

Exegesis

*The Epistles*

# Essential Tools

- Prayerful Spirit
- Reverent Awe
- Good Translations
- Bible Dictionary
- Inquisitive Mind
- Common Sense
- A little imagination
- And some hard work

# The Epistles

## ➤ Occasional Documents

- **Technical:** arising out of and intended for a specific occasion
- **Non-Technical:** listening to one side of a phone call
- **Task Theology:** theology applied to or directed toward a particular need

We have answers but we don't always know what the questions were

Challenge: Hear the other side

The occasional nature of the epistles also means that they are not first of all theological treatises, or are they summaries of Paul or Peter's theology. Theology is used in various ways to meet various needs. But the epistles (even Romans) are not comprehensive or exhaustive summaries of their Theology.

# Re-create the Occasion

- When was it written?
- Who is it addressed to?
- What was their cultural background?
- What was their religious background?
- Note author's attitude (warning, perplexed, encouraged, etc)
- What was their situation?
- Note specific things mentioned that reflect the occasion
- List every clue to the recipient's problem(s)

as you ask questions your aim is to understand more fully both sides of the conversation  
BC What was written will be a lot clearer and powerful when you understand WHY it was

Read the whole letter looking for clues to THEIR SIDE of the OCCASION

Consult your Bible Dictionary

Becoming familiar with the occasions can also help in book selection. Hebrews or Corinthians for a bible talk?

# Example: Hebrews

## ▷ Audience:

- ▷ 1:1 “our ancestors”
- ▷ 2:1-3 Christians that have heard the message of salvation

## ▷ Date:

## ▷ Occasion

- ▷ 2:1 drifting
- ▷ 3:12-13 hardened & turning
- ▷ 4:1 in danger of falling short of the Rest
- ▷ 3:6; 4:16; 10:19; 10:35 call for confidence: struggling with insecurity/fear
- ▷ 6:4-9 some had even fallen away back to Judaism
- ▷ 5:11 no longer try to understand
- ▷ 5:12 should be teaching but instead need to be taught
- ▷ 10:32-34 they had been extremely zealous in the past

10:32-34 great conflict full of suffering, publicly exposed to insult and persecution either personally or had stood with those that had been, suffered with those in prison, joyfully accepted the confiscation of property

# Lenses for Analysis

- **Infrared:** type of genre, literary & rhetorical devices
- **Microscope:** words, phrases, clauses
- **Xray:** structure of the passage
- **Wide-Angle:** Context of the story within the story
- **Telescopic:** explore the world behind the text by examining cultural, historical, and religious background.
- **Motion Picture:** consider how the various periods of church history understood the text
- **Mirror:** understand our own biases



Infrared: investigate what cannot be seen in natural light  
Microscope: scrutinises the details of the passage  
XRAY see the structure that the substances is upheld by

# Infrared Lens: Literary Analysis

- Training our eyes to perceive indications of when a passage begins and ends, and/or literary devices that directly or subtly highlight the meaning of a text
- Statements of introduction or conclusion
- Change in setting, time, frame or characters
- Repetitive grammatical features
- Inclusio: bracketing or envelope
- Chiasm: a writing style that uses a unique repetition pattern for clarification and/or emphasis. A-B-B-A
- Dozens more literary & rhetorical devices

How do we train our eyes? READ, READ, READ, then read some more.

UNMARKED TEXTS!!!!

Not only Bible but novels, biographies, poetry, news

allegory, alliteration, allusion, ambiguity, analogy, anecdote, anthropomorphism, antithesis, aphorism, apostrophe, archetype, assonance, cadence, catharsis, cliché, colloquial, connotation, denotation, dialect, diction, enjambment, euphemism, farce, flashback, foil, foreshadowing, hyperbole, idiom, imagery, irony, metaphor, metonymy, motif, mood, narrator, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, parable, paradox, parody, persona, personification, point of view, pun, satire, simile, stereotype, style, suspense, symbolism, symbols, synecdoche, syntax, theme, tone, tragedy, tragic flaw, tragicomedy, understatement, verisimilitude, vernacular

# Examples

▷ **Romans 1:1-7 & 16:25-27**

▷ Bracketed with an overarching theme

▷ **1 John 1:5-2:2**

▷ 6 conditional clauses in a row which alternate between positive and negative “if” statements

▷ **1 Corinthians 13:1**

▷ hyperbole: importance of Love

▷ **James**

▷ “my brothers & sisters”

▷ 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 14; 4:13; 5:1, 7, 12 19

▷ **1 Corinthians 7-16**

▷ “now about” (8:1, 12:1, 16:1)

▷ **Galatians 1**

▷ Normal Epistle Structure: Greeting, Thanksgiving & Prayer, Body, Ethical/Moral Section, and the Farewell

▷ Thanksgiving replaced with: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you”

▷ Prayer replaced: “let him be eternally condemned”

# Microscope Lens: Grammatical Analysis

- Analysis of the minute details of the text
  - Word Studies
  - Interplay of Words in phrases
  - Analysis of clauses
  - Sentence structure
  - understanding word order
- Tools:
  - Bible Software (Blue Letter Bible, Logos, etc)
  - Bible Dictionary, Word Pictures of the NT, original language dictionaries, etc
- **Don't conduct an autopsy!**

Dont spend 10 minutes explaining a greek or hebrew word only to arrive at the same english word

# Example

- 1 Thessalonians 4:17
  - How are we to understand this meeting with the Lord in the air?
    - “a meeting” occurs also in Matt 25:6 & Acts 28:15
- “Submit” in Ephesians 5:21-22
  - Literally: “wives, to one’s own husband as to the Lord.”
  - Where’s the verb? The imperative from 5:21 must be carried over to 5:22 in order to understand the meaning "submit" when it applies to husband-wife relationships.

This entails that the passages 5:21 and 5:22 must be read together. To understand the biblical view of the marriage relationship, the reader must begin with 5:21, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." That is the foundation upon which everything following is built.

mutual submission is the key. Based upon this underpinning, the wife must place the husband first by submitting to him before her own agenda. Likewise, as 5:25 indicates, the husband must place his wife's needs and concerns before his own by loving his wife as Christ loved the church. The omission of the verb in 5:22 leads to an important insight into the text. Mutual submission is the basis upon which Paul expounds the marriage relationship and applies this principle both to the woman and to the man. Paul addresses the woman before the man in 5:22, but in the concluding verse of the passage (5:33) he reverses the order and exhorts the husband first: "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." The rights of each person give way to an emphasis upon one's responsibility to put the other person first, just as 5:21 underscores at the beginning.

# X-Ray Lens: The Structure

- The meaning is in the structure
- Paragraphs are Key!
- What holds the paragraph together?
  - Pay special attention to repetitions, series of arguments, catchwords, questions and answers, and conclusions
  - Summaries and shifts
  - “therefore” & “finally”

# Example

- 1 Peter 1:3-12
  - theme of salvation binds it together (5, 9, 10)
  - Different emphasis with each: Future, Present, Past
    - Future: 3-fold future reality: living hope, heavenly-kept inheritance, and ready-to-be-revealed salvation
    - Present: 1:6, 8 “now”
    - Past: Prophets, who spoke

this repetition of terms both divides the paragraph into three sections but also binds it together with the theme of salvation

# Example

- Romans 5:1-21
  - from light to heavy
    - What is the dominant structural element?
      - boasts 5:2; glory 5:3a; glory 5:3b-5; boast 5:11
      - how much more 5:10, 15, 17
      - Lead to an unmistakable conclusion v. 18
        - “for just as...so also” sequence in triplicate (18, 19, 21)

The rabbis at the time of Jesus such as Hillel distinguished seven exegetical principles called Middoth.<sup>30</sup> These include:

- (1) from light to heavy, expressing "how much more";
- (2) analogy
- (3) a standard conclusion based on one passage
- (4) a standard conclusion based on two passages
- (5) general and particular
- (6) analogy with another passage
- (7) proof from the context

# Example

- 2 Corinthians 5:11-7:4
- Be careful of chapter breaks
- “Therefore” as a transition or bridge
- Section enveloped with emotional appeals (heart)

# Wide-Angle Lens: Context

- Context does not merely help us understand meaning; it virtually creates meaning.
- Context of the story within the story
- What's happening before & after your text?
- **Example: Philippians 2:3**
  - Word Study: Term: value: to lead, suppose, count, consider
  - used in 2:6 (Jesus) & 3:7-8 (Paul)

The command doesn't stand alone. Jesus' example & Paul's example equip us. The fuller context offers both a Christological depth to the sermon and a personal illustration in the life of Paul.

## Example: 1 Corinthians 11:17-14:40

- Chapter started positive
  - 11:2 “I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.”
- But that only lasts 15 verses
  - 11:17 “In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.”
  - 11:20 “...when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat...”
- 12:31 “But eagerly desire the greater gifts.”
- “Because you are zealous of the best gifts, I will show to you a more excellent way.”
- 14:12 “Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.”

-drifted so far from the original intent & purpose that what they were doing was no longer the same as the original.

NIV footnote: “But you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts.”

MSG “And yet some of you keep competing for so-called “important” parts. But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.”

# Telescopic Lens: Historical Background

- Explore the world behind the text by examining cultural, historical, and religious background.
- Revelation 3:14-22 Geography of Laodicea
- Philemon & Slavery
- Bible Encyclopaedia

Geographical details also contribute exegetical insights when the cultural background is examined. John & Jesus wrote a letter to the church at Laodicea in Rev 3:14-22 that cannot properly be interpreted without allusions to the geography behind the scenes.

The reference to the church as lukewarm (3:16) points to the geographical location of Laodicea between the hot springs at Hierapolis (10km north), which fall over a three hundred foot high cliff, and the cold waters of Colossae about 16kms distant. Laodicea is lukewarm in between these two cities.

the expression "pride in riches" (3:17) recalls the fact that Laodicea was the wealthiest city in Phrygia and a prominent banking center.

the phrase "I do not need a thing" (3:17) has been connected with Laodicea's unaided recovery from an earthquake during Nero's reign.

buying white clothes to wear (3:18) originates from the fact that Laodicea was famous for raising black sheep.

the mentioning of salve to anoint their eyes (3:18) derives from the medical school in Laodicea, which was famous for producing a healing ointment to improve eyesight.

These descriptive geographical and historical details contain rich exegetical applications.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (an add-on in Logos Bible Software) perceptively rehearses the differences between ancient enslavement and the types of slavery we are familiar with. In stark contrast to New World slavery prevalent in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, Greco-Roman slavery was not a permanent condition but rather only a temporary phase of life. Very few persons are known to have reached old age in slavery; instead, pertinent inscriptions indicate that roughly 50 percent were set free by the age of thirty. Freeing slaves was entirely normal and expected. More than one thousand release contracts were inscribed on the sacred wall in Delphi.

In fact, "At the beginning of the century owners were freeing their slaves with a frequency that provoked Augustus Caesar to introduce laws restricting the numbers and ages of those who could be lawfully released."

A second difference concerns the initiation process. Rather than forced slavery, Greco-Roman enslavement was for the most part a voluntary process. Large numbers of people sold themselves into slavery for various reasons, above all to enter a life that was easier and more secure than existence as a poor, freeborn person, to obtain special jobs, and to climb socially. It is quite likely that the Erastus mentioned in Rom. 16:23 as the 'city treasurer' *oikon6mos tes p6leos* of Corinth had to sell himself to the city (as a form of 'bonding insurance') in order to secure this responsible position.... Many non-Romans sold themselves to Roman citizens with the justified expectation, carefully regulated by Roman law, of becoming Roman citizens themselves when manumitted. The money that one received from such a self-sale into slavery usually became the beginning of the personal funds (*peculium*) that would later be used to enter freedom under more favorable circumstances, e.g., with former debts extinguished.<sup>36</sup> Slavery was therefore for many a beneficial process that they voluntarily entered.

Third, ancient slavery had no connection to race or the stigma of a particular excluded social class. "In outward appearance it was usually impossible to distinguish among slaves, freedmen, and free persons. Neither the slave's clothing nor his or her race revealed a legal or social status. Patterns of religious life, friends, or work did not separate slaves from freed persons or freeborn workers."<sup>37</sup> In fact, slaves held respected positions in society, including tutors of persons of all ages, physicians, nurses, executives with decision-making powers, and managers of households, ships, and estates. Capable slaves were given an excellent education at their owner's expense, including famous philosophers (Epictetus), teachers (Verrius Flaccus), grammarians (Palaemon), and administrators (Felix).

These types of descriptions break all of our stereotypes about slavery. Scriptural teaching on slavery must be understood in this context.

# Motion Picture Camera: Commentaries

- ❧ Study the text yourself first and only then open the commentaries to see what you missed.
- ❧ Multiple commentaries from various periods in church history can help safeguard against theological blindspots and generational weaknesses.

# Mirror

- Always remember that no one is a blank slate
- As we examine the text it examines us

# Difficult Passages

- They are difficult for us because they were not written to us.
- Be content with our lack of understanding; therefore, be less dogmatic
- Even without certainty of details, we can still know the point of the whole passage (“baptizing for the dead” passage of 1 Cor 15 addresses resurrection issues rather than baptism issues)
- Still ask “What can be said for certain?”
- Consult a couple good, balanced commentary
- Admit when you are only guessing

the original author and audience had shared understanding & knowledge that we are not privy to.

# Hermeneutics in the Epistles

- What does this mean to/for us?
- All “do” hermeneutics, even without exegesis as we bring an enlightened common sense to the text
- The Big Challenge: Cultural Relativity

# Hermeneutical Principles

- Rule #1: A passage cannot mean what it never could have meant in its original context and to its original audience.
- Rule #2: When we share comparable situations as those in Scripture, Gods word to us is the same as Gods word to them.

# The Challenge: Cultural Relativity

- Cultural Relativity: area with the most present day difficulties & difference
- Why?
  - Epistles are occasional 1st century writings
  - Some of the situations are highly conditioned by 1st century culture (Jewish sect into Gentile world)
  - Examples: washing feet, head coverings, long hair/short hair, holy kiss, slaves/masters...

## Example: Corinth & Coverings

- (A) Passages that are difficult to understand should not nullify passages that are easy to understand.
- (B) We are reading half of a conversation between two sides that share a culture & an understanding foreign to us. In this section in particular Paul is answering questions they have asked. In 10:15 Paul writes: “I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.” He is giving them principles to guide them in questions they have asked him. In 11:13 “Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?”
- (C) Because of (B) Cultural nuances must be understood and accounted for while interpreting this text. Even though in 11:16 Paul writes: “If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice nor do the churches of God.” He is saying that to the churches and about the churches living in a shared culture & time.
- (D) Does that mean there is no application to us? Not at all. There are always principles that support and guide the cultural expressions. It is those we must uncover and understand in light of our times and within our cultures to find equivalent expressions.

2 Peter 3:14-16 Peter writes: “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

# Use Your Lenses

- **Microscope:** Paul's use of Genesis 1 & 2
- **Wide-Angle:** Women have a prominent part in Paul's ministry. Even in this text: v. 5
- **Telescopic:** Cultural expression of authority
- **Motion Picture:** how many generations mandated head coverings?
- **Mirror:** Culturally hot topic for us    reactive

Apparently some in the church thought and maybe taught that women are inferior because she was taken out of the side of Adam (Gen 2:21-23). Paul counters by saying to his male readers, It is true that the woman was created from the man (4), but where did you come from? Your mother came before you and you were taken out of her body, so what are we arguing about? The female came out of the body of the male, and every male (since Adam) has come out of the body of a female. The conclusion of the matter is "all things (both male and female) come from God" (Gen 1:27).

Paul starts with theological data from the second story of creation that appears in Genesis 2:21-23 probably because at least some of his readers were using that text to marginalise women. He then introduces ideas from Genesis 1:26-27, where God created male and female together and both were made in the image of God. Paul asserts that the man was in the image of God, but he does not say that the woman was "in the image of man." Such a statement would violate Genesis 1:26 where "humankind" (Hebrew: adam) is in the image and likeness of God. Paul assumes that the women (of course) are also in the image of God as Genesis 1:26 affirms.

"Woman is the glory of man" can mean "woman is the glory of humankind." She was created as the final climax of the creation story. God started with light. He continued as he created water, land, plants, birds, animals, man and finally woman. As noted, the process was on an ascending scale that mentions the creation of the man (in passing) and reaches its peak with the creation of a woman who is the "glory of man[kind]."

When the worshipers look at a man leading worship (with no head covering) they could appropriately think, How great is our God who created a human being. But when they look at a woman leading in worship (without a head covering) they could think, How great is this climax of creation. Rather than contemplating the Creator, they could (?) mentally turn to reflect on the creation. By uncovering her hair (in that culture) she draws special attention to her gender.

Why do we have women? God has created them, the argument goes, for men, that is, to serve men. v. 9 "neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." "for" could also be translated "because of"

# Cultural Caution

- There is a “...danger both of relegating the revealed truths of Scripture to the realm of changing cultural fashions, and of elevating present cultural enthusiasms into eternal religious truths.”
- 20 Years Ago: John Shelby Spong, Episcopalian Bishop
  - “Why Christianity Must Change or Die.”
    - Presented as an antidote to the crisis of decline in mainline churches. Spong, a theological liberal, said congregations would grow if they abandoned their literal interpretation of the Bible and transformed along with changing times.

Harvard Divinity professor and liberal theologian Harvey Cox said “Bishop Spong’s work is a significant accomplishment,” and indeed, Cox himself has long been at the task of shifting Christianity to meet the needs of the modern world. Thus, liberal theology has been taught for decades in mainline seminaries and preached from many mainline pulpits. Its enduring appeal to embattled clergy members is that it gives intellectual respectability to religious ideas that, on the surface, might appear far-fetched to modern audiences.

If the Bible continues to be viewed literally, he asserts, it is “doomed to be cast aside as both dated and irrelevant” — an exercise which he has mastered already<sup>7</sup>. One can hardly suppress the conviction that the world’s best-selling Book will be revered still — long after Spong’s memory is but a faintly lingering stench.

It is a nauseating labor to review the spiritual foibles of this delusional theological celebrity. Spong happily defends a number of vile sexual evils, e.g., fornication, adultery, and homosexuality. He is much in favor of same-sex “marriages,” as if arbitrarily calling a sexual aberration “marriage” makes it so.

a study of 22 mainline congregations in the province of Ontario. We compared those in the sample that were growing mainline congregations to those that were declining. After statistically analyzing the survey responses of over 2,200 congregants and the clergy members who serve them, we came to a counterintuitive discovery: Conservative Protestant theology, with its more literal view of the Bible, is a significant predictor of church growth while liberal theology leads to decline.

Spong and other liberals were right to claim that Christianity must change or die. They just got the direction of the change wrong.

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