

RESURRECTION OPC – ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL
Hermeneutics: How to Read the Bible

WEEK 6 | MAY 29, 2016

Introduction & Acknowledgement

In our first session, we looked at an overall approach to reading Scripture *contextually, grammatically, theologically, and doxologically*. In our last session, we looked at the importance of understanding Scripture in light of the big story of creation, fall, and redemption. Today, we look more closely at how we use other passages of Scripture – as well as its overall teaching – to aid us in reading every passage of the Bible. In so doing, we are continuing to follow closely the lectures of Dr. Benjamin Shaw.

Amplification

“If we’re adding to the noise, turn off this song...” (Switchfoot)

The Power of Amplification

- To ‘amplify’ something means to increase its volume.
- When I was in seminary, our homiletics professor spoke of “the power of amplification” – that is, taking a teaching and expanding it using cross-references, illustrations, and demonstrating the logical connections.
- Such amplification is indeed very useful – not just in preaching, but also in reading the Bible!

Two Analogies

- An ‘analogy’ is a comparison based on similarity.
- In amplifying the teaching of the Bible, we make use of two closely related, yet distinct ‘analogies’:
 - “The phrases ‘the analogy of Scripture’ and ‘the analogy of faith’ are often used interchangeably. However, there is a distinction between them that is helpful to observe. While the analogy of Scripture deals particularly with the issue of finding other passages that teach on the same subject, the analogy of faith refers to the general teaching of Scripture. In other words, if we are struggling with how to understand a particular passage, not only may we look for other passages that deal with the same topic, we may also take into account the general tenor of the teaching of Scripture.” (*Shaw*)
- 1st Example – Analogy of Scripture:
 - “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.” (*Colossians 2.16*)
 - Question: *Does this mean there is no such thing as a Christian Sabbath?*
 - In answering this question, we must:
 - Avoid reading our preference into the text (*eisegesis*),
 - Consult related passages of Scripture.
 - The key here is that Paul uses not one, but three terms together: “festival or a new moon or a Sabbath”
 - These occur other places together in the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament):
 - “...and whenever burnt offerings were offered to the LORD on Sabbaths, new moons, and feast days, according to the number required of them, regularly before the LORD.” (*1 Chronicles 23.31*)
 - “It shall be the prince’s duty to furnish the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the new moons, and the Sabbaths, all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall provide the sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement on behalf of the house of Israel.” (*Ezekiel 45.17*)
 - “And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.” (*Hosea 2.11*) [See also: 2 Chronicles 2.3, 8.13, 31.3; Nehemiah 10.34]
 - Conclusion: “It appears to be the case that Paul in Colossians 2 is referring to the Jewish festival calendar, not to the Christian Sabbath. His point here is that the Christian is not to be held to the observation of the Jewish feasts, because they pointed to Christ. Christ has now come, so the festival calendar has been fulfilled, and is now defunct. When we consider further that the people causing problems in Colossae seem to hold to some variety of Judaism that held the observation of the festivals to be important, it becomes increasingly clear that the observation of the Jewish ritual calendar is what Paul has in mind here.” (*Shaw*)
 - Genesis 2.2-3, Acts 20.7, 1 Corinthians 16.2, and Revelation 1.10 seem to confirm this – cf. WSC 59.

- 2nd Example – Analogy of Faith:
 - Question: *Does the Bible teach us the doctrine of the Trinity?* – in answering, we must:
 - Acknowledge that the word ‘Trinity’ (Latin *trinitas*) is not used in the Bible,
 - Consult what *all* of Scripture reveals to us about God.
 - The Bible reveals to us that God is one:
 - “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (*Deuteronomy 6.4*)
 - “Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” (*Isaiah 44.21-22*)
 - The Bible also reveals to us that God is three:
 - “The angel of the LORD” is referred to as God in the OT (*Exodus 3.1-6, Judges 13.21-23*).
 - David speaks of God’s Holy Spirit (*Psalms 51.11*), whom Isaiah refers to as a person (*Isaiah 63.10*).
 - The NT makes these matters even more clear (*John 1.1; Colossians 1.16; Acts 5.3-4, 28.25*).
 - Conclusion: “We find the assertion that there is only one God commonly in the Bible. But we also find the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit referred to as God. Since we know that the Scriptures are self-consistent, we have to conclude that there is one God who exists in three persons, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. We arrive at this conclusion by the process of necessary consequence: if A is true, and B is true, then C, which is a consequence of A and B, must also be true.” (*Shaw*)
- Tools: A good concordance or a thorough cross-reference system is an excellent help. Also, the proof texts of the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* – cf. WLC 11.

The Single Sense of Scripture

- “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” (*WCF 1.9*)
- As we seek to bring the wider testimony of Scripture to bear on any passage, we must avoid two errors:
 - Under-literalism (see Lesson #2 on the *quadriga*),
 - Over-literalism (for example, insisting that ‘Jerusalem’ is *always* the city in Palestine)
- The “true and full sense” is the God-intended sense – “that which God the Author of Scripture in and by the Scriptures gives men to know and understand.” (*Shaw*)
- Francis Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (2nd topic, qstn 19) treats this fully. Here are the basics:
 - The true sense of any Scripture may be *simple or compound*:
 - Simple: a list of unclean animals not to be eaten (*Leviticus 11*)
a clear statement of commands or doctrine (*Exodus 20.1-17, Deuteronomy 6.4*)
 - Compound: OT sacrifices (means of worship in OT *and* pictures of the work of Christ)
prophecy and typology (more next week!)
“The typical sense of these things was not added to them, but part of their original intent as God gave them.” (*Shaw*)
 - We must distinguish between *sense and application*:
 - In 1 Corinthians 10.1-5, Paul provides a list of events recorded *as history* in Exodus and Numbers.
 - Yet in vv. 6-13, he insists that these are “examples for us...” – these histories may be applied to us!
 - We must distinguish between *real and invented allegory*:
 - In Galatians 4.24-26, Paul explicitly employs a double allegorical sense of the word ‘Jerusalem’ – first to speak of Jews pursuing self-salvation by the Mosaic Law (v. 25), and then secondly to speak of the church freely and only justified through faith in Christ (v. 26).
 - On the other hand, church fathers sometimes found allegory where none was intended – Irenaeus, for example, saw the unclean animals of Leviticus 11 as referring to Gentiles, Jews, and heretics!
- **Summary**: “It is important for the interpreter to pay careful attention to the whole of Scripture. It is usually the case that when a particular passage is one that has a fuller meaning, other passages will make this clear. Many references in the New Testament clarify the full sense of an Old Testament text... It is also the case that passages that have a fuller meaning will be commonly referred to in later Old Testament passages.” (*Shaw*)
- **Requirements**: firm grasp of biblical content/doctrine, attention to language/context, faith, prayer, humility