the fear that long-held beliefs and traditions are subject to being reviewed and questioned. Such traditions are often based on the acceptance of what a person has heard, preached, or taught, which may or may not have been examined critically in the light of the entire Biblical context and text. When these beliefs become foundational to one’s entire belief system, there is fear that a broader and less dogmatic exploration might cause the belief system to be questioned or discarded. Asking the right questions from the motivation of a right heart is a spiritually healthy practice. Continually questioning with a sinful heart or insincere motive is a spiritually destructive practice.

Important to understand that certain creedal and apostolic pre-suppositions, including various theological principles and biblical doctrines, are embedded and present in the Scriptures and inevitably pre-determine the outcome of the interpretation of texts. They will not change, so the process becomes more

about discovery and practice than interpretation. In such cases, the interpreter is told what the text should mean instead of hearing the text on its own terms.

Still, others need help with the biblical worldview and try to interpret the biblical text to conform to their contrasting worldview. Rather than prioritizing the interpretive phase on the message being communicated through the text and leaving value judgments and opinions until later, they begin by imposing their views on the text and then reading and interpreting it accordingly. These are the early indications of the highly heretical and toxic - *progressivism*. For example, some people determine that the supernatural realm is closed and miracles no longer happen, so they interpret miraculous biblical stories as “myths.” Others begin with the conclusion that transcendent divine revelation of scripture is impossible. Consequently, they understand the text as religious history, an ancient documentation of human thinking and seeking after the divine. Progressive social and political ideologies—such as feminism, gender or nonbinary expressionism, liberation theology, capitalism, and even socialism—have been pushed through the hermeneutical process with a cultural bias to establish and affirm pre-determined or desired outcomes for Biblical text.

The main objections posed by leaders at the beginning of the inductive Bible study movement were the result of wrongly believed and forceful biblical criticisms, which those who taught inductive Bible study recognized to be a set of assumptions (some of them better grounded than others, but all of them speculative) that often served as the lens used to view the Biblical text. Consider notable examples of your own personal experiences with more or less unexamined views and the dogmatic misuse of a deductive attitude/spirit.

In contrast, the inductive spirit and the process it implements seek to be non-dogmatic. The inductively minded person is open to discourse, discussion, and even respectful challenges; this openness is the desire to hear whatever the text has to say, whether one agrees or disagrees with its content and meaning. Such an inductively minded person recognizes that at a later point, one will have the opportunity to make valued judgments and spiritual examinations concerning the message communicated by the text. Furthermore, one with this inductive spirit is willing to acknowledge one's fallibility and to begin any interpretation with the statement,

"I could be wrong, but this is my understanding, and here are the evidential reasons for it."

Such a person is open to changing one's view if the evidence warrants it. A person with a genuinely inductive spirit will actively seek differing interpretations and the reasons for them. Even if one does not find grounds to justify a change in one's understanding of the text, at least one will have a better understanding and perhaps a better appreciation for differing points of view.

An Inductive Community

Ideally, each believer in Christ is a valued part of a Christian community where there is a broader practice and responsibility for the inductive approach than just for the individual. The Christian Church should be a community of biblical, theological, and moral dialogue, among many other things. Such conversation is discouraged because those with a deductive, dogmatic approach feel attacked or challenged by the process. In such communities, anyone who challenges or seeks a broader understanding of biblical doctrines or scripture held by most

members is isolated and marginalized. As a result, many churches may lack the openness that should characterize the faithful community. Instead, the community should have an inductive approach to studying and interpreting scripture, teaching, and learning God's word.

A true community in unity does not avoid complex issues or spiritually healthy conversations that may carry with them different views and understanding. On the contrary, the inductive attitude in the community is to have open dialogue and the freedom to search out all premises and inferences based on an evidential approach to the biblical text. This practice should be especially true for those who presumably subscribe

Communities of faith, however, should not be completely undogmatic. This statement is a truth vitally crucial for pastors, teachers, and leaders. Some biblical principles and doctrines of the Christian faith do not need further interpretation or added understanding - they are fixed and narrow, and for a good reason. Christians should agree on foundational and core biblical issues on the grounds of both an inductive and deductive approach and process. There should always be a welcome space for communities with a distinct calling and targeted mission to reason and process what God is revealing and saying - in His Word and by His Spirit. At the same time, an inductive attitude is a call to love and respect while hearing the interpretation and understanding of others, especially those members of the community of faith. Christian people would be wise to hear others inside and outside of the communities they belong—for example, traditional and non-traditional, denominational and non-denominational, and community and corporate.

Critical Consideration Three

Pre-Conceptions and Pre-Suppositions

A passionate student of Scripture will not carelessly look past sources or resources of substance that lead to a greater depth of understanding and a more accurate interpretation of Scripture. These are what this author has called *critical considerations*. When critical sources of contextual and textual consideration are overlooked or omitted in the hermeneutical process, both the hearer and the presenter have missed an excellent opportunity to learn and present Biblical truth. Two primary examples of this would be:

- *When the potential for personal spiritual growth is limited, shallow, and needs a more reliable foundation to build one's faith, belief, and a trusted platform for sharing and teaching important but difficult Biblical truths and doctrine.*
- *When the commitment to and the need for veracity and fidelity in Biblical teaching and preaching within the global Church are compromised, communicating (preaching, teaching, and writing) God's Word loses trust between the presenter and the hearer. The hearer must always trust that the presenter of God's Word has taken every right and righteous step and used every reputable and trusted source to ensure that his or her interpretation and communication of Scripture is accurate, sincere, and not erroneous or disingenuous.*

In writing *Critical Considerations*, the objective was to introduce or re-introduce the foundational principles and best practices of Biblical Hermeneutics to the community of Christ that seeks not just knowledge of the Bible, but an accurate understanding of the intended meaning of a divinely inspired text - God's Word. The desired outcome was to move biblical hermeneutics away from being merely an academic process or intellectual exercise and to build a bridge of understanding and practical use for pastors, teachers, preachers, leaders, and Bible-based communicators.

In addition, *Critical Considerations* will *provide* a vehicle for creating conversation and hermeneutical strategies around those methods and structures I have found highly significant to developing interpretive processes for Scripture. The information and research presented will also assist the reader with identifying a baseline for one's hermeneutical knowledge and proficiency level. The processes the reader will learn assisted effectiveness and veracity in biblical interpretation and changed the limited lens and bandwidth of personal growth and scope of understanding. This growth includes identifying and exposing "go-to" points of biblical reference and my comfortable theological preferences to see if they met the standards of a good and righteous process of hermeneutical scrutiny. These incremental movements account for far more than intellectual advancement and academic endeavor. It represents the journey and the joy of fulfillment and breakthrough into new realms of Biblical study and context. It reaches for more than what has been told, heard, or required. Vetting and scrutinizing the need or desire to be right to prove others wrong - reaching into the unspeakable righteous fulfillment of Biblical understanding and interpretation,

Accurately understanding the Bible requires that we recognize and consider any pre-determinations or pre-suppositions that might influence but distort or shift the author's intended meaning of any given biblical text. Unfortunately (too often), many pastors, teachers, life experiences, cultural influences, and domestic upbringings are paralyzed by a knowledge base of learned behaviors and beliefs that have suppressed or misdirected and not enlightened or illuminated the accurate and righteous interpretive process of God's Word. Nevertheless, there are many scriptural contexts in which a pre-supposed and personal reference interpretive process can be beneficial - it is understandable.

However, the reliability and accuracy of personal reference interpretation often tend to skew and ignore the hermeneutical process rather than acknowledge or align with it. All interpreters bring their pre-conceptions and pre-suppositions, references, and preferences to the interpretive process. These each influence the understanding or misunderstanding of Scripture, and then critical conclusions are drawn from it.

References and Preferences that Pre-Determine or Pre-Suppose How We Interpret the Bible

- ***Denominational Affiliation or History***
- ***A Value System Other Than the Bible***
- ***Dogmatic Theology***
- ***Ethnicity and Gender***
- ***Socio-Economic Background***
- ***Education and Training***

- ***Community and Civil Priorities***
- ***Polarizing Political or Social Views***
- ***Elemental or Limited Biblical Exposure***
- ***Bible Translations Used***
- ***Influential Biblical Preaching***
- ***Orientation Toward Biblical Scholarship***
- ***Family Expectations and Influences***
- ***Life Crisis and Personal Trauma***
- ***Spirituality and Divine Guidance or Revelation***

Understanding Biblical Pre-Conceptions and Pre-Suppositions

The discovery, understanding, and resolution of certain pre-conceptions and pre-suppositions about Scripture interpreted within the foundational and capstone Biblical hermeneutic processes is essential. If those limiting beliefs and practices are not discovered and understood, the spiritually healthy or right and righteous interpretive process is not needed. Why not just interpret all Scripture to what we have pre-determined or is already decided for us? Or, all Scriptural interpretation left to what one or those want it to mean? Irresponsible and dangerous!

Here are some questions to use in discovering those Biblical pre-conceptions and pre-suppositions that need to be discovered, understood, and resolved.

- **Do you see the Bible as a divine inspiration of God's Spirit revealed through the minds, hearts, and circumstances of human writers?**
- **Do you believe the Bible is both authoritative and true?**
- **Do you perceive the Bible as a text of spiritual priority and order with the capacity and purpose for transforming and human lives?**
- **Do you understand the Bible as sovereignly paradoxical in that it is both Unifying and Diversifying?**
- **Do you believe the message of the Bible is understandable and relative?**
- **Can you accept the sixty-six canonized Books of the Bible as God's scriptural record of and to His people?**

As stated earlier, not all pre-suppositions, pre-conceptions, or pre-determinations of a biblical text or scriptures should be determined wrong or a hinderance to the hermeneutical process. Especially, when they are directly aligned and tethered to biblical creeds, fundamental doctrines of Christian faith, and sound biblical theology. Nonetheless, it will always be a best practice and righteous discipline to identify and acknowledge those pre-existing influences and determinations each time there is an intentional interpretive process of biblical text intended for teaching, preaching, and communicating God's Word to others.

Critical Consideration Four

Meaning: The Issues of Author's Intent and Student Interpretation

The goal of what we have determined as right and righteous Biblical hermeneutics provides a standardized strategy that will lead us to understand the meaning and significance of what an author or speaker intended to communicate and what the reader or student of Scripture interprets from that text. Meaning is to be equated with the intention of the human author. E.D. Hirsch wrote, "To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning ... [is] to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation."¹

The meaning of a given text is singular, but applications of that text can be many. To keep us focused on the author's intent and meaning, here are a few questions to help chart our course toward interpreting right and righteously.

Is it correct to presume that there is only a singular meaning of a particular scriptural text and that our goal is to understand the author's meaning in the writing of that text?

Is there only one correct meaning to a given or specified text, or is there the possibility of various correct meanings?

¹ E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967)

Is there a different meaning for a text written twenty centuries earlier in a different culture, country, and linguistic context?

There are, in fact, many schools of thought regarding those three questions. One school of thought says that a text's only correct meaning is the original author's singular intent and meaning. Another school of thinking contends that the correct meaning of a particular text is purely a function of readers, not authors, and the correct meaning of any text depends upon the readers' perception and interpretation of it. In following this thought, the reader, not the writer, actually "creates" the meaning while reading the text. In the context of Biblical interpretation, that way of thinking is more than concerning. Other schools of thought conclude that meaning rests within the texts, regardless of what the author meant or how readers eventually interpret them. Again, very concerning. One school even proposes the possibility that textual meaning comes from some form of a complex dialogue between a reader and the text itself. The biggest concern with that method is that the reader needs to emphasize listening while talking less. Imagine that.

Within the last couple of centuries, a great many hermeneutical experts have continued to believe and contend that all Biblical text presents God's revelation of Himself—*His Word and His Creation*—to humanity. The discipline of hermeneutic interpretation, says these experts, is to a more complete understanding of the original authors intended meaning. Comprehensive study of the encompassing historical, cultural, and linguistic context, as well as a sound theological understanding those original audiences and hearers are taken into consideration in order to better understand what the meaning of the text

meant to its original recipients. The experts and scholars within that embrace this interpretive tradition more than notable and prestigious.²

Nonetheless, the hermeneutical approach that holds to intent and meaning the original author in a text has been labeled by opponents as the “*intentional fallacy*.” Three central arguments are made against it:

One. Some authors publicly repudiate things they have written earlier, proving that the meaning of a text is changeable.

Two. It is impossible to reproduce the meaning experience that an author had when first writing a text.

Three. Sometimes other people understand an author’s meaning better than the author.

E.D. Hirsch, founder of the *Core Knowledge Foundation*, and author of the acclaimed book “*Cultural Literacy*”, provides a strong apologetic response to each of the three opposing arguments:³

1. In direct response to the accusation that the meaning of a text changes, even for the author, Hirsch contends:

When critics assert that the author’s understanding of his text changes, they refer to the experience that everybody has when he rereads his own work. His response to it is different. . . . These examples do not show the meaning of the work has changed, but precisely the opposite. If the work’s meaning had changed (instead of the author himself and his

² E. W. Hengstenberg, Carl F. Keil, Franz Delitzsch, H. A. W. Meyer, J. P. Lange, F. Godet, Henry Alford, Charles Ellicott, J. B. Lightfoot, B. F. Westcott, F. J. A. Hort, Charles Hodge, John A. Broadus, and Theodore B. Zahn.⁸⁴ Hermeneutical manuals within this tradition have included those by C. A. G. Keil, A. B. Davidson, Patrick Fairbairn, A. Immer, Milton S. Terry, Louis Berkhof, A. Berkeley Mickelsen, and Bernard Ramm.

³ E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 7–9.

attitudes), then the author would not have needed to repudiate his meaning and could have spared himself the discomfort of a public recantation. No doubt the significance of the work to the author had changed a great deal, but its meaning had not changed at all. . . . Even though the author has indeed changed his mind about the meaning he wants to convey by his words, he has not managed to change his earlier meaning. This is very easily proved by his own report. He could report a change in his understanding only if he were able to compare his earlier construction of his meaning with his later construction.⁸⁵

2. In direct response to the criticism that one cannot reproduce the exact meaning experience that an author had when he or she first wrote a text, Hirsch contends:

It is important to distinguish between meaning and meaning experience. Meaning (what I intended to convey by certain signs and symbols) is reproducible. Meaning experience (meaning plus psychological significance to me at the time I wrote it) is not necessarily reproducible, nor does it need to be.

3. In direct response to the argument that in some situations another person understands the text better than the author Hirsch contends:

It is more accurate to say either that a later writer may understand the subject matter better than an earlier author (but this is not the same as saying that the later writer understood the original author's meaning better than did the original author) or that a later writer may understand the implications of what an earlier author wrote more fully than the original author understood the implications. Again, this

does not mean that the later writer understood the original author's meaning better.⁴

Other notable approaches to understanding an author's intended meaning should also be revised. One approach/method is the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS).⁵ According to author and theologian D.A. Carson, this approach consists of "those readings of biblical texts that consciously seek to legitimize a perceived theological nature of the author's texts and impose the influence of that theology (corporate and personal; past and present) over the interpreter's hermeneutical study and process." The trouble is that TIS puts the authority of a text of the Bible from within how the church fathers, creeds, or some church community understands the meaning of the text, and not from the divine authority of the text itself. This point will become asserted and clarified as we go, but please hear and sincerely consider the veracity of this statement.

The meaning of a Biblical text used for teaching and communicating its scriptures is the meaning that the AUTHOR/author intended for his readers.

At the same time, the significance of a particular text might only be understood within the larger context of the entire book or biblical narrative (ie; context, journey, message, and purpose), and the trajectory of that message for the church's mission in a specific place and time.

⁴ E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 7–9.

⁵ D.A. Carson - "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . .," published in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

We cannot assume or impose on a biblical author the detailed information available to us because of our accumulated knowledge base—whether historical, astronomical, or theological. Nor can we expect that an ancient writer possessed or had access to our knowledge. It is conclusive that one can quickly skew their meaning if we read into (*eisegesis*) an author's text any information or knowledge he could not have possessed.

For example, when Isaiah speaks of the "circle of the earth" (Isaiah 40:22), he may well be speaking or writing from a *flat-earth* model (that is, as seen from God's heavenly throne, the earth looks like a flat, round coin). However, to hear him in his contextual terms requires we resist the temptation to impose even our basic modern knowledge of the universe into the text. Instead, because we know "the progression of the story," we must make a special effort to recreate how the writer's understood things and how their words impacted their original recipients who lacked our current knowledge.

In context, these thoughts should challenge us to consider a couple of fundamental questions.

Who has the authority to determine what meaning is?

The first question has a simple answer. 'Meaning' refers to the content of the communication that a writer or speaker consciously has willed to convey by intentionally using and placing his words, grammar, and context. In the context of Biblical interpretation, what a reader or listener feels about a particular text does not constitute meaning; it is not what a reader or listener has pre-

conceived or pre-supposed; it is not what a reader or listener him or herself creates for him or herself; and, it is certainly not what a reader or listener feels thereafter. Simply because what one is feeling is real, does not mean what one is feeling is reality.

In Biblical interpretation, initially the reader or listener does not contribute anything to the meaning of Scripture itself but instead seeks to rightly interpret it by drawing or pulling out the author's intended meaning to gain a right and righteous understanding of Biblical truth.

When fully embracing the Bible as the revelation of God to humankind, it becomes insincere to believe and prefer what we—its recipients—contribute to its meaning. As "revealed truth," the Bible is the purposeful product of God's active intention to reveal the understanding of His Word to us—an understanding that we could otherwise never have. That is why Paul calls the Scriptures "the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2); these are God's sermons to us. That is also why Paul also describes the Scriptures as "inspired by God" or, more literally, "breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The message of Biblical Scripture originates in God alone, revealed to those to whom He chose to write it. The meaning of any Biblical text no longer depends upon its readers' interpretation. It exists timelessly and eternally within the sovereignty of God-created time, whether readers recognize it or hearers listen to it.

The second question.

Who has the authority to determine the meaning of a scriptural text?

To that, there are two answers.

One - The authority to determine the intended meaning of a text rests solely within the author himself. In the context of Biblical interpretation, the author has the first and last words about the meaning of the text.

Two - An authority exists for interpreters who assume authority from the author when interpreting the text consistent with the author's intent. So, to the extent that one who is interpreting refuses to lean on his understanding and instead submits to the will and purpose of the author, he has the authority to tell others "What the text means." These issues are critical because our definition of the discipline of hermeneutics will depend on our answer to where meaning exists—in the author's mind and inspiration, in the text, in the mind of the reader, or some combination of these.

Just as the biblical text arose within the context of historical, personal processes and circumstances, interpreters are people navigating the context of personal circumstances and processes. Consequently, Biblical hermeneutics must give attention to the context of ancient text and the conditions that produced it. However, responsible interpretation must recognize the context of the circumstances and understand those who attempt to explain the Scriptures today. No one interprets Scripture in a vacuum or silo; everyone has pre-conceptions and pre-understandings. Of course, one can only interpret with some pre-understanding of the subject.

Nevertheless, people should only approach biblical interpretation, assuming their current knowledge can right and righteously guide them. A sincere

Christian must believe the writing and continued existence of the Bible is for them - it is unwise to assume that it was written to them or, in most cases, about them. When doing this, the context is lost, and the risk of misunderstanding and misusing the message and meaning of the Scripture is highly probable.

The Speech Act Theory

The approach of language is significant to meaning through the intent and interpretation of the scriptural text. Much of the understanding of that significance is in the structural categories known in linguistics study as *The Speech Act Theory*. *The Speech Act Theory* is a contemporary linguistics theory introduced by Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin, then later adapted and further developed by American philosopher J.R. Seale. *The Speech Act Theory* considers the degree to which written or oral communications are said to perform. There are three acts of writing or speech: *locutionary*, *illocutionary*, and *perlocutionary*. Among other linguistic principles, their theory provides the general rule for concluding literal meaning from non-literal meaning. A clear understanding of the Speech Acts is critical to accurate and righteous Biblical interpretation.

Locution (the actual words on the page - what it says) Refers to communication regarded in terms of its intrinsic meaning or reference, as distinct from its function or purpose in context - especially concerning language style or idiom. So, what do the words say? Are the words written or spoken literally? A simple example of locution from the speech act theory is in the proclamation of Jesus, "*You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14).

Illocution (the author's context and purpose for using those words - why it was used) Identifies the speaker or writer's intention for using those specific words. What do the words mean to the author? What creative and interpretive process does the author use? What "context" does the author express by using certain words? This speech act focuses on what the author was seeking to "convey" with the choice of words or purpose for those words to the readers, such as assertions, commissions, directives, declarations, and expressive illocutionary points. For example, we might say that by using words in a phrase such as "light of the world", Jesus intended to both encourage and challenge his disciples to "illuminate" their world by loving and serving others through "good deeds" (Matthew 5:16). Another thought is that He wanted to inform them of their identity as his disciples: they are to be a contrast – a light in a world characterized by its darkness.

Perlocution (how the author's intended meanings determine desired outcomes for the readers - what and how it affects) Refers to how the speaker or writer envisioned desired outcomes or results for the listener or reader. For example, persuading, convincing, or reasoning. In Matthew 5, Jesus' likely intended outcome was that the disciples would become who He had called them to be, thereby engaging themselves in a variety of good and righteous works that revealed their commitment to bringing glory to God and advancing the message and mission of His kingdom. Because of their good deeds and the light that shines from them, God's Kingdom comes and His will is done. Of course, most often we never know the total reach of an author's intended outcome. However, here in the gospels, we have the light of this intended message still changing and influencing the world.

C. S. Lewis once said,

“The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is—what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used.”

That is the practical premise and functional use for the Speech Act Theory as a sound and reliable tool in hermeneutical and interpretive processes. This writer has believed with deep conviction that Scripture was primarily intended to be used for application, so that God’s people, might align themselves further to the will of God the Father, and might then conform themselves to the image (*εἰκῶν, eikōn*) of God the Son in his perfect humanity, by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:28-29

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

A Christ-centric objective is a necessary and critical consideration for the *Christ-centric* goal of the pastor, teacher, preacher, and communicator of Biblical text. The goal should be that we read, interpret, teach and preach Scripture with the right and righteous understanding of *what it is, what it was intended to do, and how it is meant to be used (objective)* to lead hearers to Christ, and to reveal itself of His likeness.

Critical Consideration Five

Contextualization: Context and Text - Text and Meaning - Meaning and Contextualizing

As stated, the hermeneutic process represents a standardized system used to gather historical, biblical, and literary context often used to establish the spiritual and cultural environment and influences on the author or writer of the biblical text. That gathered context assists in leading to a greater understanding of the author's intended meaning for his text. With this broadened insight, the reader/interpreter moves to a more fitting and righteous interpretive conclusion of a given text. If discovering the intended meaning of the AUTHOR/author's text is the pursuit - then understanding the context for both the author and his text is the means of reaching that pursuit.

This process describes what the *missiologists* (the academic study of the Christian mission - its history and methodologies) first called "*contextualization*." Contextualization is "*that dynamic process which interprets the significance of a religion or cultural norm for a group with a different (or developed) cultural heritage*." The term originated in 1972 when the Theological Education fund published a document called *Ministry in Context* and said, "*Contextualization is not merely a fad or a catch-word but a theological necessity demanded by the incarnate nature of the Word*." Dean Fleming, the author of *Contextualization in the New Testament*, says it "*has to do with how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious, and historical setting*."

[Context] From the Latin word; *con-textus* - *con* (meaning; together) and *textus* (meaning; woven), the word context refers to the surrounding

elements into which a particular text was given, received, and woven into its form, structure, and style, by its originator and author; Or the whole to which some piece is a part.

There is no way to overstate the valued progression of context to the text, text to the text, and the text to a context in the hermeneutical interpretive process - it is imperative. While the content of biblical revelation is unchanging, the presentation form is ever-changing. These two aspects (from the introduction)—**form and content**—provide the indispensable core of contextualization.

Anyone seeking to interpret or draw out the meaning of Scripture must understand that the more one interprets independently or carelessly from a passage's biblical, historical, and literary context, the more one interprets according to personal preference and without sound fundamentals. Therefore, the student of God's Word must discover the interpretation of Scripture as a journey towards the intended meaning in each passage. It is a journey that leads its traveler from context to text, text to text, and from text to context to find the meaning each author intended from revelations received to what they wrote. In our day, this journey is called the *contextualization process*, and it is for the sole purpose of right and righteously interpreting a particular text from Scripture. Contextualization is essential for finding the reader or interpreter's true destination - the Author/author's intended meaning.

We wisely start with the context of a text and its author before attempting to interpret the author's intended meaning of that text. Suppose we use an example of a biblical context taken from another portion of Matthew's gospel chapter five text. In that case, we can see why the progression of context to the text, text to text, and finally, text to context is a critical and essential consideration to the hermeneutical process.

Matthew 5:17-20 NASB

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

When Jesus spoke these words, He spoke them as an instruction to a new way of life and value in God's kingdom - the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus directed the teaching to a smaller group of intentional disciples, a larger group of not fully decided followers, and then a diverse mass audience seeking anything of Jesus from miracles to a grassroots movement against both Rome and temple Pharisees (priests, scribes, and rabbi's). Jesus emphasized the eternal significance of His unchanging words - *until heaven and earth pass away*. To illustrate this, He used the phrase "*not one jot or tittle*," translated in KJV; "*not an iota, not a dot*" translated in the ESV; and, "*smallest letter or stroke*," translated in NASB.

The *jot* is the *serif* (small dot or stroke) that sits above a tiny Hebraic letter, and the *tittle* is the tiny *serif* sitting below a letter. The *jot* sits above the smallest of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet - *Yood*. The ancient Torah scrolls are the most accurate translation of Hebrew scripture and require strict fidelity in any translation. The importance of the unchanged *jot* above the *Yood* is that the text remains the same for even the most trusted Hebraic Scribes. This fidelity, of

course, was to protect and preserve context and accuracy - meaning and intent. If one could not be trusted to not change the tiny *serif* above the *kotzu shel yood*, then what would stop them from changing other letters, which in turn would change the context, which ultimately changes the meaning of the text? For all intent and purpose, the journey toward discovering the original or author-intended meaning of the text can become lost.

The buried meaning of the Matthew 5 text is within the context of a systemic cultural and spiritual mistrust of religious and political leaders. Jesus uses the context of "the eternity of God's Word" with those listening to Him that day to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. As we learned, until all is accomplished, not even the slightest word from God's promises is to be changed. There is an eternal consequence for anyone to do so. This proclamation was God's new and direct promise to those who trusted and believed in Him.

We have said that the hermeneutic process is the standardized system used to comprehensively gather the historical, biblical, literary, and spiritual context of the text and its author. We commonly use the contextualization process to understand the cultural, spiritual, and linguistic circumstances and influences on the author. Yet, we cannot accurately contextualize any Biblical text by changing it's intended context and meaning. The author's circumstances and influences assist the reader/interpreter in unveiling the intended meaning of the text and can be used to make interpretive conclusions from a verse or passage. Discovering the author/authors' intended meaning is the right and righteous pursuit. However, this pursuit can only be fully achieved with a broad context for the author and is essential to constructing right and righteous conclusions from the author's intended meaning.

Biblical Context

Defining and including a hermeneutical process of Biblical context for any given scriptural text will seem confusing initially. So, how do we define Biblical context, and why should we include it? Here are three simple questions that help give clarity to understanding Biblical Context.

Does one consider the influence, revelation, and preceding parts of Scripture (already written by another author) in a particular book's writing?

Is this influence, revelation, and preceding text assumed by the author/writer of one's particular text?

If so, to be diligent and thorough, is it not wise to include those previous scriptural texts?

Biblical context is the author's interpretive consideration and potential application from a previous author's text in which that introductory text has influenced or inspired the latter's writing and meaning. So, for example, if one desires a deep dive (exegete) into Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9, one will need to recognize that Daniel's prayer is from the influence and revelation of the past prophecies of Jeremiah—particularly Jeremiah's prophecies of the "seventy years" (compare Daniel 9:2 with Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10). To rightly interpret and understand Daniel 9 you have to begin where Daniel began - with Jeremiah. That is the significance of biblical context and why we have a hermeneutical plan of contextualization.

Another example would be exegeting Paul's teaching on the "*Day of the Lord*" according to (1 Thessalonians 5:1–11).

"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you, yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

To rightly interpret and understand Paul's intended meaning, one would need to chronologically trace the "*Day of the Lord*" concept in the scriptures starting with the Old Testament with the Messianic prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, and Zephaniah, among others. In other words, in part, one would follow a similar process Paul followed to gain his understanding and revelation of the "day of the Lord."

Isaiah 2:12, 17

"For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low; And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day."

Isaiah 13:9-11

"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellation will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless."

Ezekiel 30:1-3

"The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: "Wail, 'Alas for the day!' For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations."

Joel 2:1 ESV

"Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD, is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountain a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations."

Amos 5:18-20

"Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?"

Zephaniah 1:7-9

"Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice— "I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire. On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud."

This chronological Biblical progression or similar would construct a complete understanding of the "*Day of the Lord*" and prevent a *silo effect* (closed off and limited)—a silo in which the apostle Paul did not share.

Historical Context

The passionate and diligent student of the Word of God should want to become acquainted with the world of the writer/author and original audience. *Historical context* should never be seen simply as a look into the author's past but rather as a key to understanding the meaning of the text the author writes and how that text connects with us in the context of where we are within our place in history. Interestingly enough, it also connects us to where we might be going. Every time we read or study the Bible's scriptures, we look at history. Using the rational and standardized processes of Biblical hermeneutics, a look back is always an opportunity for a prophetic glimpse of what lies ahead and how to righteously and faithfully move forward. Historical context gives a comprehensive insight into such things as:

- *The identity and authenticity of the writer.*
- *The place and time of the author's writing.*

- *The identity and understanding of the intended audience to whom the author wrote.*
- *The practical circumstance that precipitated and eventually necessitated the author's writing.*

For example, Revelation 3:15-16 says,

"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."

Many often interpret this text as that Jesus would instead desire one wholly dedicated to him or not dedicated at all. (Does the latter even make sense?) What we know from historical information is that the region in and around Laodicea was known for its natural springs (both hot and cold). Within the city, they had hot water channeled in from hot springs and cold water channeled in from cold springs using a devised transport process preserving the temperature of the water. The fresh cold water was sold to the people for consumption. For another fee, people could visit the public hot baths for healing (like being in a therapeutic hot tub) and to the cold baths for refreshment and to treat inflammation and joint pain. To avoid paying for the use water for drinking or cleaning, or use of the public bath houses, the Laodiceans tried to get that water for themselves. However, by the time the cold water got to Laodicea, it had become lukewarm and rancid so that when people drank it, they would vomit and become ill. The spiritual and intended meaning of the text is now apparent - the author is saying the Church is to be both a place for spiritual healing and spiritually refreshing. Rather than what the Laodicean Church offered, which was spiritually disgusting. In this example, the historical knowledge and context bring additional clarity for the one interpreting the text.

Historical context is different from the *historico-critical* study. Historical context is different because background information is an intentional application (consideration) to a passage to understand its meaning more accurately. The *historico-critical* study seeks primarily to determine the text's authenticity or editorial expansion (later dated additions). Since, as we said, Christianity is not only divine but historical, the interpreter of biblical text must recognize that understanding that text's history and culture is a vital resource for discovering and understanding the meaning of any particular passage. Historical context helps document the critical aspects of change and the evolution of language and culture over time. Knowledge of this change brings illumination to the "real-time" environment in which the sacred authors received divine revelation and wrote their text.

When one considers the manners, customs, institutions, and principles that characterize any particular age and form the environment within which people conduct their lives, the process provides more than information. It allows for a connection and representative relationship of empathy, frustration, concern, compassion, and potential for a perspective not available without context. Historical context brings to life the relevance and influences of a culture - of its conflicts - and a scholastic understanding of the authorities and powers, moral and ethical norms, and finally, the existing creeds, covenants, and superstitions of the day. There is no other way to say this. If one truly seeks to interpret and understand the intended meanings and purposes for what God has inspired a specific author to write - one must engage in the historical context of the text and its author before the text.

Literary Context

Literary context is the larger whole within a specific text or passage. Prose texts comprise a series of interconnected sentences, so our first question is, how should we interpret a sentence, verse, or paragraph in the Bible? A fundamental principle of biblical hermeneutics is that any passage's intended meaning is consistent with the sense of the literary context in which it occurs.

Consequently, the first test all proposed interpretations must pass is this:

Is the interpretation or conclusions of the text consistent with the literary context?

In literature, the context of any specific passage is the material that comes immediately before and after it. The context of a sentence is its paragraph, the context of a paragraph is the series of paragraphs that precede and follow it, and the context of a chapter is the surrounding chapters. Ultimately, the whole book in which a passage appears is its *controlling context*. In interpreting a passage in the Bible, the Testament in which a passage occurs, and finally, the canon of all sixty-six books provide the most extensive literary contexts in which every passage finds complete understanding.

Why is literary context important to the hermeneutical interpretive process?

In our virtual culture, most have experienced the frustration of having something we said taken out of context. Political leaders and public officials frequently complain that the news media have misrepresented their views (no further comment). For example, the misconstruing of a harmless text, email, or social media post because the context needs to be more precise or clear. The point is that misunderstandings often happen when people hear what they want to hear

or read into something with limited understanding or concern for the full context. The same is often true of the Bible.

If one were to proclaim that *there is no God* based solely on using just those exact four words out of their literary context from Psalm 14:1, 53:1, it would be a gross abuse of interpretive integrity and a clear violation of the author's intended meaning.

Psalm 14:1 ESV

"The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good."

Psalm 53:1 ESV

"The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good."

Does one wonder what the many authors of the Bible would have to say about our present-day interpretations of the very Scripture the Holy Spirit inspired them to write? Would they approve of our countless liberties with their intended meaning and context? Indeed, there would be objection and protest (probably even rebuke) for today's Christian leaders when quoting or teaching from individual Bible verses only to apply that text (knowingly or unknowingly) out of biblical and literary context. Unfortunately, misusing and abusing the context of a biblical passage has more sobering consequences than we have taken time to consider. These careless liberties are why we must become more diligent in interpreting every passage of text consistently in and with its context. Here are three solid arguments for that dynamic process.

Three Significant Points of Literary Context

Context Establishes the Flow of Thought:

(Taking a passage out of its context disrupts the author's flow of thought.)

Context Provides Accurate Meaning of Words:

(Provides a reliable source for defining a word's precise or intended meaning.)

Context Defines Correct Relationships Among Words - Sentences - Paragraphs:

(Interpreted outside of their original context, words-sentences-paragraphs can and have taken on meanings other than those intended by the author.)

A final thought on the contextualization process is that to interpret Scripture effectively, one must embrace contextualization as a spiritual response to the Holy Spirit, creating the righteous desire to interpret and impart Scripture right and righteously.

When used as a spiritual discipline to rightly and righteously interpret Scripture, Biblical hermeneutics becomes a spiritual act. It is a spiritual act depending greatly on the leading of the Holy Spirit to reveal to us that we all can trust and apprehend the Bible as God's written Word of Truth. Unfortunately, modern scholars too often ignore the Spirit-led dimension and approach the Bible and interpretation of Scripture purely as literature and merely as an academic task. As a rule, they consider the Holy Spirit aspect to be almost another genre and not, as Jesus said in Scripture, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth."

Critical Consideration Six

Text and Meaning: Interpreted Through Grammatical Analysis, Syntactical Structure, Key Words, and Semantic Range

In the limited context of our daily life and routine, communication and using our words seems quite simple, yet effective communication and human understanding remain an enigma. In the broad context of biblical interpretation and hermeneutical processes, the use of words is a complex proposition. In biblical interpretation, words and what they are perceived to mean, words and how they are structured and applied, and words and their intended meaning and context are the most critical obstacle to right and righteously interpreting the biblical text. Interpreters of Scripture must deliberately pursue what the original words of a passage meant at the time of origin and in the context in which they occur.

To better value and understand the complex challenges that present themselves even with just the ordinary meaning of words, we must first consider several characteristic questions of words and their meaning:

- ***What is the nature of a word (the origins of the word's meaning)?***
- ***What are the semantic possibilities of a word (the evolution of a word's meaning)?***
- ***What are the nuances of a word (the distinctions and variations of a word's meaning)?***

Listed here are several guideposts for text (words) and their meaning that all Bible students should be comfortable and confident enough with to include in their interpretive plans and hermeneutical processes.

Words are Inherently Arbitrary. Why a word means what it means is a matter of rule or convention. That is just the way it is!

Words in the Same Language Can Have Similar Meanings. These are called synonyms. Two or more words are synonyms when the meaning of one word is similar to one of the meanings of another word.

A Word Can Have Various Meanings. Everything becomes complicated when a word has more than one meaning. For example, if we say... *the boy hurt his hand, the hand on the clock stopped, we needed all hands-on deck, give the band a big hand, or, the horse measured seven hands.* All one word - five different meanings. In this case, the meaning of the word is the context in which the speaker or writer used the word.

Word Meanings Evolve in Time. In reality, word meanings do not stay the same; they change and evolve. New meanings develop through broader usage and expanded context, and the old meanings become obsolete as the usage and context of a word evolve.

Words Have Both Literal and Figurative Meanings. The difference between the two can be illustrated for example in the literal meaning of the word snake.

The literal meaning of the word is a limbless, crawling reptile. However, if the word snake is used in the statement, "*The woman's husband was a real snake,*" the meaning changes. It does not mean the husband was a literal snake, but he sure seemed to be like one figuratively!

So, how can the words of a text help us discover the message the author intended to convey or the message the hearers understood?

One basic approach is to take the time and interest to determine the use and meanings of the author's words, terms, idioms, and key phrases. Then, we must settle on an exegetical approach that includes doing the "work" and having the discipline required to understand the various aspects of words and their meanings. Here are four categories for word meaning.

Referential Meaning: To what a word refers.

Denotative Meaning: The precise or literal meaning of a word.

Connotative Meaning: The expanded meaning of a word based on the emotional complications or imaginative associations of that word to its literal meaning in some way.

Contextual Meaning: The specific sense of a word suggested by its use in a specific context, limiting the uses and meaning of that word.

Isolated and unrelated words do not just materialize themselves into a particular text. Though the linguistic rules vary, all languages present their words in a system of grammatical and literary structures—sentences, paragraphs, narratives, prose and poetry, discourses, expositions, and entire books. If we are to become proficient and accurate, we must understand (at some level) how biblical languages function and then what the writers meant by their words. The alert here is that there is no shortcut, no suppositional dogma, careless conjecture, or broad assumptions that can be considered as replacement for credible hermeneutical practices regarding text and meaning. Additionally, one crucial dimension in understanding a scriptural text is in identifying the author's specific literary genre and writing style used to convey their intended message. These provide an umbrella of understanding for the interpreter of Scripture to create a more direct path to the intended meaning, motive, and spiritual intent.

Grammatical Analysis

When we speak of interpreting the Bible utilizing grammatical analysis, ninety percent of those who study the Bible for teaching, preaching, discipling, or interpreting Scripture for others will roll their eyes, and close shop. The protests are interesting, wonderfully varietal, and often used! However, much of the protest and push-back is that we do not feel confident or comfortable with even the term grammatical analysis - the rest do not value or see the need. The reality is that a good and practical hermeneutical plan can resolve much of that angst, discomfort, and skepticism.

Grammatical analysis as it relates to the hermeneutical process directly refers to the steps taken to determine the meaning of a given text by first comprehending and then including four keys in grammatical analysis:

- ***Lexicology (the meaning of words)***

- ***Morphology (the form and evolution of words)***
- ***Parts of Speech (the function of words)***
- ***Syntax (the relationship or connectivity of words)***

Lexicology

Lexicology is the meaning of words we are both concerned with and choose or use to communicate. The following progression is commonly observed as a reliable personal lexicology.

One - A word's etymology and how a word is derived and then developed.

Two - The usage of a word and how other authors use the same word.

Three - A word's similar and opposite meanings and how synonyms and antonyms are expressed and understood.

Four - The context of a word and the usage of the words in various contexts.

Though this lexical progression seems unnecessary to the basic process of reading, studying, and interpreting a biblical text, it often represents the significance of what is *not understood or acknowledged and then accepted and practiced*. Missing the best practices of a more comprehensive and careful interpretive process. Words in Scripture have meaning that is rarely revealed to those unwilling to invest in that process. The significance and use of

grammatical rules, principles, and structure relating to the hermeneutical and exegetical process must be noticed and not tossed aside simply because they require a specific scholastic discipline or become tedious, frustrating, and exhausting. Whether using a word as a noun, a verb, or an adjective makes a great deal of difference. Therefore, understanding and factoring the grammatical rules for the use of a word or the independent and dependent clauses of a sentence or paragraph of Scripture is a monumental key to the determined process of linguistic translation or grammatical analysis of Scripture.

The grammatical rules, principles, and structures for ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Egyptian, and a variety of ancient "Koine or Classic Mediterranean Greek" dialects are not the same now as when they were spoken or written. Nor are they the same for the English language. Grammar, like language itself, is a constantly evolving creature. Practices unacceptable in the past make their way into general acceptance as they become widely recognized, just as grammatical practices generally accepted in the past become unacceptable. Likewise, spoken and written language has dialects, and the Bible is a prime example of this. However, for the pastor, teacher, and passionate Bible student seeking not only to understand and communicate the meaning and application of Biblical truth, there must also be a balance and practicality to the grammatical analysis process in Biblical interpretation. Such as striking a balance between the development of syntax (syntactic structures) and a desire to uncover word meanings based on the author's intended use. This practice includes the practical construction of a complete contextual foundation and the discovery of a sincere spiritual connection to the intent and motive of an authenticated God-purposed author. The prioritized balance and practicality provide the interpretive process for the serious learner with a broader sense of understanding and revelation of Scripture.

Syntax or Syntactical Structure

The grammatical term syntax in a hermeneutical context means how an author's chosen words are put together in a connected or complementary system to form structural components (such as phrases or clauses). In an even narrower sense, syntax refers to the relationship between the words in a sentence and how they are connected and structured directly to one another to provide conclusive meaning.

To be more helpful and practical for pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders, we will use a broader definition and application for syntax or syntactical structuring. Syntax deals with the way thoughts are expressed through grammatical forms. All languages have their own form and structure, and one of the more difficult obstacles to learning another language is that each student must become competent in not only the definitions of the new words they are attempting to learn, but the pronunciations of the new new words as well as the new ways of arranging and structuring⁶ the relationship of one word to another.

To explain, we can describe how three common aspects of the exegetical process (structure, grammar, and lexical study) can be combined rather than (and this is important) used separately. In its broad sense, syntactical structure refers to all the interrelationships within the sentence to determine the meaning of the unit as a whole or structure. Syntax puts together the various aspects of the hermeneutical process and enables us to dig deeper into the biblical text to recover the God-given, author-intended message. In this sense, syntax includes

⁶ 1981 by Baker Book House Company; 2007 by Henry A. Virkler and Karelyne Gerber Ayayo - Hermeneutics: Principle and Processes of Biblical Interpretation

rhetorical patterns, as well as grammatical and semantical patterns - but only as they fit within the broader structural meaning of the text.

Rhetorical patterns deal with the relationship between sentence units and provide the foundation for syntactical study. Grammar concerns the relationship between individual terms and phrases and provides the second syntactical analysis stage. Finally, semantics investigates the relationships between the meanings of the terms in the larger surface structure and provides the final building block of a syntactical analysis of a particular text. The common thread in all these aspects of the exegesis is structure. The right question to ask would be...

Does the structure form a pattern that ties together a larger context and meaning?

Yes. Authors of the Bible all wrote contextually - its meaning is always a part of a larger whole or structural context (thought, theme, theology). However, within that broader structure and context, the Bible is many other things - hopefully those other aspects are discovered in continued study and further application of biblical hermeneutics processes.

Because the interpretation of biblical text and meaning is so connected to structural context, significant grammatical decisions should come from the structural development of the complete statement. Using this broader or macro "structural approach" allows one to see that words often have more significant

or specific meanings only as part of the larger context. Therefore, the *syntax* is structural at its core - hence the term *syntactic* or *syntactical structure*.

Once committed to developing a hermeneutical plan for interpreting Scripture, one discovers many smaller components or microstructures within an overall structure. None of the microstructure elements should attempt to become a means to an end itself - risking misinterpretation. We are not looking primarily for *chiasm* or *culmination* (more on those later). We are always looking for the author's intended meaning for the words that were chosen as they fit within the overall structure or context of the sentence or passage of Scripture.

The competent and practical exegesis of a good hermeneutical plan does not simply center on the study of an individual word or term, as if the meaning of the whole paragraph narrows itself to that key word or term. Instead, the goal of a good exegete is to bring light and understanding to the thought development and meaning of the whole statement - context. In casual communication with others, none of us ever set apart words or statements as the sole meaning of the whole conversation. Although a key or significant word can certainly complete or provide meaningful context to a phrase or sentence within a larger structure, we should not get into the unbalanced practice of over-emphasizing one word, or one portion of a sentence, verse, or paragraph and give little attention to the rest. Instead, we intend for meaning to be communicated primarily by the entire passage of Scripture taken as a whole. Committing to a broader syntactical structure most often does that for us.

Keyword

The keyword process is one of identifying words within a selected Biblical text that do not necessarily contain the entirety of the meaning of a text but instead a connecting word the author chose to use whereby his or her intended meaning cannot be completed or fully understood without it. In a reliable exegetic keyword search, it becomes clear how important it is to have a context for why an author chose specific words of significance to convey their intended meaning. Remember, single words wait for context. Our keywords have no real meaning without the author's context and intended meaning.

It is essential to use various methods and strategic preferences to identify keywords. Of course, one should always use reputable research sources and reference materials. It is worth repeating, *"the words that give you the most difficulty are usually the ones that give you the most meaning."* Indeed, this is true of a sound and thorough exegetical process used to interpret any given or selected text of Scripture. Gordon Fee, the Author of *"Reading the Bible for All Its Worth,"* offers four essential tips for identifying Key Words in a Biblical text:

- ***Note those words in the context which are "theologically loaded."***
- ***Note those words that are crucial to the passage's meaning but may be ambiguous (debatable) in their context.***
- ***Investigate those words repeated in a context or become themes within the paragraph.***
- ***Look for those words that are more critical to the context than they seem to be at first glance.***

Semantic Range

The study of a word must include consideration for the meaning of a word. As we said, the author determines the meaning of a word by how he uses it within a context. The semantic range of a word is observed by its usage in various contexts. *A semantic range is a fundamental task of establishing the parameters of the word meaning to individual words or keyword cases.* The semantic range of a word is the result of *diachronic* and *synchronic* (etymology) study, which is a list of usages of the word in the context of its past (*diachronic*), and relevance to its use and meaning in the present (*synchronic*). Here are a few final questions one will want to answer to help create the parameters for an effective semantic range study.

- ***What are the author's uses and context of a word?***
- ***What are the cultural uses of the word?***
- ***What was the word's meaning at the time the author used it?***
- ***What are (if any) the variations of meaning for the word in its original language?***
- ***What are the grammatical rules for the word?***

Critical Consideration Seven

Contextual Realities: Time and Passage, Geography, Culture, and Linguistics

Time Passages

One difficulty for the hermeneutical process is the *time passages* between where we are today and when and where the text originated.

What words have been lost or gained with a text over time passages?

What meaning in the text has changed or remained the same during those time passages?

When the interpreter poses such questions while navigating a hermeneutical plan designed for interpreting the ancient biblical text, he or she begins to see the complexity of scriptural interpretation and, of course, the need for a right and righteous process essential to interpreting the biblical text.

A natural difficulty comes with the reality of time and passage between present-day interpreters and those inspired ancients who authored the text. Although the Word of God is eternal, it is the responsibility of a diligent hermeneutical student or practitioner (if you will) to close the gap between then and now. That difficulty begins but does not end with *to whom* and *why* the text was written and given. Most Biblical scholars of the last half century have written or addressed the difficulty of time passages in their thesis, written commentary, or live lectures. Most would agree that reading and interpreting Scripture is profoundly unique and that closing the time and passage gap is critical to correctly interpreting much of the Bible's meaning. In the global and digital age in which we live, there is greater access and understanding of biblical hermeneutics and the difficult challenges and the impact of time passages on ancient texts. For the passionate student of Scripture those ancient texts of the Bible have become illuminated and even more critical than ever before. The interpretive obstacles of the past have become a rudimentary part of the comprehensive process of scriptural interpretation and what we know as biblical hermeneutics.

The most intriguing "time passage reality" is that the writings and events in the Bible span centuries, and the last authentic words authored from Scripture were more than 1,900 years ago. During that time and passage, the world not only went from flat to round and from illiterate to literate, but also transformed itself in imaginable and unimaginable ways many times over. The time passage gap between where we are and what the ancient world once was, is not something that many who teach and preach the Bible give adequate time to understand and interpret. However, to overcome that difficulty, we close the gap between time passages by creating a hermeneutical process that includes the correct context for history, culture, language, literacy, geography, and the spiritual

climate for the biblical text. It is often challenging to understand a particular text because it includes concerns and languages partially lost in the past. Consider the possibility of time passages that existed—more or less in various places—between actual events and the time of writing. Specifically in the texts we now possess in the diversely translated, printed, and published Word of God.

Because the chronological narrative of Genesis takes the reader up to the death of the patriarch Joseph, earlier sections like Genesis 12–25 were undoubtedly composed, passed down through oral tradition, and eventually written into a literary text long after their main character, Abraham, died.

At the creation of the universe (Genesis 1), God was the only sentient (living/capable) being. Since Hebrew as a distinct ancient language emerged approximately 1000 BC, someone composed the creation account after that date. We can determine the ministry of the prophet Amos in the mid-eighth century BC; however, more than likely, his oratory messages were preserved and eventually collected into the biblical book bearing his name by someone else later.

Though the ministry of Jesus probably spanned 27–30 AD, the reality is that authors did not write the Gospels until at least a few decades had passed. Consequently, the integrity of the words of Jesus was maintained and protected almost exclusively through oral tradition and then into Greek before being committed to the writings we call the Gospels. This time and passage requires that our interpretations consider, for example, both the historical and biblical context of a prophet such as Amos (the *time* when he spoke, and *passage* until

written). This would include text such as **when** Jesus initially spoke and was **then** written, including the circumstances in which later people preserved, passed on, compiled, and, finally, wrote down the original words.

Indeed, both Jews and Christians cared deeply about accurately preserving and transmitting their traditions. However, the believing communities (Israel and the Church) were influenced by the unique perspectives and intentions of inspired authors writing only what they felt was necessary to emphasize or exclude. In this process, the writers were mindful of their readers and the effects they hoped to produce in them (remember illocutions and perlocutions).

Geography

Another challenge to achieving correct Biblical interpretation is *geographical evolution*. Unless afforded the opportunity to visit the places mentioned in the Bible during the time they happened, we lack the visual perspective and comprehension that would help us understand certain events and how they were impacted by where they took place. Of course, even if we could visit our present-day accessible locations (and many have), few of them have retained what they once were (and none, the identical culture) in biblical times.

Geography is a legitimate and commonly overlooked hermeneutical category. We think it highly significant those authors who spell out for us in their biblical text or narrative the terms and context for “Who,” “When,” “Why,” “How,” and “What”. In reality, it has only recently become significant as well to add the “Where” into that context. To weave the historical spatial dimension into the

fabric of the Bible's narrative storyline sets the Scriptures apart from most other ancient holy writings. And it does so in remarkable and dramatic ways!

The point is geographical context adds to biblical understanding. Without the author's perspective or knowledge of elevation and landscape, it is quite difficult to understand why Assyrians *came up* from Lachish to Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17), or why Luke the New Testament author describes the people as *traveling up* to Jerusalem from Caesarea, or *down from* Jerusalem to Jericho. Historically in many cultures around the world graves were *dug down* into the earth; yet, in some ancient cultures with biblical context graves were most often *dug into* existing above ground limestone rock formations. So, the phrase, "*he was gathered to his people/fathers*" (Genesis 49:29, 33; 2 Kings 22:20), may have begun with the practice of collecting the bones of the deceased after the flesh had decomposed and then putting them in a location with those of the ancestors (perhaps in an ossuary, though this is not certain). Likewise, geographical knowledge helps us understand why someone such as Jonah sought to resist God's instruction to prophesy against Nineveh (to the northeast of Israel) and headed for Tarshish (far to the west of Israel).

Culture

The biblical world was essentially agrarian (ruled by acquisition and possessing land), and made up of landowners and tenant farmers using primitive machinery by present-day standards and methods of transportation that were slow and exhausting. Throughout the Bible, we encounter customs, beliefs, and practices that make little sense to us.

Why was it a practice in the ancient world to anoint priests, kings, and the diseased with oil?

Why was it customary in a real estate or an inheritance transaction for the seller to take off a sandal and give it to the buyer as in Ruth 4:6–8?

What was the point of the Levitical laws regarding purity, or the many other seemingly senseless requirements that went with them?

Literal adherence to Leviticus 19:19 would eliminate most of the modern clothing that is worn: "*Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.*" So much for polyester and wool blends. Considering our present-day cultural trend for personal branding and body messaging, it would be wise to ask, "*Why were tattoos forbidden in Leviticus 19:28?*" and, "*Is that still a thing?*"

In addition to considerations such as these, we should quickly look to a previously mentioned critical consideration: with few exceptions the people functioned in non-literary cultures. Most of the ancient world was illiterate; with rare exception only the elites or scribes could read, and even fewer were able to write. In an age of unparalleled literary and digital technology such as ours it is virtually impossible to comprehend a world with few or no written texts and the inability of most people to read those that did exist. In addition, how we think about certain things may influence our understanding of ancient customs, and we miss their significance. For example, *what does "head covering" mean in 1*

Corinthians 11:4–16? Should this be understood in terms of a particular type head scarf? After reading some translations, one might assume Paul is referring to veils, this gives us an image of the veil or *hijab* that Middle Eastern women wear today.

Nevertheless, some commentaries insist that hairstyles, not veils are the issue here. We need more information to understand how Paul viewed this issue and why it was necessary. In the same way, western civilizations concern for hygiene might prohibit our understanding of the Pharisees' practice of ceremonial washing (Mark 7:3–5). We must educate ourselves if we are to properly understand the cultural customs and concepts of the ancient biblical world that are far less familiar. We cannot simply pick up the Bible and read it like an ordinary book.

Finally, we must understand that the grid of our cultural values and priorities sometimes unintentionally leads us to accept an interpretation that is not actually in the text. For example, in the Western world, individualism ideology consumes our thinking and reasoning. As a result, we tend to impose an individualistic paradigm on texts that the author intended to carry an inclusive or collective meaning. For instance, readers familiar with modern battles between individuals might view the battle between David the boy shepherd and the Philistine Goliath as simply two enemies going "one-on-one" (1 Samuel 17). Instead, the episode follows the ancient custom of "representative combat," in which armies used a winner-take-all contest between two top-tier warriors rather than slaughter each other on the battlefield. Each contestant fought as a representative of his entire army.

Similarly, some readers determine that Paul in (1 Corinthians 3:16–17) is referring to God's temple instructing Christian individually. As a result, they explore how Christians can build virtuous spiritual qualities in their personal lives (indeed, not a bad practice). However, this reads individualism into the passage despite clear indicators that Paul refers to the entirety of the body of Christ as being the temple in which God's Spirit dwells. Christians together form one temple—on a local or global level. In the metaphor, Paul cooperates in building the church (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Linguistics

The writers of the Bible wrote in the languages of their day—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Hellenistic Greek—languages that are inaccessible to most people today even though they may have their drastically evolved modern descendants. Hebrew and Greek have different forms for masculine and feminine nouns, pronouns, and verbs, so the English word "you" hides whether the Hebrew or Greek word it is translated singular or plural and masculine or feminine. Translated as plural "they" could also be either gender, as is proper in English.

We are also relatively unfamiliar with the standard literary practices of the ancient authors. We depend on trained biblical scholars to translate biblical languages and their literary nuances into our native language, but their work is also interpretive. Here is an example: Paul's words in (1 Corinthians 7:1) present a puzzle for translators. The NIV and ESV translation render the final clause, "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*" Compare this with the KJV, NRSV, and NASB: "*It is good (or well) for a man not to touch a woman*"; or, PHILLIPS, "*It is a good principle for a man to have no physical contact with women*"; and then NEB, "*it is a good thing for a man to have nothing to do with*

women." After considering multiple reputable translations, is it linguistically logical to ask whether the Greek is that inconclusive? The verb translated "touch" does mean that, but it was also a common euphemism for sexual intercourse (sleep with), so the versions that capture that point are likely to be correct. Since these versions diverge so markedly, how would an English reader understand what Paul meant apart from some help with the cultural context? Moreover, the default for what is most "literal" is unhelpful. Yes, "touch" may be a literal translation of the Greek verb, but with time and passage, "have sex" or "sleep with" may more literally capture the linguistic meaning today.

In addition, the current cultural pressure to supply gender-neutral or inclusive versions makes the translation process even more complex. For example, in Hebrew and Greek, the word translated as "man" (masculine, singular) often refers to both males and females, as was formerly true in everyday English. However, when Paul says, "*God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar*" (Romans 3:4 KJV; and NASB), he does not have only the male gender in mind. So, one may rightly translate the phrase, "*Let God be true, and every human being a liar*" (e.g., NIV, NET, CEB) or "*everyone a liar*" (ESV, HCSB, NRSV). The same obstacle appears if we compare Deuteronomy 19:16 KJV, NKJV, NASB (if a false witness rises against any "man") with most all other translations it is ("person" or "someone"). In short, the time and passage between the various biblical worlds and our own require careful historical study if we are to understand the meaning of words in the Bible.

Connected uniquely to the issues of time and passage are the understanding and meanings of ancient Hebrew and Greek idioms and maxims, parables, paradoxes, covenants, and chiasms. These are all within the purview and

contextual consideration of the hermeneutical process for the present-day Christian leader, teacher, preacher, or communicator. Anyone committed to teaching the Bible as God's inspired and authoritative Word must comprehend the need to include and consider these linguistic/cultural communication genres as essential to the interpretive process.

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Critical Consideration Eight

Nuances of Language and Communication: Evolving and Enduring

Idioms - An idiom is a figurative expression of a concept, feeling, idea, or circumstance. One should never interpret an idiomatic expression literally as it is most often unique to the language or context of a particular culture or people. Every language has its idioms. However, with Biblical Hermeneutics, those idioms of the ancient Hebrew most used in the Old Testament and the ancient "Hellenistic or Mediterranean" Greek are critical in the effective, complete, and accurate interpretative process. The ancient Hebrews were known for their dominant use of idioms in the oral traditions of culture and religion. For example, one of the more recognizable idioms of the Hebrew scripture is (Exodus 3:7-8).

Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and

honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

In the ancient Hebrew culture, *milk and honey* were prized and highly valued commodities. The writer did not intend that the land would flow abundantly with literal *milk* and *honey*. The land was highly valued because it was a covenant promise from their God. All that God gives is good - and to be prized and highly valued. Was the land plenteous, and did the land prosper? Yes, when the people of God righteously worked the land, honored God, and kept the word of their covenant with Him.

Maxims - A maxim is a brief expression of a general or proverbial truth, fundamental principle, or rule of conduct from a general or biblical truth. A Biblical example, "*Whatever a man sows that will he also reap.*" A general example, "*The pen is mightier than the sword.*"

Parable - A parable is a short *allegorical* story intended to illustrate (or teach) some truth, Biblical principle, or moral lesson. Jesus spoke with *parables* and *idioms* or *figures of speech* many times and is the most commonly recognized in Scripture. However, parabolic teaching was not just common to Jesus and the Gospels - the Old Testament writers also used parables to teach, warn, and correct effectively. *The Poor Man's Lamb* from the prophet Nathan to King David (2 Samuel 12:1-4), *The Escaped Prisoner* from the prophet to King Arab (1 Kings 20:35-40), *The Fruitless Vineyard* from Isaiah to Judah, and the house of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7), and, *The Two Eagles and the*

Vine from Ezekiel to the House of Israel (Ezekiel 17:3-10). These provide just a few examples.

Paradox - A paradox is a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that, when investigated or explained, may prove to be well-founded or accurate. The Bible is paradoxical because it represents both divine and human realities that appear contradictory, yet both can be true. For example, the Bible is a unity, while its contents reveal a remarkable diversity. Unfortunately, throughout most of the Church's history, Christians assumed the unity of Scripture and downplayed or overlooked the reality of its diversity. The assumption was that it spoke with one voice, the voice of its author.

Nevertheless, the Bible has two very distinct Testaments, written in at least three primary languages, with many dialects, and many nations. This paradox has taken place over centuries of time and distance, using multiple genres, styles, and translations. *How can there be unity in such diversity?* For centuries, readers and interpreters of Scripture harmonized or justified conflicts and tensions within the Bible or resorted to typology, allegory, or the principle of the *regula fidei* (the rule of faith) to interpret complex or paradoxical texts in the light of clearer ones.

As we said, a paradox is a seeming contradiction that, upon contextual and literary analysis, is seen to express truth. The nature of Jesus' teaching is most often paradoxical.

This paradox is evident when He says, "*the first will be last, and the last first*" (Matthew 20:16); "*the person who finds his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life will find it*" (Matthew 10:39), and "*the one who would be first must be a servant of all*" (Mark 10:44). Much like the use of hyperbole, the paradox captures our attention moving us away from complacent thinking towards seeking and confronting a much-needed truth.

A paradox requires two interpretive actions from us. The first is to identify the paradox when we find it. At the surface level, it is a contradiction, and we need to let the contradiction reveal and resonate with us - this is a contradiction. However, *a paradox is an apparent contradiction*, not an actual one. If we hermeneutically analyze and resolve the contradiction, we can see that it reveals the truth. For example, people who appear last in worldly estimation and logic, either literally or by self-renunciation, can be first by trusting in God and thereby gaining eternal life. A paradox functions like a riddle, initially confusing or perplexing us and leading us to process the apparent contradiction rightly.

The categorical processing of God's Word is neither right nor righteous, nor is it one of hermeneutical fidelity.

Can one be first and last, or both lead and follow simultaneously?

Can one gain it all and, at the same time, give it all away?

Can we surrender and conquer, or lose and win concurrently?

Is it possible to both die and live simultaneously?

Under the unlimited sovereignty of God, the answer is an emphatic - YES. Without identifying and factoring in the sovereign, mysterious, and paradoxical nature of God and His Word, the complete and righteous hermeneutical process is impossible.

Merisms - (Latin: *merismus*, Greek: μερισμός, translit. *merismós*) is a rhetorical figure of speech in which a combination of two contrasting parts of the whole refer to the whole. For example, in order to say that someone "*looked everywhere*", one could use the merism "*looked high and low*".

Merisms are common in the Old Testament. For example, in Genesis 1:1, when God creates אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (Modern pronunciation: *et hashamaim ve-et haarets*) "*the heavens and the earth*" (New Revised Standard Version), the two parts (*heavens and earth*) do not refer only to the heavens and the earth. Rather, they refer to the heavens, the earth and everything between them: God created the entire world, the whole universe. Other famous examples of Biblical merisms are Genesis 1:5 in which "*evening*" and "*morning*" refer to "*one day*" (including noon, afternoon etc.), and Psalm 139 in which the psalmist declares that God knows "*my sitting down and my rising up*": God knows all of the author's actions.

Covenants - A deep-dive understanding of Biblical covenants (Old and New) and God's divine and eternal purpose for them with His people is essential to the complete interpretive process. We filter Biblical understanding and meaning through the covenant between God, the author, and His people. Those historical covenants are relevant to our present-day covenant with Christ and His Church. There must be a significant working knowledge of Biblical covenants in any reliable hermeneutic process. Covenants are about promises, expectations,

integrity, consequences, fulfillment, and fruition. Limited understanding or value of Biblical covenants represents limited understanding and value of Scriptural meaning and intent.

Chiasm - A chiasm (or chiasmus if you prefer) is a writing style that uses a unique repetition pattern for clarification and emphasis. *Chiasm* (*ky'-az-um*) is often called the chiastic (*ky'-az-tic*) approach or the chiastic structure. This repetition form appears throughout the Bible yet is not well known. The way a passionate student of the Bible approaches the scriptures should be dramatically enhanced while learning what *chiasmus* is and how to recognize them. A *chiasm* is one more on the list of critical considerations in the interpretive process for both the Old and New Testament passages. The importance of the chiastic structure is in its hidden emphasis, clarification, and confirmation of context. Some scholars have identified over one thousand examples of *chiasmus* in the Bible.

A *chiasm* is a repetitive reversal pattern such as A-B-C repeated in reverse sequence as C-B-A. One excellent example of *chiasmus* is in (Joshua 1:5-9).

A - No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. [Verse 5b]

B - Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, [verse 6,7a]

C - being careful to do according to all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. [Verse 7b]

D - This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, [verse 8a]

D - but you shall meditate on it day and night, [verse 8b]

C - so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. [verse 8c]

B - Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, [verse 9a]

A - for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. [Verse 9b]

(ESV)

Comprehending and researching the idioms, maxims, parables, paradoxes, and covenants of the Old and New Testament are genuine gems of revelation towards learning engagement and creating priceless teachable moments. It is especially true in *oral environments and cultural communication platforms*. Knowledge and understanding have always been powerful - now, they are a matter of distinction or extinction for the present-day Christian leader, teacher, or preacher. They must become a critical "best practice" consideration for sound and spiritually healthy hermeneutical interpretation and exegesis of Scripture.

Critical Consideration Nine

Literary Genre: Analysis and Intent

Genre

Genre is a literary category employed to classify and categorize what a group of writings may or may not have in common with one another. The classification of a particular genre is the organization of literary practices characteristic to, or representative of a particular group of writings. The classification of a particular genre shapes the expectations of the reader regarding the style, form, and function, of a work or body of literature. The classification and understanding of genre is an essential step to the interpretive process. It is primarily through the concept of genre we are enabled to understand and interpret the unfamiliar and ancient nuances of Biblical text.

Often, mistakes in interpretation result from understanding a particular genre form as if it were a different form. This is a common error, but an error, nonetheless. An error in genre analysis takes place, for example, when the genre of prophecy or apocalypse is understood as a historical narrative, or when a

parable is understood as a historical narrative, or when descriptive statement is understood as prescriptive. A genre mistake leads to faulty interpretation because the interpreter will usually then begin asking the wrong questions about the passage. In a negative way, then, genre mistake alerts us to the fact that one's perception of the literary form or genre of the text determines the questions one asks about the passage.

Approaching the Bible through the context of literary genre acknowledges that the Bible comes to us in a predominantly literary format. In the words of C. S. Lewis, *"There is a ... sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are."* The overall format of the Bible is that of an anthology (collection of creative inspiration) literature. A literary approach identifies the genres and other literary forms of the Bible and analyzes individual texts in keeping with those forms. A valued interest and awareness of literary genres and forms greatly assist in how we analyze a biblical text and opens doors into a text that would otherwise might remain closed.

The approach of literary genre initiates the argument that a work of literature embodies universal human experience. Such fidelity to human experience is complementary to the tendency of traditional approaches to the Bible to see only academic ideas in it. A good literary approach corrects a false but all too common contention that the Bible is a theology book with the "proof texts" attached. A sound literary approach to the Bible is ready to add value to the biblical authors' skill with language and literary technique, seeing these as an added avenue to our enjoyment and interpretation of the Bible and its text.

Finally, using a reliable literary genre approach to the Bible takes its humble place alongside the two other main approaches—theological and historical context. These three interpretive domains are established by the biblical authors themselves, who usually integrate all three elements in their writings. And though it be God-breathed and Spirit-inspired, the Bible is a literary work, and the single-most substantial in the history of humankind; and as such the historical and theological material is packaged in literary form or genre.

To illustrate the substantial value of genre analysis we can compare between **two Biblical descriptions of the same event** from the same author.

Judges 4:17-21 (Genre - Narrative)

Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.

Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

“I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

“Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’”

But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

Judges 5:24-27 (Genre - Poetry}

*Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
most blessed of tent-dwelling women.
He asked for water, and she gave him milk;
in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk. Her hand reached for
the tent peg,
her right hand for the workman's hammer.
She struck Sisera, she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.
At her feet he sank,
he fell; there he lay.
At her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell—dead.*

Remarkable!

The Literary Genres of the Bible

Torah [*torah*/law]

Teaching or instructing the four law portions of the Pentateuch.

1] There is the Decalogue and Book of the Covenant, given at Sinai in Exodus 20—23 (and reenacted in Ex 34 after the golden calf incident). Decalogue means “ten words” rather than “ten commandments.”

2] The “Tabernacle Laws” of Exodus 25—40, which concern God’s directions for building the temple (chaps. 25—31) and the description of Israel following these instructions (chaps. 35—40).

3] The laws of Leviticus expand on the tabernacle laws and flow out of Exodus. Some see two main sections, each beginning with ritual laws regarding the altar and concluding with rules for ritual worship.

4] The laws of Deuteronomy (Deut. 12—26) consisting of a series of speeches given by Moses on the plains of Moab just before Israel entered the Promised Land. In this sense it represents an expanded exposition on the laws given previously and is meant for the second or succession generation of the people of Israel.

History [*historical/evidential narrative*]

1] Biblical history is represented and written in the historical narrative genre, with specific focus on the Hebrew narrative. This does not mean, of course, that every narrative in the Bible is therefore historical writing—as the existence of the parable genre shows us. So, the historical narrative genre encompasses different forms, ranging from factual history writing to fictional parables.

2] The Biblical history genre commonly contains small shifts in point of view, as well as brief but strategic uses of dialogue, that often produce an imaginative reenactment of the historical event, conferring upon it a strong attitudinal definition and the discovering of understanding it in patterns of meaning.

3] We rely upon the historical narrative text of the Bible to inform, enlighten, reveal, and bring understanding to concepts such as *Creation, Covenant, Faith*

and Faithfulness, Heritage and Lineage, Sin and Rebellion, the Nature and Character of God, Fulfillment and Promise.

Apocalyptic [*apocalyptic/apocaluptō*]

Apocalyptic derives its name from the Greek term *apocaluptō*, meaning “to disclose, reveal.” Apocalyptic literature seeks to reveal God’s will for humanity to his own people, but through highly symbolic language it conceals that plan from the ungodly. Since apocalyptic focuses on the future when God will save his people and judge evildoers, the symbolic disclosures allow the chosen people to prepare for the great day of salvation; the expectation of an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom. Apocalyptic entails the revelatory communication of heavenly secrets by an otherworldly being to a earthly messenger who presents the visions in a narrative framework; the visions guide readers into a transcendent reality that takes precedence over the current reality and encourages readers to persevere in the midst of their trials. The visions reverse normal experience by making the heavenly mysteries the real world and depicting the present crisis as a temporary, illusory situation. This is secured by God, through the transformation of this world for the faithful followers of Christ.

Gospel [*gospel/evangelion*]

Contemporary scholarship primarily addresses the issue of genre and a literary understanding of the Gospels. The Gospel genre adapted from the Old English “godspel,” means “good news.” Found primarily in the New Testament to describe the message, preaching, or story of Jesus Christ. Indicates the four canonical Gospels: *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.*

Epistle [*epistle/epistole*]

Categorized as a Biblical literary genre an epistle is a letter or written correspondence—most likely written on scroll. Epistles were common during the era that the New Testament was written (twenty-seven NT books). Most were written as letters to specific churches or people, and rightly classified into two categories Pauline and general. Generally dictated orally by the author to someone who would physically transcribe, the author would review, seal, and couriered to the intended audience. Peter and Paul both used others to transcribe their letters (1 Peter 5:12; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1:1). Paul signed his letters to verify their authenticity (Galatians 6:11). There is scholarly speculation that Paul may have had vision problems, which could have necessitated his use for transcription. Biblical epistles carry similarities in their formatting, with an introduction identifying the author, a greeting, followed by the body of the letter. Common to end with a blessing for the church and notes for a few specific individuals.

Wisdom [*wisdom/hak-ma*]

Wisdom literature is a genre of Biblical literature that consists of statements by sages and wise men that teach about life, virtue, and the nature of God. Biblical wisdom has been defined as the “perceptive, considered, experienced, and competent action to subjugate the world and to master the various problems of life and life itself.” The books of *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Song of Solomon*, and parts of *Psalms* all belong to the genre of wisdom literature. Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches also include *Ben Sira* (also called Sirach or Ecclesiasticus) and the *Wisdom of Solomon* (also called the *Book of Wisdom*) in the Apocrypha.

(Proverbs 1:2-4)

To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth...

Poetry [prose/ 'pōətrē]

1] Biblical Hebrew poetry is not to clearly describe events or to give the reader instructions. Instead, OT poetry is emotional; it gives feeling—it is not propositional. It is meant to force the reader into feeling the “word of the Lord”.

2] Hebrew poetry is dependent on what is called parallelism—the rhyming of ideas rather than the rhyming of sounds, and thus it seems repetitious to modern western readers. What the Hebrew writer would express in a single concept, perhaps with some added adjectives or adverbs, gets stated twice in slightly different words. The point of the Hebrew Biblical writer using the literary genre of poetry is to suggest the emotions (what is felt from the experience) of the event, rather than to give a “blow-by-blow” description of how the event occurred.

(Compare Judges 4:17-21 to Judges 5:24-27)

Parallelism ['perə ,lel ,iz(ə)m]

A common literary feature of Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament is called *parallelism*, in which the words of two or more lines of text are directly related in some way. This feature can be found in any poetic passage, and sometimes even in narrative, although it is more common in the Psalms and Proverbs.

Specific words that may be ambiguous or used in unusual ways can be clarified or more narrowly defined by seeing them in the context of a parallel structure.

(See Hebrew Poetic Parallelism Resource Example Eight)

Prophecy [*propheteia/prophetese*]

Begin with what prophecy is not: the primary trait of prophecy in the Bible is not that it foretells the future. Much less of the prophetic books are futuristic than is commonly thought - without exclusion of the distant and eschatological (end-times) future. Biblical prophets often predicted imminent judgment or deliverance for people and nations, but without reservation a biblical prophet is someone whose primary task is to speak or “tell forth” messages from God rather than foretell the future for God— “forth-telling” rather than “foretelling”. The prophecy genre is God’s inspired revelation to the hearer and reader of the continuance and fulfillment of His divine purposes, plans, and His moral and spiritual expectations.

Parable [*parable/parabole*]

The importance of parables is evident when we realize that fully a third of Jesus’ teaching in the *Synoptic Gospels* comes in parabolic form. In modern terms, we think of a parable as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Yet what did the term parable mean in the ancient world? The Hebrew term is *māšāl*, which also is used for the “proverb” or “riddle” and has “comparison” as its basic meaning. The background of the parable in wisdom and prophecy is crucial when considering Jesus’ development of the parable form. It has long been recognized that Jesus was a teacher of eschatological wisdom, and his parables demonstrate this quite well.

Critical Consideration Ten

Biblical and Systematic Theology: The Relevance and Significance for Both

In the sound hermeneutical process, there is a need for processing scriptural text through the grid of theological thought and reliable principles.

Understanding the need for that resource adds one more level of context and another path to understanding and interpreting the author's intended meaning.

An excellent place to begin is by defining the distinct differences in form and function between biblical and systematic theology.

Biblical Theology

Bluntly, biblical theology is theology of the Bible. It certainly is not our theology, but rather it is the theology of biblical authors as inspired by the Holy Spirit. It

reflects their revealed knowledge and understanding of God, and their subsequent obedience to His Word. To understand biblical theology as the theology of Scripture itself, in turn, requires a specific method, a specific way of reading Scripture (a hermeneutic standard). Think of it as a three-tiered process of *historical*, *inductive*, and *descriptive* methods.

Historical: One does not arbitrarily arrange biblical teachings topically, for example: "*What does the Bible teach about tithing and giving?*" Instead, we understand each relevant biblical passage in its original historical setting. Such as interpreting Malachi 3:10, "*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.*" within the historical context and narrative of ancient Israel, rather than taking it out of context as an anytime, anyplace, and any circumstance application.

Inductive: We should interpret Scripture openly, implementing an "*authorial-intent*" hermeneutic: "*What was the author's intended meaning in a given passage or text?*" Think of it as a dialogue. We are trying to be good listeners of Scripture rather than assuming our preconceptions or pre-determined meanings of the text.

Descriptive: This means one will diligently restate biblical teachings on a given topic or doctrine, such as *sanctification*, by respecting the terminology used by the writers of Scripture themselves. If so, he or she will discover that in Scripture, *sanctification* refers both to God's initial act of setting believers apart for his holy use and to the process of the Spirit's work in helping us grow in Christ.

From this three-tiered process, Biblical theology flows naturally from a "*right and righteous*" biblical interpretation as it attempts to explore the teachings and significant themes of Scripture within the orbit of the overall biblical storyline.

Having looked at a fundamental approach to biblical theology, we also must remember that for one to interpret, produce, write, or teach a Biblical "theology" is a human endeavor; it articulates and expresses an individual's or a group's understanding of reality with God/Christ at the center. To answer the question "*How does a Christian or Christian group understand and express its faith?*" requires an explanation of its theology. The individual, the group, and the church must open and study the BIBLE to achieve that.

This process calls for multi-disciplined Bible study followed by reliable Biblical teaching and instruction as essential and critical to understanding how Biblical theology rises to us from the context of historical conditions and circumstances. Its expressed observations rely not only on the movements and circumstances of people, places, and things but the author's and recipients' interaction in faith-defining moments of their lives.

It was put this way by theologian and author Berkeley Mickelsen, "*In Biblical Theology, the theologian must be astutely aware of the biblical languages, all known historical factors, and the freshness of the message of God through his servant to men involved in a life and death struggle with dread realities.*"

Resolving Diversity and Unity of the Bible

The Bible's diversity reflects the variety of its authors and the circumstances of their times, places, and situations. Its unity derives from its single divine Source/ Author and the complete and comprehensive narrative it unveils. The two affirmations of diversity and unity provide the foundations for both biblical and systematic theologies.

The approaches of biblical theology uniquely expose and highlight the inherent diversity and the mystery of unity within the inspired pages of the Bible.

Interpreting Scripture through the lenses of Biblical theology enables us to perceive each author's text, uniquely Spirit-driven perspectives, and theological emphasis giving insight into how we can help their voices speak within relatively parallel or similar circumstances today.

Biblical theology introduces the path forward from the exegesis of individual passages towards outlining, structuring, and defining their relevance and significance for believers and followers with a biblical worldview and a dynamic relationship with genuine Christian faith. Then, at the hermeneutical level, we gather and prioritize the common themes that unite the passages and trace them through an entire book or author. The process can be done most often in three steps:

One: Study the theological themes in terms of individual books.

Two: Explore and identify the theology of a particular author.

Biblical beliefs systematically. The process comprehensively compiles all the relevant passages and then draws inductive (evidential) conclusions into a clear, teachable format to have a reliable foundation for our beliefs. Systematic theology interacts directly with Scripture rather than with extant sources.

One: One begins with a pre-understanding of traditional views from a chosen theological community (such as Methodist, Reformed, Anabaptist, Evangelical, or Pentecostal).

Two: A specific ideology from a particular Biblical doctrine is selected, such as *redemption, atonement, propitiation, justification, or eschatology*. The doctrine is comprehensively tracked through Scripture to determine which authors and texts contain significant commentary. The exegetical study then searches for comparable distinctions in each passage that addresses the doctrine giving a range of order to the passages to assist in concluding which aspect of the doctrine each passage teaches.

Three: One chooses a systematic format to organize the results and determines the subject's Old and New Testament instruction and principles.

Four: Finally, the biblical theologian tracks the chosen textual ideology or doctrine through Church history to see how it evolved or remained intact with time. This research tells how the doctrine was contextualized in the past and provides invaluable (positive and negative) clues for the re-contextualization of the doctrine for our own time. In other words, biblical theology is significant to the proper goal of biblical study and teaching. Every aspect of the hermeneutical

study (including contextualization) is resourcing and constructing a theology for our present-day.

What is the Exact Relationship Between Biblical and Systematic Theology?

Biblical theology is inevitably complemented and completed by biblically sound and reliable systematic reflection. Rightly understood, biblical and systematic theology are co-equals working together to instruct and guide us in understanding and applying the Bible's principles, commands, and doctrines to our lives, individually and corporately.

First, the biblical theologian gets to work and engages in historical, inductive, and descriptive biblical theology.

Second, the systematic theologian gratefully takes what the biblical theologian gives him and frames the biblical teaching using categories and concepts that will help guide the church's apprehension and application of biblical truth.

The two are inseparable and interdependent. All aspects of the *theological-hermeneutical* process cohabit in conceptual unity and progression. So, there is a logical and spiritually organic sequence in how biblical and systematic theology complements and completes one another.

***Biblical context - Historical context - Literary context - Exegesis of text -
Biblical theology - Systematic theology - Practical Application theology***

In one sense, they flow in a straight line in the order presented here, as each one forms a foundation and then flows into the next. In another sense, the latter three provide the mental framework for exegetical and theological study. The theological pre-understanding established by one's confessional tradition is necessary for exegetical decisions. Still, both biblical and systematic theology collate the revelation of God in his Word, so they are two parts of the immense task of understanding and applying the Word. They lead us to grow deeper and expand wider with our interpretive understanding of God-intended Biblical and theological meanings.

It has become rare for anyone to pursue a purely objective search for biblical truth at any time. We search Scripture for keywords to address critical concerns or issues of human need or suffering - and rightly so. However, one word, one Scripture, from a single text, written and translated from an ancient language, does not always constitute a biblical truth. Nor does it effectively bring context and righteous understanding to the reader or one seeking more than a partial answer amidst the absolute and eternal truth. These limited practices, plus the unbelievable plethora of options available in our pluralistic world, make it difficult, if not impossible, to determine which option is best, let alone which of them is "true" (in the sense of final or absolute truth). However, these aspects of the theological method such as pre-understanding, community stance, personal experience, and rational thinking—are not merely negative influences. Each contributes positively to constructing a shared personal and community

theology. In our complex and secular world, the ability to think biblically and critically about one's ideas and other options is blunted.

It is increasingly difficult to make "*right and righteous*" decisions on mere possibilities and probabilities. More and more critical scholars are replacing the concept of "truth" with a pluralistic (modernized) openness to many possible "truths," even in theological matters.

We can no longer ignore the need and demand for biblical competency and literacy in the Church. There is a call for an awakening to the relevance and urgency of providing at least an elemental level of biblical fidelity and systematic methodology. There is no margin or justification for vacillating between the noisy and impulsive secularized Christianity and sound biblical and systematic theology. Theologians need to leave their cloistered and elitist faculty lounges and abandon the *culturalization*, *progressive* and *secular* ideologies of academia - the Church of Jesus needs their knowledge and learned insights.

Pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders need to reform and acquaint themselves with the right and righteous truth of God's Word, committing wholly to sound hermeneutical and exegetical processes of biblical interpretation for the sole purpose of feeding and leading the Church into the righteousness of God. Pastors need to step down as "merely" CEO, and fulfill or make sure the calling as spiritual shepherds and caretakers of the human soul - the Church of Jesus needs the greatest gifts of serving, loving, and unapologetically teaching God's truth.

Critical Consideration Eleven

Contrast and Compare: Revelation of the Spirit vs. Theological Interpretation

The Importance of the Revelation of the Spirit

- The illumination of the Holy Spirit helps believers understand the need for Scripture and convinces the reader that the Bible is true. Spirit revealed that understanding is indispensable.
- The Holy Spirit gives the sincere believer the ability to apprehend truth but not always the ability to comprehend the meaning of that truth.
- The Holy Spirit leads to a sense of conviction that enables the interpreter to embrace its meaning entirely.

- The Holy Spirit is a leader and guides into all truth, enabling one to live righteously and obediently in the truth.

The Importance of Good Theological Interpretation

- The meaning and context of the Bible are not rightly understood righteously when simply reading it.
- Simplistic and self-guided interpretation is spiritually dangerous and often lacks spiritual maturity. Being a good reader with a good knowledge of words and their meaning is not a substitute for good hermeneutics and scriptural exegesis.
- The Holy Spirit's help does not replace the need to interpret biblical passages according to historical and biblical context principles, grammatical and linguistic analysis, biblical and systematic theology, and contextual communication.
- One does not need formal Biblical education to use sound principles and reliable methods for Biblical interpretation. (Please note: It sure helps.)
- Hermeneutics provides the means (the plan) for understanding the Scriptures and for right and righteously applying that meaning.
- The primary goal of theological interpretation will be to establish, explain, and demonstrate guidelines and methods to guide those who want to understand and apply Scripture righteously and correctly.
- Theological Interpretation is a strategy enabling us to understand the meaning and significance of what an author or speaker intended to communicate.

The Important Tensions for Both the Spirit's Revelation and the Theological Interpretation

- The Bible is God's Word, yet it has come to us through human means.
- The commands of God are eternal and absolute, yet in such diverse historical contexts, we are hard-pressed to see how they can be universally normative.
- The divine message must be clear, yet many passages seem too ambiguous.
- We acknowledge the crucial role of the Holy Spirit, yet scholarship is undoubtedly necessary to understand what the Spirit has inspired.
- The Scriptures present the message God wants us to hear, but that message is conveyed within a complex literary landscape with varied genres over a considerable time.
- Proper interpretation requires the interpreter's freedom, yet that freedom comes with considerable risks of bias and distortion. Is there some role for an external corporate authority?
- The objectivity of the biblical message seems essential to some readers. However, on the one hand, presuppositions inject a degree of subjectivity into the interpretive process, while the deconstructionism of postmodernity calls the very concept of objectivity into question.

The diligent and sincere reader seeks to obey what God reveals in Scripture. Nonetheless, as readers and interpreters, we must not lose sight of the

significant (often spiritual) issues the original biblical authors were trying to communicate and be willing to obey. Those spiritual principles and truths are both timeless and eternal. The English theologian and author Nicholas Lash states the point forcefully, *“If the questions to which ancient authors sought to respond in terms available to them within their cultural horizons are to be ‘heard’ today with something like their original force and urgency, they have first to be ‘heard’ as questions that challenge us with comparable seriousness.”*

Lash points out that *present-day pastors, teachers, preachers, and Christian leaders must not read and interpret Scripture without it penetrating their hearts and minds with conviction and urgency.* We cannot genuinely understand what a text means without allowing it to affect our lives in the ways the Holy Spirit-inspired text intended to affect us. Interpretation involves a crucial dialectic exchange between the historical origin of a text and the perspective of the present-day or current reader or interpreter. There is a bridge to build there. Building that bridge will require a strong and sound approach utilizing both the revelation of the Spirit and an excellent hermeneutical process. It is never just one or the other.

To focus only on one or the other marginalizes the Bible to the status of merely an educational process or a mysterious feelings-based process where one continually waits for God to tell them what the Scripture meant in the past and why it should mean what it means presently. However, on the other hand, to abandon the historical and literary reference and context of a text and to seek only some comfortable and agreeable significance for today is misguided and indeed not the right and righteous process of biblical interpretation.

Genuine interpretation requires fusing or meshing the ancient and modern horizons where the meaning of the ancient text helps interpreters come to new understandings of themselves. As Lash correctly insists, “the articulation of what the text might ‘mean’ today is a necessary condition of hearing what that text ‘originally meant.’” Though Lash chooses not to take the point this far, his point should be well-taken by both the sincere follower of the God who revealed—and the follower who diligently seeks to redirect and “live out” the message of the text studied.

Critical Consideration Twelve

Sermonizing and Homiletics: The Word Rightly Divided and Righteously Fulfilled

The study of Scripture can never be complete until one has made the final move from the ancient text to present-day relevance and context. The siloed study of a text's original or intended meaning should never be just the means to an end in itself. However, they must always have as their desired outcome the fluid and living application of the text to one's current needs and the faithful sharing of that text with others. An expository teaching or preaching presentation should be preferred, with significant priority to prayer and space for the role and habitation of the Holy Spirit. Merely learning Scripture is not the ultimate task. It must be believed, proclaimed, heard, and then, by all means, substantiated in how one lives it out. This fluidity of the Word is the task and desired outcome of contextualization and sermon study. The good hermeneutical process should produce a good sermon and proclamation of God's truth.

As we move from the world of *the biblical text* to its *present* and *real-time relevance*, we must move effectively to mesh those two aspects. We cannot separate *hermeneutical exegesis* from *practical presentation, discipleship, and daily application*.

The same would also be true of separating *meaning* from *significance* or *significance* from *relevance* because they are all aspects of the same hermeneutical work and interpretive process.

To "*draw out*" the meaning of a text is to be "*pulled in*" to its significance because the perspective of one's pre-understanding has meshed with the perspective of the text, and exposition has become the beginning of the significant and relevant sermon.

One of the preacher's core responsibilities to his or her hearers is to make sure that the Word speaks as clearly today as it did in ancient times without crossing the bounds of credibility and logic. For example, the early Church Fathers recognized that dismissing the importance of the unity of Scripture harms our understanding of its distinctly diverse and essential specifics. So they took seriously what the gospels say about "*all the Scriptures*" disclosing or revealing the ministry of Christ.

Luke 24:27

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

John 5:39-40

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

However, over time and centuries of preaching and teaching Scripture, this insight became abused in ways that are now embarrassingly obvious to us by forms of ancient allegory and newly discovered hidden meanings that sought to give a mystical Messianic appearance in every Bible passage. This instruction was all done through an exegetical license that stretched the boundaries of any sound reasoning and intellectual credulity. Yes, Jesus is the Word revealed; however, He is not revealed in every word. Yes, every Word of the Bible is for us, yet not every word is about us.

This truth distinguishes between the "*right and righteous*" fulfillment of the Word utilizing a dynamic and reliable hermeneutics process, sound preaching, or a hastily prepared, slothfully shallow, and time-prohibited presentation.

Unfortunately, even those who take genuine exegetical care in illuminating the text's original meaning often fall short on this point. For the most part, this is because too many pastors, teachers, and preachers, are no longer theologians or even students of the Bible but, more often than not, are brilliant and highly competent organizational leaders who, perhaps in their success, have not perceived the need. Nonetheless, there is a pattern of failure to provide a solid hermeneutical foundation and the disciplined application needed for scriptural understanding.

As we said from the beginning - the goal of the "*right and righteous*" hermeneutical process is to teach and preach the word of God in a living and breathing relevance and significance for readers and hearers today. One could say, "*The significance of the Word of God is always relevant for all times and all people.*" However, the reverse of that statement is also true. "*The relevance Word of God is always significant for all times and all people.*"

Why should that be important for the present-day pastor, teacher, communicator, and leader?

Why the urgent need for fidelity among those responsible for right and righteously interpreting Scripture to lead and discipling others into the wisdom, knowledge, and truth of the Bible?

Why indeed?

It is crucial, and there is urgency, because without some comprehensive form, structured process, or plan for interpreting biblical text intended for reliable teaching, preaching, and leading, there is no relevant or significant sermon. It is the sermon not worth hearing. Even that statement alone will evoke conflict, resentment, and personal hostility and is suspicious to some only because it is true. Indeed, the argument will always be that getting lost in the high weeds of biblical hermeneutics and a litany of contextual possibilities for interpretive integrity takes away from the relevance and significance of the present-day

image-driven methods of teaching and preaching God's Word. We can start with this simple rule in utilizing the biblical hermeneutic process for sermonizing biblical text.

"We cannot understand the significance of a text until we have learned the intended meaning of that text, and we cannot learn the intended meaning of the text until we have discovered a context for the author of the text. Then and only then are we ready to contextualize for teaching and preaching God's Word to God's people."

Here are several timeless, unmovable, and unchangeable rules for the establishment and the "*right and righteous*" practice of biblical hermeneutics developed as a presentation or sermon.

- *God's revealed Word is the final arbiter of all truth, and contextualization of necessity must recognize the inviolability of its truths.*
- *A verbally absolute, inerrantist approach to contextualization accepts the culturally transcending nature of all biblical truth and, thereby, the unchanging nature of these scriptural principles.*
- *An evangelical contextualization is aware of the transformational character of the current receptor context.*

- *The best way to demonstrate this is to note how often the biblical writers themselves had to contextualize previously revealed truths for their current situations.*
- *The Christ-centered message that God has intervened in history and the redemptive significance of the cross lies behind all the voices. This macro-narrative must guide all scriptural contextualization today.*
- *The Christ story must provide the foundation for all the diverse theological contextualization.*
- *Sermon preparation must be a devotional exercise (a first-person encounter) before it becomes a proclamation event (a second-person encounter). Preachers must continually place themselves before the text rather than merely place themselves behind it to direct it to this or that situation in the church.*
- *To remain viable - pastoral, teaching, and preaching ministries must display a dependence on the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, who gives knowledge and wisdom to those who seek him. The sermon forges in a spirit of devotion where the strength may be of the Spirit rather than the flesh. The effects of the gospel are entirely the result of the Spirit rather than the teacher/preacher/communicator skill set.*
- *As the New Testament writers did, we must spiritually discern the "limits" between reliable contextualization and amalgamation. At times they had to*

oppose an unwillingness to contextualize (the Jewish Christians in Acts 10,11, 15. At other times they had to say no to pragmatic compromise (1 Corinthians 15; Gnosticism in 1 John).

- *Like them, our contextualizing must be in keeping with the one true and absolute gospel, led by the Holy Spirit, tested by the wider Christian community, and have the power to transform the community.*

- *We must enculturate the gospel into the lives and customs of the people we serve by reclothing the supra-cultural message in a new cultural garb "without loss of meaning." This enculturation can only be done with care to have a "transforming engagement" in multicultural settings today.*

- *We must "'globalize' the gospel" and, at the same time, transform the local community by listening to the "common theologies" of the powerless people groups while seeking harmony and unity in the broader sense.*

- *While the content of biblical revelation is unchanging, the form of its presentation is ever-changing. These two aspects—form and content—provide the indispensable core of contextualization.*

So, we ask ourselves the difficult but necessary questions. As students of God's written Word, are we continuing to equip ourselves to teach, preach, and present the living Word of God in a knowledgeable and approved way so that we are not ashamed, discredited, or discarded?

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

This Truth, I Believe [*creedo*]

If present-day preaching is to be more than just religious public speaking and to convey more than ancient wisdom or the knowledge base of the preacher, it must be Biblically informed, and Biblically sound. Any claim that one is receiving a message, sermon, or homily billed as Biblical must first meet the criteria of having been built on the foundations of what the Bible teaches or implies. If preachers or teachers seek to inform people of God's ways and His will, they must be sure that sound hermeneutical principles guide the process. For example, their preaching is intentionally and literally on point with Biblical texts. If based on a biblical text, preachers say to their listeners, "*God wants you to . . .*," then they are bound ethically (and to their God-given calling) to interpret God's will accurately.

Part of the pastoral creed of teaching and preaching should be the right and righteous belief that sermon by sermon, we engage God's people in the critical process of aligning themselves with the sound and reliable interpretation of the written and authoritative Word of God. In this Word is revealed the image of Christ that is present in each prayerful selection of text and scripture. As hearers

of the Word, the people of God, the household of faith, should find themselves growing in Christ-likeness with each teaching and sermon. The conclusion must be: preaching and teaching Scripture should therefore assist and expedite the conformation of God's people into the image and likeness of the Son of God by and through the power of God.

1 Peter 1:22

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

In reality, God has chosen the "preaching of His Word" as a preferred path for the spiritual journey for his children, to be "conformed to the image [εἰκῶν, *eikōn*] of his Son" in his humanity.

Romans 10:13-15

*For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And **how are they to hear without someone preaching?** [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

Romans 8:29

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

1 Corinthians 1:18-21

*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. [19] For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” [20] Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21] For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, **it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.***

This understanding should lead the pastor, teacher, preacher to a Christ-centric approach in presenting the *Word of God* to the *people of God*. It is as the Scripture says, “*God has destined all his children to the end that they be conformed to Christ.*” The apostle Paul also instructed, “*We proclaim Him, instructing all people and teaching all people with all wisdom, that we may present all people mature in Christ*” (Colossians 1:28).

In this instruction we are led to the obvious conclusion - the primary function of God’s Word, the primary purpose of Biblical preaching and teaching, is God’s means to an end. That “end” is His people conformed into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ by the power of His Spirit. This is a “weighty” and sobering

process. A process that requires not just a “filling up” of knowledge and understanding of Scripture, but one that demands an “emptying out” of pre-supposition, self-feeding awareness, and pre-determined outcomes that do not lead the both the preacher and the hearer into a Christ-likeness and image-bearing conformation.

As the people of God are disciplined (preaching/teaching of God’s Word) into the process of being conformed into the image of Christ Jesus, the restoration of *imago Dei* (the image of God) among humankind is made known. That image was known and present to Adam and to Eve at creation but was defiled in the fall resulting from the first sin.

Genesis 1:26–27

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

In fulfillment of the promise of the new covenant through Christ Jesus, the people of God will “share His holiness” fully conformed to the image of God in Christ Jesus, therefore becoming partakers of the divine and eternal nature of the Creator.

Hebrews 12:10-11

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. [11] For the

moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

2 Peter 1:3-4

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

1 John 3:1-2

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. [2] Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

The impartation (right and righteous preaching and teaching) of the image of Christ to the people of God becomes then the daily process of sanctification/holiness that is followed. The point is that Christ Himself is the best and most excellent example for His followers to conforming to His image and becoming His likeness.

Church Fathers such as *Augustine, A'Kempis, Luther, Calvin*, all agreed that Christ must be imitated and followed as an example, but emulative efforts

performed with Christ as an example must also include the reception of Christ as a gift:

(Martin Luther)

“Now when you have Christ as the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation, then the other part follows: that you take him as your example.”

(John Calvin)

“Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life. . . . What can you require beyond this one “thing? For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ.”

(C. S. Lewis)

“Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”

(K.J.Vanhoozer)

“For those who by faith through the Spirit have been united to Christ, putting on Christ is not a fiction (what if) but a reality (what is). . . . Disciples do not act like Christ in order to approximate an exemplar outside them. Rather, disciples put on Christ from the inside out.”

What has become critical to the present-day pulpit and homiletic responsibility is presenting the “day to day” process (dailiness) of

sanctification as the establishing of one's Christ-like identity and the "closing of the gaps" between what one believes, how one lives, and who one actually is. That day to day process, which is the followers responsibility to become Christlike, is not a dismantling, but a rebuilding—an active manifestation of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ already indwelling the Christian; not a fictional imitation, but a factual actualization, by the power of the Spirit. The greater understanding and pastoral theology of introduction to Christ, formation in Christ, and conformation to the image of Christ is certainly a critical consideration for **the Word Rightly Divided and the Word Righteously Fulfilled.**

We cannot stress too strongly the significant role sound biblical interpretation performs in this critical process. When people listen to preaching, they want to "hear a word from God." When they cry out to know if there is a God or how they may know him personally—when the vexing questions of human existence confound or when issues of ultimate destiny demand answers—mere human opinions fail to satisfy or convince. Moreover, if preachers and teachers fail to introduce Christ through Scripture, their hearers will be misled, with possibly tragic and even eternal consequences. As people seek guidance and courage to live responsibly as Christians—or merely to survive a crisis—they want to know how God can help, what God expects, or what God is saying about their situation. At such points, no self-help or human wisdom suffices. Pastors, preachers, and teacher of God's Word find their role at this very point. When faithful to their calling, preachers possess the great privilege and tremendous responsibility of comprehending the ancient text, arriving at its correct meaning, and conveying its significance to people in their own time and culture so they may apply it to their lives.

That is indeed "*the right and righteous*" process.

Consideration Thirteen

The Impact of Prayer and the Influence of the Holy Spirit on Hermeneutical Outcomes

Everything in the biblical hermeneutics process falls short of the desired outcomes if pastors, preachers, teachers, or interpreters of Scripture do not devote time to seeking, praying, and then making a priority for the Holy Spirit's guidance into and through the hermeneutical process. As leaders and mentors in the daily practice of biblical study, we should be fully committed to that practice as an essential part of our approach and should then be at peace with that as both right and righteous. As suggested earlier, a prayerful appeal to the Spirit is no substitute for sound hermeneutical processes – however, it is undoubtedly an essential foundation for building from that process.

First, we look at the practice and discipline of personal prayer, and the possibilities and need for prayer as a continual foundation to the hermeneutical

process. This would include any interpretive conclusions we present to those who call us pastor, teacher, mentor, and leader.

Prayer and the Hermeneutical Process

"True prayer to God the Father is prayed in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. True prayer is when the created connects with Creator, where the fullness of love, compassion, divine purpose, and understanding are completed in ways impossible for man to comprehend. This kind of prayer is a personal and essential process, one that cultivates a deep love and hunger for knowledge and understanding of God's written Word."

No matter how often the text of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is read, it captures the heart and engages the mind. Just three words,

"Pray Without Ceasing"

It is *"the call"* for believers to pray continually. The same is true about *"the command"* that we should pray the way Jesus told us to pray.

Matthew 6:5-15.

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father, who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Our immediate responses to these passages and those similar can range anywhere from a cynical "*that would be nice*" to an almost programmed progression and analysis of how not to take the text literally or presume that anyone would be capable of praying all the time, or that any of us could presume to pray just like Jesus. Nevertheless, it certainly crosses our minds that this request, although coming directly from the Bible, seems almost impossible and improbable. So, we ask, "*Is this necessary*"? *Isn't it more convenient and justifiable to dismiss a literal interpretation at that point?*

However, a dismissal like that would be an error and, subsequently, an errant choice for anyone seeking reliable spiritual direction and guidance for "*right and*

righteously" interpreting Scripture. If we are to ever teach, preach, and communicate, the ancient texts of God's living and relevant Word to our world in the transforming and regenerative way we must re-set our thinking and de-direct the affections of our heart back to the calling God first placed in our life.

Let's propose that we do not dismiss this teaching as impractical, impossible, improbable, or unnecessary. What if we pursued the text for a more precise understanding and intended meaning? What if we were to use our spiritual knowledge and insights to focus directly on learning God's very nature and expectations - His character and His power to do the impossible and the improbable? Our motive for this journey would not necessarily be that God would do something for us but primarily believe that He would do something within all of us. We could begin by increasing our faith and developing an open acceptance that the author intended this Scripture in question to be a literal truth and that it is indeed acceptable and expected by God that men should pray always and everywhere.

The point is that God always moves us into circumstances where faith is possible; without that faith, we cannot please Him. We must come to believe that the only way to live where faith is possible is through continuous prayer. In boldly accepting His word on continuous prayer, we open ourselves to a journey of faith, spiritual learning, and a revelation of truth that might radically change our lives and set a new and divine course for our eternity. Personal relationship and communication with God could conceivably change to one where we become both seeker and worshipper as opposed to being merely one more self-sufficient Christian leader who has learned all and seen all - that is an isolated and lonely place. It would be possible for us to then become the lifelong learners

he intended us to be and to become once again people of passionate faith whose greatest desire is to know God and to make Him known.

From this point in our journey, the Holy Spirit leads us to God's most profound truths and understandings. We are allowed the joy of opening our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit and the fullness of God's Word. In this magnitude, we build a genuine "*Jesus-type faith*" where the impractical, impossible, improbable, and unnecessary all become practical, possible, probable, and necessary. This place is where we can truly learn to pray continuously to God the Father with believing faith.

We eventually learn that to hear from God; we must pray with a pure heart and an undistracted mind.

We also can rediscover how to pray with great desire, fear, and reverence toward God. And finally, we discover again that our prayer must be sincere with genuine humility - void of all human pride and predeterminations. We can only get there by praying honestly about who we are and where we are in our relationship with Christ.

The next obstacle is to make sure that we are conscious that (no matter how noble our intentions are), we all will sometimes fall short of this goal. For example, in considering personal prayers and what is offered daily to God, one can notice a tendency for those prayers to be reactive, rote, and self-centered. That certainly does not mean we are evil or even "unsophisticated in our prayer." Instead, it indicates that we are static and simply not growing in prayer. One

should also remember that when we rely on our strength during prayer, we will never be able to keep our thoughts (focused) and hearts pure (honest) enough for true prayer.

Scripture reminds us, "*The thoughts of man are evil from his youth. God alone gives another heart and another spirit, for both to will, and to do are of God.*"

The constant desire should be to discover and learn ways to fulfill our call from God to prayer. Believe that we should step forward in faith and begin to do what He has asked us to do once again, or maybe for the first time. He has asked us to be faithful and obedient to His Word; we should then apply that request to the biblical instruction for prayer. We must be faithful in the quantity and consistency of our prayer, and then God, by His Spirit, will be faithful to increase the quality of our prayer. As teachers, preachers, pastors, and Christian leaders interpreting and communicating the Word of God (The Bible), we must begin or re-commit to practice, persistence, and belief in our prayer time.

The continuous prayer is at God the Father's heart and essential to the "*right and righteous*" hermeneutic and interpretive process.

Three Essential Habits in Prayer that Impact the Hermeneutical Process

Stillness – It is crucial to begin prayer with moments of stillness. The solitude of stillness leads to a critical point in our relationship with Christ in which we learn

to both hearing and listening. Hearing is a sensory function - listening is a deliberate conscious choice. To hear and to listen is to acknowledge His Lordship over our lives and to gain wisdom in the discipline of understanding His intended meaning for His Word. Finding a physical place for this kind of stillness is not necessarily easy, especially when our lives and surroundings are conditioned and equipped for immediate responses, verbal affirmation, and technological stimulation. Nevertheless, quietly worshipping with a song or silently reading a written prayer can open the door to interior silence.

Too often, we believe we do not have sufficient time for such things. That is truly a wrong belief. As the Egyptian army bore down upon the Israelites while they stood on the shoreline looking at the Red Sea, Moses said to one million people, "*The Lord God will fight for you... you need only to be still.*" There is always time to be still before God and His Word.

It is worth repeating. This stillness is essential to the hermeneutical process as pastors, teachers, communicators, exporters, and spiritual leaders who desire to interpret Scripture with God's intended meaning *right and righteously*. Nothing can replace or be more critical than stillness and silence before God and His Word. We need to stop in the face of the exegete's biggest obstacle - distraction. And, in humility – be still.

Psalms 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Watchfulness – Discovering the biblical meaning of watchfulness develops the spiritual gifts of discernment and knowledge needed to guard the mind and soul against the deceptions and perceptions of presuppositions and predeterminations that can and will hinder and distract the hermeneutical process. Watchfulness creates a sensitivity to the heart and understanding of God within the interpreter of text and almost certainly a recognition of His voice. Jesus said, *"Keep alert and pray.* Placing these words into the contextualization process of hermeneutics is not unwise. Otherwise, temptation and distraction will overpower. *"For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak!"* If we are not watching, we are simply not paying attention; in prayer, we pay attention to the biblical order and interpretive process God has given us.

"Often times in prayer, we must see what we need to see, when we are not watching for what needs to be seen. This responsibility is central to the success of the hermeneutical process."

Matthew 26:36-41

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you

not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Humility – God has always required a humble and contrite spirit (God resists a proud heart but gives grace to the humble) from those that serve Him. However, one cannot define humility with something one does, but it should define who one is. Many achieve recognition as teachers, preachers, mentors, exhorters, communicators, and interpreters of the ancient text known as the Bible, and in most cases, this is good. However, who are we, if not *curator animae humanae* - caretakers of the human soul? As we consider the weight and responsibility that accompanies the hermeneutical process, the exegesis of Scripture, and the contextualization of God's Word, humility is inevitable. One way or another, the eternal truth discovered and revealed in the interpretive process will humble one and all.

Humility begins with our not being too proud to bow a knee and confess - Jesus the Lord. Remember, biblical hermeneutics is not simply an academic or intellectual process; it is a spiritual process that must include our study and intellect. The humble prayer that surrenders the will of the human spirit and the excellent attitude of our minds will also bow us down to God the Father and lead us forward to a *right and righteous* interpretation and the intended meaning of God's Word.

Psalms 25:8-9

*Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

Proverbs 11:2

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

The Influence of the Holy Spirit on Hermeneutical Outcomes

Hermeneutics, the standardized and disciplined art of biblical interpretation, is fundamentally essential to the evangelical community because of the commitment to the Spirit-breathed inerrancy and authority of the Bible. The right and righteous assignment of Bible interpreters is to exegete the authors intended meaning of Biblical text and passages spoken and written to original hearers and readers and then to contextualize how that meaning relates to hearers and readers today. Biblical scholars have wrestled with critical hermeneutical concerns, but relatively little consideration has been given to the Holy Spirit's influence in the hermeneutic process and outcome.

Because accuracy and fidelity are critical to the interpretation of Scripture and inaccuracy has the potential to profoundly and adversely impact so many lives, one must be right and righteous in his or her interpretive process. Sufficient application of truth creates a path for a sufficient understanding of truth. A skewed or insufficient meaning of a word, verse, or passage may result in misinformed living.

In John's gospel, chapters fourteen and fifteen, the Holy Spirit, is presented as the "*Helper*"; perpetually available to help followers make certain the correct

meaning of the Bible's principles, commands, and questions. Holy Spirit is immersed in the hermeneutical process because He is "*the Spirit of truth*" who, Jesus said, "*will guide... into all truth*" (John 16:13). Paul would confirm this in writing "*We have... the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us*" (1 Corinthians 2:12). This instruction continued as John also wrote, "*His anointing teaches you about all [spiritual] things*" (1 John 2:27). In the author's context, "*anointing*" refers to the Holy Spirit; by *metonymy*, the act of anointing is related to what the anointing teaches. In this case, the presence and habitation of the Holy Spirit.

Having acknowledged that habitation, the Holy Spirit's participation in teaching, equipping, and navigating, believers into "*all truth*" presents some complex but critical questions for consideration:

If reliable and authentic learning comes from the inner working of the Holy Spirit, is that not an indication of one's understanding of Scripture being essentially subjective?

Since the Holy Spirit is always present and working in the heart and mind of a sincere believer, does that believer instinctively know the correct meaning of a Bible verse?

If the Holy Spirit interprets the Word intimately to individual believers, how can one be certain or determine the correct view among several conflicting interpretations?

If two individuals claim to be taught by the Holy Spirit and yet present differing interpretations on a particular passage or text, which interpretation or conclusion is credible?

Author and Cambridge University New Testament Bible scholar C.F. Moule, put it this way,

"the blessed Spirit is not only the true Author of the written Word but also its supreme and true Expositor."

Yet, the question remains the same.

How does one accurately discern the meaning of God's authoritative Word when confronted with so many conflicting interpretations?

This leaves one with even *more questions* regarding the authority and accuracy of unreliable and untethered Biblical interpretation.

If human interpretations confuse the clarity or dilute the veracity of the Word, is the Bible no longer authoritative?

Is one reliable and inconsistent if he or she assumes the accuracy and practice of private judgment and claims that his or her interpretations are correct and another's wrong?

Is the Bible not clear in its meaning?

Can only a select few have insight into the meaning of Scripture?

Are the "deep things of God" and his "thoughts" (1 Corinthians 2:10-11) understood only by a select group of Christians?

Can Christians make claim of scriptural infallibility regarding personal interpretations of Biblical passages simply by claiming that the Holy Spirit "taught" them the meaning?

In what context does the Holy Spirit give insight into the Bible's meaning? Does such "insight and knowledge" come suddenly, or is it the result of the study?

If insight and knowledge come from study, can the Bible's meaning be ascertained by rational processes apart from the Holy Spirit?

How does the Spirit's role in interpretation relate to the illumination of His Word?

Are the two functions the same? If not, how do they differ?

These are certainly critical issues and essential questions. Celebrated author and preacher Joseph Parker explains it this way, "*there is no function assigned to the Spirit more important for us to understand than that by which He assures to the church a profound and correct interpretation of Scripture.*" Eternal truth must be understood and correctly interpreted.

How does the Holy Spirit "guide and direct" believers in their engagement with the interpretive process?" What does that guidance and direction mean? Listed here are some suggested and well-respected biblical propositions that will assist in the processing of most of these questions and issues.

The Holy Spirit's Influence in Biblical Interpretation Does Not Dictate the Spirit Gives New Revelation.

Spirit's work is always careful and conscientious, and in affirmation with the written Word of God, not beyond it or in addition to it. The Holy Spirit and the Word function in unity. The Bible, being God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16), has the

authoritative power to *generate and regenerate faith*, to *sanctify and nurture*, and to *enlighten*.

The Word (Bible), in unity with the Holy Spirit, *regenerates life* (John 3:5-7; Titus 3:5), *sanctifies life* (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2) and *enlightens life* (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-15). The written Word of God is always in complete unity with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible, God's Word, is "*living and active*," "*operative or effective*" (Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23). But the effectiveness is always evident when the Holy Spirit is at work in connection and unity with the Word.

"The Word of God can have no efficacy unless the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the hearers at the same time, creating faith and making men's minds open to receive the Word."

Concerning the receptiveness of man, John Calvin wrote, "*The heavenly doctrine proves to be useful and efficacious to us in so far as the Spirit both forms our minds to understand it and our hearts to submit to its yoke.*"

The interpretive Influence of the Holy Spirit in Scripture Does Not Mean that One's Interpretations are Infallible.

Inerrancy and infallibility are characteristics of the Bible's original manuscripts but not of the Bible's interpreters. The manuscripts were inerrant because of the Holy Spirit's guarding and guiding the writers to record what He wanted to be recorded, word for word. However, such an oversight cannot be claimed for interpreters of the Word. In inspiration, the Holy Spirit gave oversight to the authors to guard against any human error. In interpretation, the Holy Spirit guides, but does not guard against infallibility. To elevate one's interpretations to

the level of infallibility would blur the distinctions between inspiration (a past, now completed work of the Spirit in the recording of Scripture) and interpretation (a present, ongoing work of the Spirit in helping interpreters in the comprehending of Scripture). It would also credit a level of infallibility to Protestant human leaders, which evangelicals reject in Roman Catholicism.

Therefore, allowing the right of private (individual) judgment in interpreting the Bible does not mean that all the results of private interpretation are accurate.

The Work of the Spirit in Interpretation Does Not Mean that He Gives Some Interpreters a Cognitive Acuity for Seeing Truths Under the Surface that are not Evident to Any Other Dedicated Bible Students.

The interpreter, if he thinks he finds a "*hidden*" meaning divergent from the ordinary, literal meaning of the passage, cannot claim the Holy Spirit's help.

The Influence of the Holy Spirit in Bible Interpretation Means That the Unregenerate do not Welcome and Apply God's truth. However, They Can Comprehend Many of its Statements Cognitively.

Unsaved men can mentally grasp something of the objective data of the Bible. Many unbelievers have understood many historical facts presented in the Word of God. Some have even followed the logic of certain portions of the Bible. They have cognitively grasped specific objective biblical facts - that certain Bible personalities performed certain tasks, said certain words, went to specific geographical locations, argued with certain points of logic, and so on - yet they do not personally know the God of the Scriptures. "*The world through its wisdom did not know him*" (1 Corinthians 1:21). Even with determined and

diligent research on a high scholarly level, they cannot respond to the true divine sense of the Scriptures. The Spirit's illuminating of Christians must include something more than mental apprehension of the Bible of which non-Christians are capable.

Though the unsaved may mentally observe objective data of the Bible, it remains foolishness to them (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14). Though perhaps able to follow the logic of Paul's reasoning in his epistles, unbelievers do not "take to heart" the truth involved. The grammar of John 3:16 may be apparent to the unsaved, but this does not mean they receive the truth of the verse in their hearts. The unsaved do not welcome God's truth because it strikes at the very core of their sinfulness.

Only the saved can welcome God's truth. When Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that "*the man without the Spirit (soulish, unsaved man)* does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God," he did not mean that an unsaved person is incapable of comprehending any of the grammatical data of the Bible. Instead, Paul meant that a non-Christian does not welcome its truth! The Greek word translated as "accept" means "welcome." If "receive" were intended, a different Greek word would have been used. The verse does not mean that an unsaved person, devoid of the Holy Spirit, cannot understand mentally what the Bible is saying; instead, it means that he does not welcome its message of redemption to his heart. He rejects the message, refusing to appropriate it and act on it.

By contrast, people in Berea "*received (from) the message with great eagerness*" (Acts 17:11), and the Thessalonians "*received (from) the Word... with*

the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6) The statement in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that the things of the Spirit of God are "*foolishness*" to an unbeliever would indicate that he has some understanding of what the Bible says. Otherwise, how could he judge such communication as foolish if nothing were communicated to him? Therefore, he could not call something foolish unless conscious of it. "But," someone may argue, "this verse also states that an unsaved person cannot even know the things of the Spirit. Does not this argue against the point being made that the unsaved can be cognizant of Bible facts?" No, because the Greek word that is used means "*know by experience*," as opposed to which means "*know intuitively or intrinsically*." An unbeliever does not know God's truth experientially. He may grasp portions of it mentally, but he does not discern it spiritually nor experience it personally. Henry A. Virkler summarizes this point well when he writes:

"Thus, unbelievers do not know the full meaning of scriptural teaching, not because that meaning is unavailable to them in the words of the text, but because they refuse to act on and appropriate spiritual truths for their own lives. Furthermore, the psychological results of such refusal make them less and less able (and willing) to comprehend these truths."

Hermeneutics: The Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation /H.A. Virkler

In illumination, the Holy Spirit's work is to show what the Bible means and persuade Christians of its truth. Illumination is the Spirit's work, enabling

Christians to discern the meaning of the message and to welcome and receive it from God. Obedience and application in the believer's life is the inevitable result of the illuminating work of the Spirit.

To receive God's truths fully, one must understand them and then appropriate them. The Holy Spirit, who has given the Word of God, seeks to "*open the eyes of the readers to perceive its truth and receive its light.*" Theologian Fred H. Klooster follows up with this: "*Understanding Scripture requires more than an intellectual grasp of the historical setting of the text or the literary structure of the passage.*" Heart-understanding demands the heart response in the totality of one is being to the living, triune God.

The Spirit's Influence in the Hermeneutic Process Does Not Mean Only Bible Scholars can Understand or Interpret the Bible.

The Bible was given to be understood by all; hence its interpretation is not in the hands of an elite few. (1 John 2:20, 27). Nevertheless, believers should not neglect the interpretive help biblical scholars can afford.

The Holy Spirit's Influence in Interpreting Scripture Requires a Right and Righteous Approach From the Interpreter.

Thomas Aquinas used to pray and fast when he came to a difficult passage of Scripture. Most scholars whose Biblical studies have blessed the church have generously mixed prayers with their studies. A deep religious experience has enlightened many an otherwise ill-instructed mind about the meaning of much of the Holy Writ. Apart from the quickening of the Spirit, the interpreter will have

only words and phrases. Only through the Holy Spirit can he enter the biblical writers' meaning.

However, this is not to say that prayer automatically guarantees that a person's interpretations will be accurate. Spiritual devotion, depth, and sensitivity make correct interpretations possible but do not assure their accuracy. More is involved, as other propositions indicate.

The Holy Spirit's Influence in Biblical Interpretation Means that Insufficient Spiritual Equipping Limits Accurate Interpretation.

A worldly Christian, one who is not obeying the truth and is not yielded to the Lord, is unable to understand the Word fully (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) and "is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13). A Christian who is in sin is susceptible to making inaccurate interpretations of the Bible because his mind and heart are not in harmony with the Spirit. As Lewis Chafer wrote, "*Carnality of life excludes [believers] from understanding, or progressing in, the deep things of God.*" God reveals His truths by the Spirit only to spiritual Christians. "The spiritual man" has greater depth in his discernment of spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:15).

The Influence of the Spirit in Interpretation is Not a Replacement for Diligent Study.

The interpreter must study the Word intensely with a heart sensitive to the Spirit. The point here is that the Spirit does not make study excessive or unnecessary. On the contrary, **the more self-consciously active the interpreter is in the process, the more likely the Spirit's illumination.** The

Holy Spirit works through the efforts of the individual as he reads the Bible, studies it, meditates on it, and consults other works about it. In the inspiration of the Bible, the Holy Spirit was working, but so were the human authors. Similarly, in the interpretation of the Bible, human work is involved.

The Spirit's Work in Biblical Interpretation Does not Rule Out the Use of Reliable and Biblically Sound Study Resources.

Devout people often assert that they can know the Bible competently without help from any supportive commentary or research. The presumption is that they can go to the Bible and that the Holy Spirit interprets it directly. This assertion seems to them more spiritual than relying on the commentary and writing of men. Evangelical theologian and apologist Bernard Ramm rebutes this view by stating...

"No one has the right or the learning to bypass all the godly learning of other Bible scholars, both past and present.

He asserts that such an affirmation is "*a veiled egotism.*" Of course, commentaries can and do come between a person and the Bible. It is possible to rely on others' interpretations to neglect one's study of the Scriptures. Rather than using commentaries and other study helps as a crutch and accepting others' views unquestioningly, one would be better served to consult them and evaluate the views suggested in the light of sound and reliable study of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). This should be done prayerfully and humbly in dependence on the Spirit's guidance. Co-Founder of Dallas Theological Seminary Lewis Chafer, addresses this point well.

"No student of the Scriptures should be satisfied to traffic only in the results of the study of other men. The field is inexhaustible and its

treasures ever new. No worthy astronomer limits his attention to the findings of other men, but is himself ever gazing into the heavens both to verify and to discover; and no worthy theologian will be satisfied alone with the result of the research of other theologians, but will himself be ever searching the Scriptures."

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation Does Not Mean Those who Interpret Can Ignore Common Sense and Logic.

Since the Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), He would not teach concepts that failed to meet the tests of truth. (In a correspondence theory of truth, truth corresponds to the actual state of affairs.) Therefore, the Holy Spirit does not guide into interpretations that contradict each other or fail to have logical, internal consistency.

Two believers may be spiritual, but one or both may be wrong in understanding a Bible passage because of failure to both critically and logically think through the Bible. Two contradictory views may be wrong, or one may be wrong, but both cannot be correct. The Spirit seeks to aid the Spirit-filled learner to think clearly and accurately. The interpreter "*must employ principles of reasoning in making inductions, deductions, analogies, and comparisons.*"

Bible students recognize that while the Bible is a unique book - inspired and downloaded by the Holy Spirit and therefore infallible and authoritative - it is a written means of communication (from God to man), which suggests that it must be understood in that light. As with any written communication, the interpreter

seeks to expose the passage's intended meaning in its original context before relating the text to personal and present-day circumstances.

The Bible was written in languages unknown by most modern readers today, in cultural environments that were vastly different from those in current-day Western culture, in geographical settings that are distant from most present-day readers of the Bible, and in literary styles unlike many common literary forms today. These gaps of linguistic, cultural, geographical, and literary context are often hindrances to communication. Removing these hindrances or closing the gaps is much of what is involved in correctly interpreting the Bible.

Just as one uses common sense in seeking to bridge communication gaps within his own culture, so he should use common sense in interpreting the Bible. For example, a reader typically gives an author the benefit of the doubt if the author makes a statement that seemingly conflicts with a previous statement. One should grant the same benefit to the Bible. Also, a reader typically uses logical principles to understand an author's writing. He does not read into the writing a meaning foreign to the material. Again, the same benefit should be granted to the Bible.

Though spiritual truths often supersede man's reasoning ability, they do not contradict or conflict with reason. On the contrary, clear thinking and standard procedures followed in comprehending written communications are essential in Bible interpretation and harmonize with the Holy Spirit's role.

The Place of the Holy Spirit in Interpreting the Bible Means the Spirit Does Not Typically Give Sudden and Spontaneous Insight Into the Meaning of Scripture.

Though many passages are readily understood, the meaning of others may come to light only gradually in the diligent process of faithful and careful study (as stated earlier in the proposition). Still, at other times an interpreter may concentrate on a passage for a long time with its meaning still eluding him. However, later, after leaving the passage for a while, the meaning may seem to jump to his mind suddenly. *"The interpreter's struggle to understand always precedes that... experience; it does not occur in connection with a text on which one has expended no effort."* This sudden and spontaneous insight, if it occurs, does not come without having invested ones self into the passage beforehand.

To speak of the Spirit's part in hermeneutics is not to suggest some mysterious work beyond verification or validation. Some theologians argue against the view that the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation and religious instruction means that His activity is a *"mysterious and unfathomable"* work so that learning activity is unexplainable, unpredictable, or unverifiable, or that teaching and learning are *"miracles supernaturally wrought by... zaps of the Holy Spirit."* Though the academic argument stresses a valid point about learning not coming simply by impulses of the Holy Spirit, this **crosses a line and makes a critical error by ruling out the Holy Spirit's work altogether.** To depend on the Holy Spirit is, the academic says, is to *"hyper-spiritualize"* religious instruction as if it were *"an ethereal, mysterious, non-terrestrial affair which is fundamentally beyond the regular workings of nature."* However, while it is understood that some biblical educators may seek to overemphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in

Biblical interpretation, **an even more dangerous direction is to neglect and de-emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit altogether.**

The Spirit's Ministry in Interpreting the Bible is Included in But Not Identical to Illumination.

Illumination, as stated earlier, is the Spirit's work on the minds and hearts of believers that enables them to discern the truth and receive it, welcome it, and apply it. In interpretation, a believer is aided by the Spirit to ascertain the meaning of a passage. The aid of the Spirit is the first step in illumination. However, illumination is not complete until one has appropriated it to his life. Interpretation involves perception; illumination includes it but also involves reception.

The Influence of the Spirit in Scriptural Interpretation Does Not Mean that all Parts of the Bible are Equally Apparent in Meaning.

Some Bible scholars claim that the Scripture is equally *perspicuous*, that its meaning is clear and plain. However, *perspicuity* does not mean that all parts of the Bible are equally clear. For example, even Peter said that Paul's epistles "*contain some things that are hard to understand*" (2 Peter 3:16). *Perspicuity* means, instead, that the central message of the Bible, the message of salvation is made clear to all, and is understood by all.

The Spirit's Work in Interpretation Does Not Result in Believers Having an "on call" Comprehensive and Completely Accurate Understanding of the Scriptures.

The exact meaning of many passages still eludes many Bible scholars, even after a lifetime of study in the Scriptures. Moreover, the precise meaning of some verses will not be known until believers see the Savior "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Students of the Bible, even though they are devout and are Spirit-taught, must admit that the correct interpretation of at least some passages cannot be entirely ascertained this side of heaven.

These propositions suggest that at least five elements are necessary for correctly interpreting the Bible: **salvation, spiritual maturity, diligent study, common sense and logic,** and **humble dependence on the Spirit of God** for discernment. In addition, *the Holy Spirit must be actively and intently involved in a believer's efforts to comprehend and interpret the Bible.*

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Critical Consideration Thirteen

Critical Conclusions

Hermeneutics is relevant not only to the interpretation of the Bible, but, to all expressions of human life, in the sense that everything from an Arizona desert sunset to a classical symphony, or the cry of a small child in the next room is a "message" that calls out for a meaningful interpretation. In this general context, Hermeneutics is a common practice both consciously and subconsciously. In a narrower context, the case for teaching and integrating Biblical Hermeneutics into our pulpits, small group discipleship, worship, and educational settings is made. We are all drawn to the reality of the Creator God in which we continuously interpret that reality and evidence as believable or unbelievable, logical or illogical, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on. Anywhere the text of God's Word is presented to receptors or hearers, there is a need and godly demand for "*right and righteous*" interpretation and contextualization of Scripture. This need has become ever so critical to the American culture because of the apparent volatility and polarization towards the Biblical worldview and the Christian ideology. We live in an anti-Christ age of cultural

deconstructionism, illiteracy, and learning deficiencies. The quality and depth of American education are not nearly what they once were.

"In December 2019, the latest results came out from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which compares the United States' ranking to other countries every three years. It showed that despite billions of dollars being spent, academic performance by American 15-year-olds was stagnant overall: slightly above students from peer nations in reading, but below the middle of the pack in math, according to the New York Times, with a widening achievement gap between high and low performers. About 20 percent of American 15-year-olds could not read at the level expected of a 10-year-old, according to Andreas Schleicher, director of education and skills at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which administers the PISA test. That was on the heels of the latest results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a US test that showed that two-thirds of children are not proficient readers. Compared to the last time the test was given, in 2017, the average eighth-grade reading score declined in more than half of all 50 states, and the average score in fourth-grade reading declined in 17 states."

The River – Hudson Valley Newsroom

Unfortunately, we are witnessing much of the American Church chasing or, in many cases, mirroring a non-biblical worldview. Much of this digression results from believing that it could create a platform of relatability/relevancy that

ultimately would provide an evangelistic harvest for the kingdom of God and subsequent Church growth. This strategy seems right in many ways, but looking around us, we must ask, "*Was it righteous*"?

Consider, for example, the Biblical objectives and commands around harvesting the kingdom of God and building His Church.

Are these objectives and commands the complete and sole responsibility of the Church?

The answer gains clarity when we understand that Christ told Peter, "*I will build His Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it* (Matthew 16:18)." On another occasion, He added, "*no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him*" (John 6:44). There is a correct and relevant application and context for both references in this conversation. Christian leaders and faith influencers are tasked with making disciples and teaching everything that Jesus commanded. The commands of Jesus (*the logos*) are not subject to cultural-social trends or human preference. Our calling is to teach God's written *Logos* as the living *Logos* - in any age or season. Sadly, according to Barna's research, the current American Protestant Church has become nearly Biblically illiterate and does not see the Bible as a guide or influence towards their moral and ethical behavior and critical decision-making.

"What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans—especially young adults. For instance, Barna Group

studies in 2016 showed that while most people regard Easter as a religious holiday, only a minority of adults associate Easter with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other examples include the finding that few adults believe that their faith is meant to be the focal point of their life or to be integrated into every aspect of their existence. Further, a growing majority believe the Holy Spirit is a symbol of God's presence or power, but not a living entity. As the two younger generations (Busters and Mosaics) ascend to numerical and positional supremacy in churches across the nation, the data suggest that biblical literacy is likely to decline significantly. The theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant churches nationwide suggests the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency."

Barna Group Research

The result of this disturbing data is a reality where most American Christians function with an uncomfortable degree of infidelity to their own beliefs and faith. Some of that infidelity is undoubtedly the result of the rejection and the deconstruct of complex, demanding, and uncomfortable Biblical truth - the rest is more likely the result of plain ignorance and disinterest (which might be the same thing). Nevertheless, the Bible has never been more relevant than in our current times. There is a Spirit-led movement toward Biblical literacy and fidelity to God's Word. This movement has come to the American Church from the seeds of revival among persecuted Christians worldwide (China, India, Shri Lanka, Iran, Iraq, South Africa, and South America). This movement is driven by the hunger and desire of the persecuted laity of the body of Christ for Biblical

veracity and the knowledge of God's eternal Word. It is an organic grassroots movement manifested by the Holy Spirit and not manufactured or manipulated by global social media platforms' *likes, trends, branding, and memes*.

In the Biblical context of global Christianity, these are the most exciting and germane times. As the Church of Jesus commits to diligence in utilizing reliable approaches to understanding and gaining revelation of God's Word, we are empowered to relevancy and equipped to navigate and flourish in times of persecution and difficulty.

In conclusion, here are several unmovable and unchangeable principles to remember while developing and practicing *right and righteous* biblical hermeneutics.

- The revealed Word of God is the final arbiter of all truth, and contextualization of necessity must recognize the sacred inviolability of its truths.
- An inductive, inerrantist approach to contextualization accepts the paradoxical nature of all biblical truth and, thereby, the unchanging nature of scriptural principles.
- An evangelical contextualization of Scripture is conscious of the transformational character of the current hearer's context. God's Word transforms lives; therefore, every effort must be given to interpreting rightly, righteously, and presenting in the same way.

- While the content of biblical revelation is unchanging, the form in which it is presented is ever-changing. These two aspects—content and form—provide the indispensable core of contextualization.
- As a student of God's written Word, one is equipping oneself to teach, preach, and present the living Word of God in a knowledgeable and approved way so that one might not be ashamed, discredited, or discarded.

The hope is that *Critical Considerations for Biblical Hermeneutics* is a significant step in equipping and understanding the interpretive process of Scripture. It is an honor to help navigate this small segment of the journey.

Dr. Stephen Isaac ThD.

Critical Considerations

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Critical Considerations

Resource Examples: Hermeneutic Plans - Development and Interpretive Assistance for Students

I thought it helpful to include interpretive resources and example plans for students and interested parties. These examples are presented in various formats and presentation methods and styles. One method, format, or style is not necessarily correct above another. The determinations for choosing a format, method or style should be made based on one's comfortability in comprehending and commanding the hermeneutic process chosen for interpreting and exegeting scripture. There are several examples of hermeneutical plans to consider and then use to pick, choose, while constructing one's own plan. There are also a couple of examples for outlining expository pulpit presentations.

I have also provided example resources for developing a syntactical structure with a specific text or passage which includes grammatical analysis, keyword search, inductive conclusions, and semantic range. There are examples for constructing a grammatical analysis of a text or passage of scripture ie; words, words to phrases, phrases to clauses, clauses to sentences, sentences to

paragraphs, ect. For those who have time and interest this includes the significant and appropriate uses for identifying nouns and pronouns, verbs and adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions and presuppositions. More than likely there is enough here to make "your eyes cross"!

[RESOURCE EXAMPLE ONE]

**Hermeneutical Plan
Expository Pulpit Presentation:
The Book of Jude
Stephen Isaac ThD.**

One - Read and Familiarize the Text: (Read Text Once Each Day for 30 Days); (Authorship, Audience, Literary and Genre Style

Two – Identify Pre-Suppositions and Pre-Conceptions

Three – Context: (Historical, Biblical, Original Language and Linguistics)

Four – Grammatical Analysis: (Key Words, Conclusive Phrases, Sentences, Clauses, Cultural Idioms)

Five - Syntactical Structuring and Inductive Conclusions of the Text

I. Greeting (verses 1–2)

II. Body of the Letter—Contesting for the Faith (verses 3–23)

Guiding Instruction (verses 3–4)

A. Instruction: Contend for the Apostolic Faith (verse 3)

B. The Reason: Opponents (verse 4)

C. The Reason Explored: Defining and Interpreting the Opposition [a Midrash] (verses 5–19)

1. Three Old Testament Illustrations of Ungodliness and Retribution and Application to the Present (verses 5–10)

a. The Illustrations (5–7)

(1) The disobedient in the Wilderness (5)

(2) The disobedient angels (6)

(3) Sodom and Gomorrah (7)

b. Linking to the Present: “In the very same way these also ...” (verses 8–10)

[the traditional link: Michael and the devil (verse 9)]

2. Three More Old Testament Illustrations Explain the Present (11–13)

a. Illustrations (11)

(1) the way of Cain

(2) the error of Balaam

(3) the rebellion of Korah

b. Connecting to the present: “These are those who...”

(1) Inhabit and Pollute the Community

(2) Five Traditional Metaphors (hidden reefs – clouds without water – autumn trees without fruit – wild waves of the sea – wandering stars)

(3) Warning of Judgment

3. The prophecy of Enoch and its application to the present (verses 14– 16)
 - a. The Prophecy (verses 14–15)
 - b. Linking to the Present: “These are the grumblers ...” (verse 16)
 4. Guiding Apostolic Interpretation of the Threat (verses 17–19)
 - a. The Apostles’ Prophecy of Evil in the Last Days (verses 17–18)
 - b. Linking to the Present: “These are those who ...” (verse 19)
 5. The Instruction Developed (verses 20–23)
 1. Defensive Tactics: Building Up the Community from Within (verses 20–21)
 2. Offensive Tactics: Mission to the Opponents (verses 22–23)
- III. Blessing and Doxology (verses 24–25)

Six – Text: (Speech Act, Semantic Range, Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Eschatological Implications, Use of Chiasm)

Seven – Contextualize and Sermonize: (Build a Relevance and Application Bridge)

- I. Relationship to Individual,
- II. Relationship to Church/Christ
- III. Relationship to Community

[RESOURCE EXAMPLE TWO]

Hermeneutical Plan I (Advanced)

Stephen Isaac ThD.

Biblical Text [choose and insert passage]

Read Text Twice (first time read the actual text - second time to include the lead-in and concluding text) Read the text inductively - relatable and logical connections can be made.

Identify Intent for Text and Process Personal Presuppositions

What have you been taught on this text in the past?

What do or what have you believed about this text?

What past or circumstantial experiences do you have with this text?

Read Text in Comparative Commentary Sources (Use At Least Three Comparatives)

Read Text to Identify

- Literary Genre/Style/Authorship
- Old Testament: [Law, Heroic Narrative, Prayers, Prose or Song, Proverbial Wisdom, Prophetic Warning, Prophetic Foretelling, Apocalyptic]
- New Testament: [Gospels and Red Letters, Parabolic Teaching, Apostolic Narrative, Epistle/Letter, Instruction, Correction, Warning, Apocalyptic Revelation]
- Answer the Question of: Authorship Authenticity, Biblical and Cultural Role

Read Text to Contextualize (Inductive Conclusions for Building a Syntactical Structure)

- Historical Context (Culture, Language, Social and Economic Circumstance)
- Authors Text (Speech Act Theory)
- Original Language and Meaning (Interlinear Bible)
- Build Key Word List
- Find Main and Subordinate Clauses
- Identify and Format a Syntax Structure
- Transliterate and Define Key Words from Original Greek and Hebrew Text
- Identify Matters of Linguistic Consideration (Idioms, Maxims, Parables, Paradox's, Covenants, Chiasms)

Build Contextual Relevance (Application Bridge)

- Relationship/Connection to Individual
- Relationship/Connection to Church/Christ
- Relationship/Connection to Community

Read Text to Seek, Summarize, and Sermonize

- Gather Notes and Citations/References

- Layouts and Exposition Structure
- Prayer and Meditation
- Edits and Cuts

Create a Homiletical Sermon Narrative and Presentation Format

[RESOURCE EXAMPLE THREE]

Hermeneutical Plan II (Intermediate)

Stephen Isaac ThD.

Hermeneutical Plan

[Insert Chosen Passage or Text]

I. Reading the Text in a Literal Interpretation

Possibly, the most important hermeneutic principle is to read Scripture “literally” —according to the plain or normal sense. When the text is symbolic or meant to be a figure of speech, it is most often evident and clear within its context. For example, poetry (like the Psalms) commonly employs symbols and figures of speech. Apocalyptic literature (prophetic literature about the end of the world) like Revelation, Ezekiel, or Daniel also uses symbols. However, historical literature and epistles do not. In general, stick to the plain sense unless the context demands otherwise.

At times throughout history, interpreters carefully sought hidden, spiritual meanings behind every text—rendering the Bible almost impossible to understand. For example, a tree represented obedience, a river represented the Holy Spirit, and fruit represented evil. Be wary of these types of interpretations, which are not clearly supported in the immediate context. A good hermeneutics protects against these types of readings, just as it does with all literature. Again, when interpreting Scripture, keep it simple by using the literal principle, unless the context necessitates otherwise.

II. Tracing Historical Context

Each portion of Scripture must be understood in its original historical setting, including the author, audience, cultural background, place, and the situation that prompted the writing of the text. Many errors in interpretation occur simply because the reader interpreted according to his or her own experiences and cultural understanding. However, proper Bible interpretation seeks to understand Scripture in the way the original audience would have understood it. Consequently, interpretations that the original audience would not have concluded are likely incorrect. At times, the Holy Spirit, through a different author, reveals to us that a historical person, event, or object was a type of Christ or had some deeper meaning which the original audience wouldn't have discerned. Generally speaking, the historical and cultural setting is key to proper interpretation.

A good Bible student by necessity must be a good historian. Commentaries and other tools will help with this, but the more one is familiar with the whole counsel of Scripture (from Genesis to Revelation), the more the ancient culture becomes familiar, leading to more accurate interpretations.

III. Identifying Literary Context

A sound and thorough hermeneutical plan will establish literary context to interpret Scripture more accurately. This is extremely important because without considering the literary context of a verse, one could interpret it to mean essentially anything. Here are some tips to help with applying the contextual principle:

A. Discover the immediate context of the surrounding verses or paragraph. This is done by reading the surrounding verses several times and asking questions like “What is the main thought or purpose of this section?”

B. Discover the broader context of the chapter. Likewise, this is done by reading the chapter several times to discover the overarching theme. For example, the main theme in 1 Corinthians 12 is spiritual gifts. The main theme in 1 Corinthians 13 is love. The main theme in 1 Corinthians 14 is order in the church—specifically dealing with tongues and prophecy. The main theme in 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection. Some chapter themes are more challenging to discern, but knowing the chapter theme will help guide interpretation.

C. Discover the overall context of the book. Again, after reading the book, ask questions like “Why was the book written?” or “What are the major theme(s) of the book?” “Are there any theme verses which clearly show the author’s intent (cf. John 20:31, 1 Timothy 3:14-15, 1 John 5:13)?” The answers to these questions can often be more quickly discovered in the introduction of a study Bible, Bible survey book, or commentary.

As the context of the surrounding verses, chapter, and book are identified, it will help guide and protect one’s interpretation.

IV. Comparing and Contrasting the Text

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. We must always interpret Scripture by comparing it to Scripture itself. If we come to an interpretation of a certain text that contradicts what the Bible says as a whole, then that interpretation should be considered incorrect.

The compare and contrast is especially important when considering what appears to be contradictory texts or doctrines. Here are a few rules to help with using compare and contrast:

A. Use clear passages to interpret less-clear passages. When encountering an unclear passage, consider what the Bible clearly teaches to help with interpreting the unclear. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:29 says, *“Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, then why are they baptized for them?”* What does “baptized for the dead” mean? Mormons have interpreted this to mean that one can be baptized in place of a dead person, thereby fulfilling the dead person’s requirements for salvation. Whatever “baptized for the dead” means, it cannot mean that baptism saves anybody, whether they are dead or alive. This would contradict the principles of commentary and comparison. Scripture clearly teaches that people are saved by faith and not works, including baptism (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:16). Also, Scripture does not teach that our works or faith can save others. 1 Corinthians 15:29 is difficult to interpret and comparing helps protect us from error.

B. Remember the Bible cannot contradict itself since God is its author and he cannot lie (cf. Titus 1:2). Scripture, in its original manuscripts, is without error. If two passages contradict one another, this means our interpretation of those passages is incorrect (possibly from not understanding the historical or literary

context) or the translation of those passages is incorrect (possibly from wrongly translating the original language or even an error in the ancient manuscript used).

To successfully compare Scripture with Scripture, analyzing the cross-referenced verses in a study Bible or commentary, looking up key words in a Bible concordance to find similar verses, or studying a corresponding doctrine in a systematic theology or Bible encyclopedia are helpful.

V. Including Grammatical Analysis and Syntactical Structures

Grammatical analysis is simply recognizing rules of language, which include grammar and some syntactical structure. One must be able to recognize the subject and verb of a sentence—whether the verbs are past, present, or future tense. One should recognize when nouns or pronouns are singular, plural, possessive, or non-possessive. One should recognize adjectives, adverbs, dependent and independent clauses. It is particularly important to recognize conjunctions, as they connect words, sentences, phrases, and clauses. We will consider a few of them:

A. “Therefore” instructs the reader to look back at what was previously talked about (a topic, verses, or even chapters) to properly understand what follows. It has often been said, “When you see the conjunction ‘therefore,’ you must look back to see what it is there for.” For example, Hebrews 12:1 says: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set out for us.” The conjunction “therefore” points the reader back to Hebrews 11, the Heroes of the Faith chapter. The author is telling the

reader that the great faith of these Old Testament heroes should inspire us to be faithful in our own spiritual journeys.

B. “And” simply means “in addition to.”

C. “But” or “however” provides a contrast with what was previously said.

D. “That,” “then,” “for,” “so,” and “because” are used to introduce a purpose or reason. For example, Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.” This verse hinges on the conjunction “so that.” “So that” tells us that if we do not conform to the world but instead renew our mind, we grow in our ability to discern God’s will. Consequently, those who are living in sin and not living in God’s Word have problems discerning God’s will for their lives and others. If we don’t recognize the conjunction “so that,” we will miss the logical flow of the author’s statement.

E. “If” provides a condition.

Without recognizing the grammar in a sentence, and **connecting it to the overall structure of a paragraph or chapter**, it is impossible to truly understand the meaning.

VI. Including a Genre Analysis

Since the Bible is a work of literature, it includes different literary styles called genres. To interpret verses in various genres, we must understand each genre’s unique rules of interpretation. Thinking of the various genres as sports with different rules is helpful. For instance, in basketball, a person can’t kick the ball

like in soccer. And in soccer, one can't tackle like in football. Each game has its own rules; if those rules are broken, one will get a foul and possibly be removed from the game. Likewise, each genre has rules we must abide by to properly interpret a text. The primary genres are as follows:

A. Psalms are poetic Hebrew prayers and songs.

B. Proverbs are wise sayings about godly living presented in a short, memorable format. They should not be taken as promises but rather as general truths or common realities.

C. Prophecy includes God's speaking through prophets in both a foretelling and forth-telling fashion. Foretelling includes telling the future—speaking about the coming of the Messiah, judgment, the day of the Lord, etc. Forth-telling is simply applying Scripture prophetically to God's people.

D. History tells the stories of the Bible. They detail redemptive history—how God brings about salvation through the messiah. They are descriptive in nature—showing us what happened—not prescriptive—showing us what to do.

E. Parables are symbolic stories with a spiritual meaning. It's important to remember that parables typically have one major point; therefore, significant meaning should not be applied to every detail of parables.

F. Epistles teach us Christian doctrine, as written by the apostles and their associates. It is important to identify the genre of specific writings so we can properly interpret them.

VII. Biblical and Systematic Theology

God did not reveal all his truths at once. There is a continual progression and order of revelation throughout Scripture - beginning to end. To right and

righteously interpret a particular text, we must consider an overall order and progression for that text. Is there a particular theme or theological principle in the text that can be traced and contextualized to another author or passage in the bible? We should also ask, Does the text fit into a particular “What had God revealed to those people during that historical period?” When considering God’s rejection of Cain’s offering, it would be wrong to read into the narrative a full-blown understanding of the Mosaic law and its stipulations for offerings. At the time it happened, God hadn’t made those known yet. Similarly, when reading the stories of Job and the Patriarchs, we must remember that no Scripture had yet been written, though God had certainly been speaking to them. Understanding how the original readers would perceive something is foundational for proper interpretation. Again, it is wrong to accept an interpretation of Scripture that the original audience would not have understood. This is only acceptable when later biblical authors reveal a deeper biblical meaning of a certain OT passage. does. As a general principle, we should not accept an interpretation that the original audience would not have naturally come to.

VIII. The Christological Context

Christ is the major theme of Scripture, and therefore we should be aware of both old and new covenant references to him. Many hermeneutical plans use this approach in helping with developing significance and relevance to their sermon/presentation. In John 5:39-40 and 46, Christ spoke to unbelieving Jews:

You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me, but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life. ... If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me.

Similarly, Jesus said this to his disciples after his resurrection, *“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled”* (Luke 24:44). The law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms were one of the ways the ancient Jews referred to the whole Old Testament. All the Old Testament pointed towards fulfillment in and through Christ the Messiah.

The Christological context does not mean we should allegorize Scripture (making every detail a symbol of him) or think that every verse directly points to Christ in some way. What it does mean is that while studying Scripture, we should be aware that there are often references to Christ throughout and take note of them. Studying Scripture should make us know and love Christ more.

IX. Pre-Conceptions and Pre-Understandings

In interpreting Scripture, there is great wisdom in finding out how believers (present and past) have interpreted certain passages or looked at certain doctrines. What are some tips for navigating pre-conceptions and understandings to the hermeneutic process?

A. We must be humble. Pride often leads to false interpretation, but a wise person is humble and seeks the insight of others.

B. We must be resourceful. It often takes hard work and diligent study to research problem passages or doctrines; however, there is great fruit in such efforts.

C. We must, at times, be willing to break from the majority or from what is familiar to us. Just because the majority agrees on some point, or because we were raised in a denomination or church that believes a certain doctrine, does not mean either is right. Throughout history, there

have been seasons where the majority fell into serious Scriptural error, and certainly no church, denomination, or individual is immune to this. We must recognize this and therefore be committed to God's Word more than a denomination, church, or individual.

X. Sermon and Presentation

The final stage to the hermeneutic plan should always include the vehicle or platform for delivery for the interpreted text. Commonly known as the sermon, the teaching, the presentation of the pastor, teacher, or leader to the intended hearer. The goal of right and righteous biblical interpretation cannot solely be for self-enlightenment and personal enrichment. Though the Word of God must first be received and embraced by the preacher, teacher, presenter, or exhorter; ultimately the messenger must have a mission to share and deliver the Word of the Lord to those who will also hear and receive themselves.

The completed process of the hermeneutical plan is both the form and foundation for that message. The messenger takes the hearer from context to text, and from text to present-day context. That is to say, from meaning to significance to relevance.

[RESOURCE EXAMPLE FOUR]

Hermeneutical Plan III (Basic)

Dr. Stephen Isaac ThD.

Biblical Text [choose and insert passage]

1.) Read the Text Several Times.

The goal of this step is to do more than merely see words on a page. The reader should take inventory of everything, and since God does not waste jots and tittles, the reader must take pains to become aware of even the smallest details. To do this, the student must read, read, read, and read again. The outcome repetitive reading is familiarity, so it is important to guard against the illusion of mastery—the error of thinking that familiarity with a text equals mastery or correct understanding of its content.

2.) Compare the Best Bible Translations.

A helpful way to recognize the details of a text is to compare it as it is stated in your translation with how it is rendered by other standard translations. Wherever this comparison reveals a notable difference, you can assume that a significant interpretive issue stands behind it. These differences need to be recognized and

recorded for further study in the next stage of the process: interpretation.
(Recommended for Hermeneutics/Exegesis ESV, NRS, NASB)

3.) Select a Reliable Bible Commentary

A Bible commentary is a book written by a scholar who has done the hard work of academic research and the diligent deliberation of dissecting a portion or the entirety of the Bible. A good Bible commentary provides the Bible student a theologically sound and comprehensive level of the hermeneutical process. Your commentary should feature context for historical authenticity and authorship, culture and geographical significance, literary and grammatical structures, language and original text, key word meanings, and in some cases practical and present-day application and relevance. Some commentaries are academically unapproachable for even the serious Bible student so it is wiser to find something less intimidating and manageable yet challenging and informative.
(Recommended for general Hermeneutics/Exegesis MacArthur Bible Commentary, Bible Exposition Commentary, Bible Knowledge Commentary Old and New Testament)

4.) Develop a Syntactical Structural Diagram

The purpose of a structural diagram is to portray the text's grammatical analysis in a graphic manner. Diagramming requires the student to read the text at an even greater level of detail, identifying the main subject and verb in each sentence, distinguishing main clauses from subordinate ones, and recognizing how various phrases in each sentence qualify particular words. Diagramming also helps the student trace the writer's flow of thought from the beginning to the end of the passage he is studying.

5.) Ask the Right Questions

It is not the goal at this point to form conclusions. That will come in the next stage. Rather, based on repeated reading, comparison of translations, and structural diagramming, the student must now make one more attempt to mine the data from the text. He must approach the text with the mind of a meticulous investigator, and this means refraining from interpretation and taking the time to ask the right questions instead.

If the student of Scripture desires to learn, he must put on the inquisitive mind of a child. Write the text out on a piece of paper, leaving ample space for underlining, circling, drawing arrows, and recording notes. Then ask questions, and on the basis of what is actually stated, see what the text yields in return. As Sherlock Holmes says, "*There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact,*" so nothing can be taken for granted or left as a general impression.

6.) Summarize the Results

After an appropriate amount of time has been dedicated to the observation process, it is important to step back and sum up what has been observed. In summary, keep in mind this rule for Bible study: The more time you spend in observation, the more effective and efficient you will be in interpretation. The efforts you invest at this stage of the process will yield a harvest of rewards. Conversely, the degree to which you take shortcuts and fail to acquaint yourself with the data of the text is the degree to which the rest of your study will suffer.

Exegesis: Drawing Out Meaning

In Scripture God speaks through his chosen writers out of benevolence, not scorn. He speaks in order to be understood, not to conceal. He has not only created human language with all its norms, but he speaks using that language

according to those norms. Consequently, it is possible to understand what he means by what he says, and this is the goal of interpretation.

The act of interpretation can be defined as the process a reader undertakes to ascertain the author's intent in a text. What does this process look like in standard practice?

1.) Interpret the Words

The interpreter must answer the questions, "Why did the writer choose these words, and what is their meaning in this context?"

Ultimately, the objective of this step is to provide a precise definition to the best of one's ability. The interpreter must do the necessary work to be able to say with objective proof, "By using this term in this context, the writer intended to communicate the idea of _____."

2.) Interpret the Grammar

The interpreter must reach back to the observation stage to recall the unique and noteworthy grammatical features he observed in the text. These features included things like verb tense, word order, parallelism, if-then conditional clauses, the possible referents of a pronoun, the role of a conjunctions, and so on. Understanding these features is vitally important since meaning is not only communicated through an author's choice of words, but through the way he orders his words and relates them to one another.

Again, the goal of this step is not merely to identify possibilities; it is to come to a conclusion. With sound explanations in hand, the interpreter must be able to say, "The writer intended this grammatical feature to communicate the idea of _____."

3.) Solve Interpretive Problems

In some cases, the meaning of a word or a grammatical feature will not be clear-cut. Our distance from the original writer and his context can create a level of interpretive dissonance where even experienced scholars and commentaries will disagree with each other. These situations present a number of temptations. For some interpreters, the impulse will be to throw up their hands in defeat. For others it will be to take the easy way out—to conclude that all the interpretive options are correct. Still others will be tempted to decide the issue according to intuition, or according to what earns the accolades of the desired crowd.

The following approach is recommended in a situation where multiple options for interpretation are present:

- a. Research the options. Read a good number of commentaries to determine which options exist. Take time to understand each one carefully.
- b. Compile the arguments. As you read the available commentaries, make a list of the arguments that are given in favor of and against each of the options.
- c. Weigh the evidence. Problems are not solved by counting the number of arguments you found for or against a particular option. They are solved by pondering the legitimacy and weight of each argument. As you do, pay close attention to the arguments that make best sense in the context of your text.
- d. State the conclusion. Having considered all the arguments, state and explain your hypothesis/conclusion. Resist “getting stuck over analyzing”—the inability to make decisions because of fear, anxiety, and second-guessing. A good formula to employ is, “Based on what I have learned, the best conclusion is _____ and here are the reasons why: _____.”

4.) Connect all Parts

A tendency among many interpreters is to leave the process in pieces. Terms are given careful definitions; grammatical features are explained; specific

interpretive difficulties are solved. But little effort is made to show how all of these findings relate to each other and advance the author's overall intent to communicate knowledge.

Consequently, the interpreter must take the time to reassemble the pieces and display it as a cohesive whole. A good interpretation of a text will prove itself by its internal consistency.

5.) Validate the Results

Once the interpreter has reached a conclusion about the intent of the author, he must be sure to validate his conclusion before he incorporates it into his convictions and behavior—and certainly before he teaches it to others.

This post-exegetical check is accomplished when the following questions are answered solidly in the negative:

- a. Does my exegetical conclusion contradict what Scripture as a whole teaches on the subject? Since the Scriptures are non-contradictory in nature, the meaning of one text cannot genuinely contradict that which has been revealed in Scripture elsewhere. Therefore, contradictory interpretations cannot exist.⁹
- b. Does my exegetical conclusion represent a novel interpretation never seen before in church history? One of the greatest dangers among interpreters is the desire to be the first to advance a novel interpretation. But as Fee and Stuart argue, "Unique interpretations are usually wrong." If no one else has seen what you see, go back to the drawing board.
- c. Does my exegetical conclusion ignore accountability to my local church? It is a travesty that a good number of biblical scholars have little or no regular involvement in a sound local church. They interpret Scripture in an ivory tower, not in the context of godly elders. The quality of their efforts is evident. As F. F. Bruce writes, "The revelation of God cannot be properly known apart from the cultivation of brotherly love within the Christian community."

[RESOURCE EXAMPLE FIVE]

Syntactical Structure:

[Grammatical Analysis, Inductive Sentences,

Key Word Identification, Semantic Range]

2 Timothy 2:14-15

Dr. Stephen Isaac ThD.

14(a) **Remind** [*vr.b.*] **them of these things, and charge** [*vr.b.*] **them before God**
[noun] not to quarrel [noun] about words [noun - mic],

*I. Continually teach and reinforce the words that are both tested and trusted.
(verses 8-13) Christ is risen from the dead - the word of God is not bound -
endure everything to obtain the salvation in Christ Jesus - die with Him to live
with Him - endure with Him to reign with Him - confess Him and He will confess
us - he is faithful even when we are not. (IS)*

*II. Do not engage yourself, or be lured into a war of words over faithful sayings
and eternal truths. (IS)*

III. There is no divine calling to being a "word-warrior." (IS)

[Key Words]

a. charge [grk]; διαμαρτύρομαι [dia-mar-ty-ro-mai]: *to make an authoritative declaration on the basis of presumed personal knowledge—to declare, to assert with authority, to testify-give warning in God's presence*

[Semantic Range]: given the *divine mandate* to instruct God's Word as one *possessing knowledge* and the *spiritual authority* to impart the wisdom of God

b. quarrel [grk]; λογομαχία [logo-ma-chi-en]: *futile arguments, divisive disputes over the meaning or use of words without regard to the meaning they are meant to convey*

[Semantic Range]: contentious arguments that *serve no good or righteous purpose* other than *tearing down the faith of the Christian community* and *undermining the spiritual foundations* of other hearers of the word.

14(b) **which does no good** [adj.], **but only ruins** [vrb.] **the hearers** [vrb.- sdc].

I. The long-lasting negativity of word-war is demoralizing to the faith those we teach. In the wisdom of scripture it is portrayed as both senseless and spiritually divisive. If we are not building others in the faith up with words - we are tearing down with them. (IS)

[Key Words]

a. ruins [grk]; καταστροφή [ka-tas-tro-phe]: *to do serious harm to, with the implication of misleading; 'to cause harm, to cause ruin to*

[Semantic Range]: (see b.)

b. hearers [grk]; ἀκούω [ak-o-uō]: *(an idiom, literally 'to bring into the ears') to cause someone to hear— 'to cause to hear, to make hear.'*

[Semantic Range]: This word refers to the **opposite of building them up. Quarreling about words demoralizes the listeners** It upsets them. It hurts their faith, causing spiritual damage. It ruins their faith. It destroys their faith by weakening its

foundations. It brings catastrophe to them.

15(a) Do your best [adjective] to present [verb] yourself [pnoun] to God [noun] as one approved [verb - mic],

I. Give to God the best you have to give of yourself. (IS)

II. Be passionate and disciplined about learning and equipping yourself for Godly service. (IS)

[Key Word]

a. best - [grk]; σπουδάζω [sp-ou-da-zon]: to do something with intense effort and motivation— ‘to work hard, to do one’s best, to endeavor.’

[Semantic Range]: to be diligent ‘, to do one’s best ‘ ; to do one’s utmost ‘ , to work hard ‘ , to try hard ‘ , to make every effort ‘ ; to take all pains ‘ , to not only do the easy things, but to endeavor ‘ to also do the hard things especially when it matter most.

b. present - [grk]; παραστήσαι [para-ste-sai]: to establish evidence to show that something is true— ‘to show to be true, to present evidence of truth, to prove;

[Semantic Range]: To present himself before God as one who is approved by Him. Timothy is to submit his work to God for His approval. He is to let God see that he is a good workman. He is observed by God and is accountable to Him. In this submission He is to win God’s approval. He presents himself before God’s bar of judgment. Another view is that he is to present himself for service.

c. approved - [grk] δόκιμος [do-kim-on]: to be judged as good, genuine; pertaining to being judged worthy on the basis of testing;

regarded as worthy

[Semantic Range]: It is not the person who commends himself who is considered worthy, but the person whom the Lord commends'. It includes both testing and approbation. It means to be tested by some trial or examination and found to have successfully stood the test, to be accepted after testing

15(b) a worker [verb] who has no need [noun] to be ashamed [adjective, sdc], rightly handling [verb] the word [noun] of truth [noun - sdc].

I. Equip yourself with excellence so that you might sustain a righteous confidence in the knowledge of Christ and the wisdom of truth. (IS)

II. Teach, preach, and mentor God's word with depth, meaning, clarity, and spiritual authority. (IS)

[Key Words]

a. ashamed - [grk]; ἀνεπαίσχυντον [ane-paisch-yn-ton]: pertaining to having no reason or need for being ashamed or feeling disgrace — 'unashamed, not feeling disgrace.' ἐργάτην ἀνεπαίσχυντον 'a workman who has no need to feel ashamed'

[Semantic Range]: This has an active sense, 'to be ashamed'. He is to be a workman who has no cause to be ashamed of his work, having nothing to be ashamed of. He does not fear that he will be ashamed when he hears God's verdict on his work. Positively, it means that he should be proud of his work.

This also has a passive sense, 'to be put to shame'. He would be put to shame if his work is found to be unworthy because of its poor quality. He would be put to shame by God's disapproval.

b. rightly handling - [grk]; ὀρθοτομέω [or-tho-to-me-o]: to give accurate instruction — 'to teach correctly, to expound rightly.'
σπούδασον σεαυτὸν ... ὀρθοτομοῦντα τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας 'do

your best ... to teach the word of truth correctly'

[Semantic range]: Many retain the metaphor of cutting straight: cut the word of truth into its right pattern, cut straight the word of truth when presenting it to others, hold a straight course in the word of truth, lay out straightly and truly the word of truth, follow a straight path in preaching the gospel without being turned aside in vain disputes, keep the word on a straight path. Others think that the metaphor was no longer a live one and this simply meant to do something correctly. Of these, many give a generic meaning: correctly handle the word of truth, handle aright or rightly, rightly administer, manage rightly, treat truthfully so as not to falsify, deal rightly with it so as not to falsify, be scrupulously straightforward in dealing with the word of truth. Others give rather specific meanings: tell correctly the true message, or possibly interpret correctly, teach correctly, interpret or apply correctly, rightly teach, truly teach and preach.

Resources and Citations:

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RESOURCE EXAMPLE SIX]

Critical Considerations

Thesis Page (John 1:1-18)

Dr. Stephen Isaac ThD.

The Prologue - Who Is Jesus?

John 1:1-18

In the first eighteen verses of his book, John tells the world who Jesus is. He begins by proclaiming that God the Father is revealed to us in Christ Jesus His Son, and when the Son of God came to earth He presented to all of humanity what God the Father was like—eternal, personal, and as the source of all life. The word life appears no fewer than thirty-six times in this Gospel along with

several other key words, which we will spotlight later. We could say that the word life and its contextual meaning is the foundational theme for the book.

We need only read the first verse of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) to understand the central issue of life, and it centers on the reality of God as not only Creator but as Beginning. If there is a God (and there is), and if that God has spoken in history (and He has), then the most important thing in the world is to find out what He has said. In this prologue of chapter one, John positions himself as that voice of divine knowledge and authority.

The Gospel of John is well embraced by Christian believers and most disciplined followers of the faith are familiar with its themes and memes. However, many who can quote the widely identifiable verses from this unique Gospel have a less-than-adequate grasp of the importance of its theology and relevance to our present world. We live in a world where followers and disciples of Christ must defend the Christ by how we believe in Him. Do we believe in Jesus as a good and righteous man that we can look up too? Was He a great moral teacher that we can learn from? Do we believe in Him as Lord, life-source, or friend? Was Jesus who He said He was - the Son of God? Those questions do not all provide us with the right or same answers.

There is no uncertainty or ambiguity in John's presentation of Jesus as the Son of God. He starts out where he should start out - with the beginning - creation. John will claim that everything that was ever made was made through him; and without him, nothing has ever been created, and that Jesus was the source of power in the original physical creation and in the spiritual creation by which people are brought to new life in Christ.

Where does John the impetuous and impatient Galilean fisherman, get the authority to write and speak in the voice of Jesus? From where does he summon

the divine knowledge to write as an eye-witness of the creative mysteries of God? Where does he get the literary insight to write in a first, second, and third person context (the divine, the evangelist, and the beloved of Jesus)?

We will discover this and more as we engage ourselves in full exegetical study of one of the most prolific and theologically fundamental passages of in the Bible.

John 1:1-18

[RESOURCE EXAMPLE SEVEN]

Grammatical Analysis Breakdown

Dr. Stephen Isaac ThD.

I. Words

When sounds are combined, words are created. Words can be labeled according to their function in a phrase, clause, or sentence. Once its function is determined, a word can be labeled.

Examples of words: believers, light, walk, be, the

II. Phrases

Phrases do not contain subjects and verbs. A phrase is incomplete in thought. Phrases (and parts of phrases) can be labeled, as well.

Examples of phrases: praying a prayer - through the door -
to walk in faith

III. Clauses

Clauses contain subjects and verbs. There are two kinds of clauses: independent and dependent. Independent clauses can stand alone and can be called a "sentence." Dependent clauses cannot stand alone, are not sentences, and can be labeled according to their function in sentences.

Examples of independent clauses: I'm weary. The camel is walking.

Examples of dependent clauses: because I'm weary - which is my excuse - broken by the fall - around the wall - in a moment

IV. Sentences

Sentences have two essential parts: complete subject and predicate. They have various patterns. In English there are five forms of sentences:

Simple: one independent clause--

The children are playing by Jesus.

Compound: two or more independent clauses--

The children are playing outdoors by Jesus, and their parents are talking about healing indoors.

Complex: one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses--

The children are playing outdoors while their parents are praying for healing indoors.

Compound-complex: two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses-- The children are playing outdoors because the weather is nice, but they are happy.

Complex-complex:

parents are praying for healing indoors.

One or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause which contains an imbedded dependent clause--

The children, who are playing outdoors because the weather is nice, are...

Sentences can also be analyzed according to usage (declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory).

Examples of sentences:

Rain is falling. (declarative)

Does Michael live here? (interrogative)

Open the window. (imperative)

What a noise you made! (exclamatory)

V. Paragraphs

Paragraphs also have "grammar" even though they are bigger pieces than sentences. Paragraphs are made up of related sentences and are about one topic only. Paragraphs have a topic sentence; all the other sentences relate to it.

Example of a paragraph (topic sentences underlined): Our son loves to fish. He regularly goes fishing at the lake on his ranch with his daughters, or on trips with several fishing buddies. It doesn't really matter if he catches anything or not. The whole point is relaxation, love for fishing, and the companionship with good friends and family. Of course, he usually catches enough to have at least one fish fry or some smoked fish with the family and friends when he gets back. Our son would not miss a chance to throw a line in the water and fish all-day for all the fancy vacations in the world.

Beyond the paragraph there are even more complex levels: essay, chapter, book, and so on. With each of these larger levels, patterns exist. Relationships between pieces can be analyzed.

Each level can be either built up to create a higher level (for example, word to phrase to clause to sentence) or broken down to a lower level (for example, sentence to clause to phrase to word).

VI. Nouns

"Noun" means name. This label is given to the name of a person, place, thing, idea, or belief. Nouns are often preceded by "the" or "a/an." Nouns answer the questions "Who?" and "What?"

They can be found on three levels:

Word: The class went on a field trip to the church. (Who went? On a what? To the what?)

Phrase: She enjoys playing sports. (Enjoys what?)

Clause: Whatever you want to do is fine with me. (What is fine?)

VII. Pronouns

Pronouns take the place of nouns (which are called "antecedents" of pronouns). Therefore, pronouns also answer the questions "Who?" and "What?" As diverse as they are, English pronouns are actually a lot less complicated than they used to be, now that words like thou, thee, thy, and thine are not commonly used. Pronouns are word level pieces even though they can be found in phrases and clauses.

Pronouns can be labeled according to the following:

number (singular/plural): it/they

gender (male/female): he/she

case (subjective/objective/possessive/reflexive): he/him/his/himself person

(first/second/third): I/you/he, she, it

Also, pronouns can be divided into groups.

Personal: I, you, he, she, it, they, we, etc.

indefinite: anybody, someone, each, everyone, etc. **interrogative:** who? what? which? etc.

Relative: that, which, who, whom, whose **demonstrative:** this, that, these, those

VIII. Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns. Adjectives answer the questions "What kind?" "How many?" "Whose?" "Which one?" They function as "modifiers" (change agents) in a sentence and can be labeled on all three levels. (Note: In English, word level adjectives generally appear before the noun/pronoun, and phrase or clause level adjectives appear after it.)

Word level: Michael pulled the brown wagon down the street. (What kind of wagon?)

Phrase level: A man with a beard came into the room. (Which man?)

Clause level: All students whose cars are illegally parked will be ticketed. (Which students?)

Articles (the, a, an) are a special group of adjectives. It is optional to label the articles when one is looking for adjectives.

IX. Verbs

Verbs show physical or mental action of the subject. They may also reflect "state of being"; that is, the subject just "is." The complete verb, along with its complements and modifiers, functions as the predicate in a sentence. Verbs answer the questions "What is happening/has happened/will happen?"

Verbs are labeled primarily on the word level although many times verbs have compound parts (two-word verbs or helpers). Any word that functions as action

in a sentence is labeled a verb. Verbs are the parts that show time change (tense).

Examples of verbs:

Megan will go with you.

The baby has been crying for two hours.

The coach sat and pondered the situation.

It should have been done by now.

X. Adverbs

Adverbs are modifiers (change agents) of verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. They answer the questions: "Where?" "Why?" "When?" "How?" "How much?" or "To what extent/degree?" Adjectives can often be changed into adverbs if "-ly" is added to them. Adverbs can be found on all three levels.

Word level:

Phrase level:

Clause level:

Adverbs can modify verbs: Bill fell asleep quickly. (How did he fall asleep?)

Adverbs also modify adjectives: Our cat has bright green eyes. (What degree of green?) They modify other adverbs, as well: I cannot run very quickly. (How quickly?)

I'm leaving later. (When am I leaving?)

Put the book on the table. (Where should you put it?)

Because she felt sick. Betty went home. (Why did she go home?)

Note: Qualifiers such as very, often, always, not, and never are adverbs.

CONJUNCTIONS

Conjunctions are words that connect words, phrases, and clauses.

There are three groups of conjunctions: coordinating, subordinating, and correlative. Although conjunctions are in themselves basically word level

(correlatives are made up of more than one word), they can create phrases, clauses, and different patterns of sentences. Conjunctions may be small, yet they play a critical role in one's understanding of grammatical analysis.

Coordination: Bob and Sue went camping.

The squirrel ran up a tree, but I still got a picture of it.

Subordinating: While they were putting up the Christmas tree, the dog knocked it over.

Correlative: Neither the coach nor the players knew what had caused the loss.

XI. Prepositions

In many ways, prepositions are what hold the English language together (and what give second language speakers fits!). Out of the 25 most frequently used words in English, nine of them are prepositions (*of* holds the number two spot behind *the*).

Prepositions show relationships between words. This part of speech can be labeled on two levels: word and phrase. Prepositional phrase = preposition + modifiers + object.

Prepositional phrases function in a sentence as phrase level adjectives and adverbs. If a preposition has no object, it becomes an adverb. In fact, many English verbs are made up of a main verb + preposition- that-has-become-an-adverb (for example, look up; sit down; turn around).

Examples of prepositional phrases:

Between you and me, I'm not surprised.

Put your dirty clothes in the laundry basket.

One of the children is late for the party.

Note: Objects of prepositions are nouns and pronouns, but these never function as the subject of a sentence. (See Function)

XII. Interjections

Interjections are words or short phrases that are used alone to express strong emotion. They are usually followed by an exclamation point.

Examples: Hey! Wow! Oh, Boy! Congratulations!

[RESOURCE EXAMPLE EIGHT]

In *Critical Consideration Four: Meaning -The Issues of Authors Intent and Student Interpretation*, I shared the well-known principles of *The Speech Act Theory*.

The following resource is an expansion and a biblical application for *Speech Acts* compiled by Faithlife/Logos. I included their research as a hermeneutical interpretive assist.

Lexham Speech Act Dataset - Faithlife/Logos data.speechacts@logos.com
Interpretive Resource - Speech Acts: Dataset Documentation

The Speech Acts Dataset is designed to annotate sentences in an attempt to capture the volition or intent of the speaker/writer. When humans speak or write, the information conveyed by the speaker has an intended purpose. That is, we “do” things with language when we speak and write. This annotation captures the intentions (what is being done) of the speaker or writer. For example, a

pastor can utter the short sentence “I pronounce you husband and wife,” and create a new social reality for those involved. This utterance is a *Declarative Speech Act* whereby a new social reality is created by the utterance (see below for more detail). This is the case with every utterance. We are always doing something with our words when we speak: We make a request of someone, we promise to do something, we express gratitude, we state a belief, etc.

The Speech Act Dataset uses a simple classification of Speech-Act categories which has been rigorously established through linguistic research in the field of *Pragmatics*. This classification is simplified in order to retain searchability. For example, when Jesus prays “Give us our daily portion of bread” in Matthew 6:10, he is making a request of God, and a request is a type of Directive Speech Act. In the same way, when Jesus says “Do not store up for yourself treasures on Earth” in Matthew 6:19, he is uttering a command to his followers, and a command is also a type of *Directive Speech Act* (see below for more detail).

Use with the Sentence Types of the Bible Dataset

The formal features of a *Sentence Type* is, by itself, not always able to provide the most useful information to the user in their searches. For example, if a user wanted to search for all of the commands in the Bible, a list of every instance of the imperative mood may provide a good starting point, but it would not provide all of the data. There are several places where a sentence type other than the imperative is used to give a command. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:10 “I appeal to you that you all agree.” Here Paul uses a declarative sentence (according to the Sentence Type Dataset) to make a command. One would not be able to find other such examples if this data set were not created.

This data set allows users to see the purpose of all the utterances in the Bible, and using the classification utilized for annotation, to search for all of the different speech acts in the Bible.

Speech Act Glossary:

Informative Speech Acts

Informative speech acts are divided into two types: Assertive and Information Question. All Informative speech acts involve the exchange of information as the principle purpose of the communicative act.

Assertive

An assertive speech act is one where a speaker makes an assertion or a statement, gives a description. The speaker thus provides (asserts) information to the hearer or audience.

Example 1: 1 Corinthians 1:9

πιστὸς ὁ θεὸς δι' οὗ ἐκλήθητε εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν

God, by whom you were called to the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our lord, is faithful.

Example 2: Luke 1:57

Τῇ δὲ Ἐλισάβετ ἐπλήσθη ὁ χρόνος τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, καὶ ἐγέννησεν υἱόν

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth. And she bore a son.

Information Question

An information question is a specific speech act which directly states that the speaker lacks a piece of information.

Example: Mark 5:30

ἔλεγεν· Τίς μου ἥψατο τῶν ἱματίων;

(Jesus) said, “Who touched my garments?”

Obligative Speech Acts

Obligative speech acts are divided into two types: Directive and Commissive. All Obligative speech acts impose an obligation on either the hearer or the speaker themselves.

Directive

A directive speech act is one where the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something.

Example 1: Romans 12:14

εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς διώκοντας

Bless those who persecute you.

Example 2: Matthew 8:6

καὶ λέγων· Κύριε, ὁ παῖς μου βέβληται ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ παραλυτικός, δεινῶς βασανιζόμενος.

And (the centurion) said, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.”

In the second example, the speaker does not make the request to Jesus in the typical way. The centurion gives information to Jesus which is couched as an implicit request to have Jesus heal his servant.

Commissive

A commissive speech act is one where the speaker commits themselves to some action.

Example: Mark 6:22

εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς τῇ κορασίῳ· Αἴτησόν με ὃ ἐὰν θέλῃς, καὶ δώσω σοι

The king (Herod) said to the girl, “Ask me for what you want, and I will give it to you.”

Constitutive Speech Acts

Constitutive speech acts are divided into two types: Expressive and Declarative. These speech acts all constitute a social reality. A speech act is Constitutive only if it is uttered by the appropriate person at the appropriate time in the appropriate location. A judge who says, “That is out of order” while watching a football game at their house is not in the appropriate location to declare a judgment. The speech act only constitutes a social reality in the courtroom where the judge holds authority.

Expressive

An expressive speech act is one that expresses a psychological state about a state of affairs specified in the utterance.

Example 1: Mark 1:11

Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα

You are my beloved son. I am well pleased with you.

Example 2: Mark 11:9

ἔκραζον· Ὡσαννά· Εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου

(The crowd) cried out, “Hosanna. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Example 3: Romans 7:22

συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον
For I delight in the Law of God according to my inner being.

Declarative

A declarative speech act is one which brings about the correspondence between the content of the utterance and reality.

Example 1: John 19:30

ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· Τετέλεσται
Jesus said, “It is finished.”

Example 2: Mark 2:5

λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ· Τέκνον, ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι
Jesus said to the paralytic, “Child, your sins are forgiven.”

Example 3: Romans 1:8

Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν
First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you.

Speech Act and Sentence Type Combinations

You can search for Speech Acts within specific types of sentences using a combination search. The following are example searches for common Speech Act and Sentence Type combinations.

Note that your search results may include a few false positives where sentences are inside of other sentences.

Questions

Example: Mark 8:4

Πόθεν τούτους δυνήσεται τις ὧδε χορτάσαι ἄρτων ἐπ' ἐρημίας;

Where is anyone able to feed these people with bread here in the desert?

Rhetorical Questions

Example: 1 Corinthians 5:6

οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι μικρὰ ζύμη ὅλον τὸ φύραμα ζυμοῖ;

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough?

Commands

Example: Matthew 8:2

Κύριε, ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαί με καθάρισαι.

Lord, if you are willing, you are able to make me clean.

Commands of God, Christ, Paul

Example: Matthew 7:1 (Command of Jesus)

Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε·

Do not judge, so that you will not be judged.

Indirect Commands

Example: Romans 15:10

καὶ πάλιν λέγει· Εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ.

And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

The Data Research Process: Jimmy Parks provided the conceptual model and framework for annotation. Jimmy Parks and Michael Aubrey annotated the Greek New Testament. Jeremy Thompson annotated the Hebrew Bible and provided programming support and provisional analysis based on existing datasets for both testaments. Jeremy Thompson's provisional analysis was based on data extracted from the Propositional Outlines and also from the Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament.

James Parks, Speech Acts Dataset Documentation (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016).

[Resource Example Nine]

**Hebrew Poetic Parallelisms
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I. Synonymous - the second line repeats the first in different words having the same meaning.

[Psalm 19:1-2]

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his	} Synonymous
Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge	} Synonymous

II. Synthetic - the second line (or following lines) adds to the first

[Psalm 24:3-4]

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?		
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and	}	Synthetic

**III. Antithetic - the second line contrasts with the first.
[Psalm 73:26]**

My flesh and my heart may fail,		
but God is the strength of my heart	}	Antithetic

IV. Climactic - successive lines build to a climax or summary.

[Habakkuk 3:17-18]

Though the fig trees do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,	}	Building
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD I will joy in the God of my salvation.	}	Climax/Summary

V. Eclectic - combination of different types interwoven.

[Habakkuk 1:2]

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear	}	Synthetic	}	Synonymous
Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?	}	Synthetic		

VI. Emphatic - synonymous words used for emphasis

[Deuteronomy 6:5]

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart , and with all your soul , and with all	}	Emphatic
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About the Author

Dr. Stephen Isaac's mission is to spend a lifetime fulfilling his calling to ministry in serving God, his family, and church. After humble beginnings, he has spent the last 40 years pastoring in Phoenix, Arizona.

Over the years, influencing and connecting to people outside the Church has always been a priority to Steve's mission as well. Known only as "The Missionary Man", he hosted Salem Broadcasting's nationally syndicated late-night radio show "Radio Hope". Having been ranked 3rd nationally as a powerlifter, a 7-time Arizona State Champion high school football coach, and an NFL/NBA /MLB chapel speaker provided the platform to reach beyond the walls of the church community to share and model the message of Christ.

In May of 1999, he and a group of friends formed a small community of believers simply known as The Reunion Church. Years later, Steve continues to pursue his calling – shepherding at Reunion, writing books, teaching Bible students, mentoring and training young Christian leaders, and influencing his community.

Forever committed to the relevant communicating of strong "biblical and historical" context and content for scripture and text, Dr. Stephen Isaac views his mission simply as "*cura animarum*" (caretaker of the soul), desiring above all to be faithful to the message of Jesus, to his family, and to God's people everywhere.

The calling into the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, has been one of the greatest and fulfilling joys of my lifetime. Living now in one of the most critical and spiritually saturated times of human history - I have determined I would rather reach for the objective righteousness of God my Father, than to be subjectively right in the eyes of man.

Dr. Stephen M. Isaac ThD.

The Reunion Church / Fully Equipped Bible Institute