

BIBLIOLOGY – The Doctrine of the Bible (Part 3)

The Authority of Scripture

“The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.” Wayne Grudem, Bible Doctrine, p. 33.

If “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16) then all Scripture is vested with God’s authority. Therefore the Bible is our sole authority for life and practice. Catechisms, creeds, translations, documents and books by men about the Bible can be helpful, but they should never be treated as if they were authoritative like the Bible. Everything (church traditions, human reason, societal norms, and personal experiences) is subservient to the Bible.

The Book of Mormon, the New World Translation (Jehovah Witness), the Catholic Church’s Canon Law and Vatican 1 and 2 Councils are examples of human attempts to raise man-made teachings to equal authority as Scripture.

In the Roman Catholic’s Second Vatican Council’s document on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum* (Latin: “The Word of God”), the relationship between Tradition and Scripture is explained: *“Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end . . . Consequently it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same devotion and reverence.”* (p. 82)

In Jesus’ day the Pharisees did this very same thing. Mark records this encounter in Mark 7:5-8 –

Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: *‘This people honors Me with their lips But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’* For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men . . .

To Jesus, the revealed Word of God, and nothing else, was the supreme and sole authority in Judaism. The traditions of men had no legitimate place of authority in the worship of Almighty God.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

As the authoritative, inspired and inerrant Word of God, it is sufficient to give us all the truth of God that God deems necessary for life in the world He has created. The Scriptures do not contain all knowledge in existence but the knowledge of truth sufficient for life and godliness.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, **that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*** 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

The believing Church does not need anything more than what God has communicated in His Word.

The Interpretation of Scripture

Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim 2:15 to “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately (“rightly dividing” = NKJV; “correctly handles” – NIV) the word of truth.*”

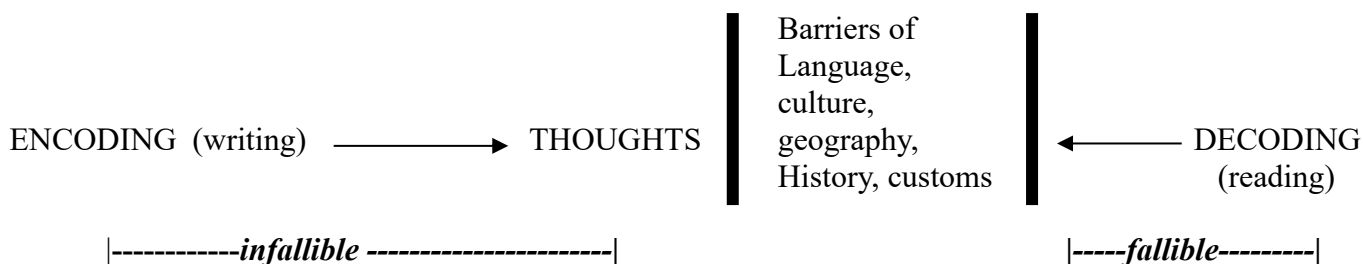
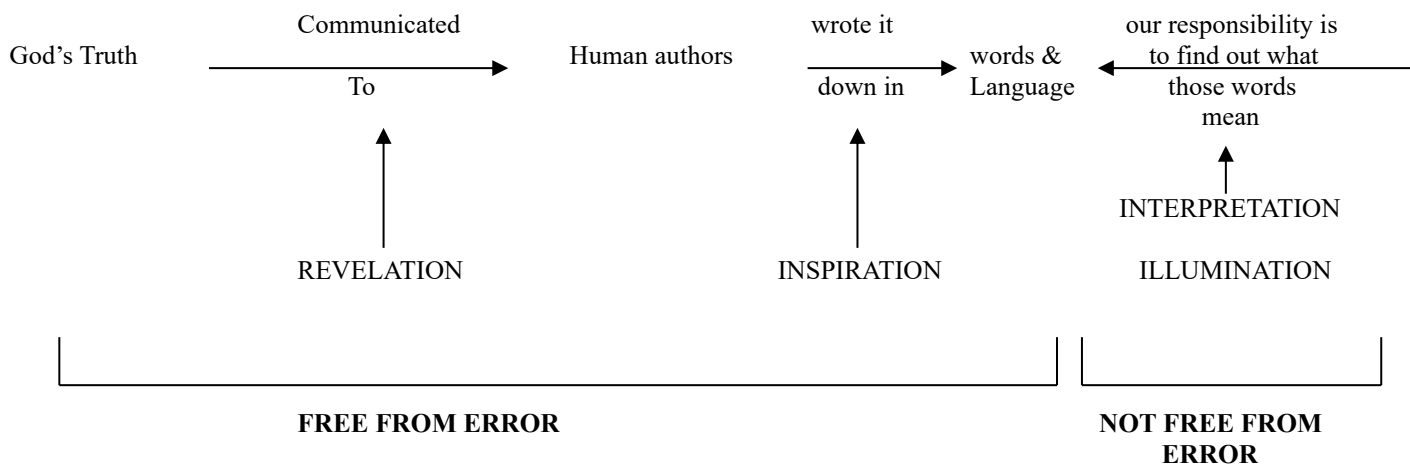
This phrase, “handling accurately” has the idea of *guiding the word of truth along a straight path* (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk.

ορθοτομουντα (orthotomounta): “rightly dividing” NKJV - “handling accurately” NASB

- Only usage in the New Testament
- Defined as “cutting a path in a straight direction”
- Derivative means “upright, straight, correct”
- English terms derived: orthodontist, orthopedic

In the ultimate sense – “handling accurately the word” means that the interpretation or meaning that we derive from studying the word equals the **meaning intended by the author**.

Now to “handle accurately the word of truth” is not always the easiest task --- and here’s why:



As you can see --- to “rightly handle the word of truth” can be a rather involved process – it involves a certain level of effort and hard work ----- Because again, our goal is to arrive at the original authors intended meaning.

NOW – in order to achieve this goal we need a good method of studying the Bible. And a good method involves 3 things: Observe the text; Interpret accurately the text; Apply the truths of the text.

Bible Study Methods

I. OBSERVATION – What does it say?

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you observe all the important things you need to see.
2. Read the book or passage as many times as you can in one sitting.

Look for: Who---wrote it

Where---was it written

When---was it written

Why---was it written/ what's the purpose of the book of passage

What---are the major truths/ what's the atmosphere/ what's the arrangement or order of the content/ what's the structure

3. Find the paragraph divisions and in each paragraph look for:
 - the principal point or main idea of the paragraph
 - commands to obey; errors to avoid; promises to claim
 - key words or phrases
 - things that are alike or different
 - things that are repeated
 - key connectives such as “therefore,” “but,” “so then,” etc.
 - important cross references that may shed light on the meaning of the passage
4. Summarize your findings----rewrite each paragraph in your own words.

II. INTERPRETATION – What does it mean?

Hermeneutics is the science and art of interpreting the Bible through careful methods of Bible study that insures that the message God intended to communicate is accurately understood by man.

“Hermeneutics is a science in that it can determine certain principle for discovering the meaning of a document, and in that these principles are not a mere list of rules but bear organic connection to each other. It is also an art because principle or rules can never be applied mechanically but involve the skill of the interpreter.” Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in understanding the passage.
2. Ask important questions of the passage like:
 - What is the meaning of that word?
 - What is the significance of that connective?
 - What is implied by using this phrase?
 - What is the relationship between this word and that word?
 - What is the progression of the author's thoughts?
3. Look up key words in a Bible dictionary or English dictionary.
4. Select key words for a concordance study.
 - find all the occurrences of a word in the Bible and look up each reference
 - try to find how the word is used in different contexts

5. Compare other translations.
6. Look up cross-reference and check any marginal notes in your Bible.
7. Always read and re-read the context---what is the author saying just before and after?
8. Summarize your finds—"the author seems to be saying. . . "
9. Consult good commentaries.

Because of all the "barriers" that potentially block an accurate understanding of the intended meaning of a passage, there must be some accurate system by which modern man is guaranteed that what was said and meant so long ago is clearly understood.

Protestant Biblical Interpretation: 5 Hermeneutical Premises **Elliot Johnson – "Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction"**

#1. The **literal** premise = the meanings to be interpreted are textually based (and contextually based) and take into account what the original author's normal, customary, usual, socially-acknowledged meaning for words was.

#2. The **grammatical** premise = affirms that the textually based meanings are expressed within the limits of common language usage. God accommodated Himself to use human language to express divine truth. Understanding how that language works (Greek & Hebrew predominantly) helps the interpreter arrive at the original author's intended meaning.

#3. The **historical** premise = affirms that there was an historical context within which the original author wrote that includes things like the methods, manners, tools, customs, buildings, institutions, etc. This is often referred to as the "culture" within which the author wrote. The historical premise further affirms that there was a specific historical setting for the particular writing being undertaken by the author – the historical occasion that motivated the writing.

#4. The **literary** premise = affirms that every passage of Scripture is set within a certain literary design that characterizes the entire book. This is also called the "literary genre" of the text. For example, some books are historical (Acts); some are dramatic (Job); some are apocalyptic (Revelation); some are wisdom (Proverbs); etc.

#5. The **theological** premise = affirms that since the Bible is ultimately God's revelation, then He is the ultimate Author who inspired human authors to write down His intended meaning. As such, there is always a spiritual and theological depth to every passage of Scripture that even the human author may not have recognized. This theological content woven within the fabric of the Scriptures is progressively unfolded and reaches its climax and completion in Jesus Christ.

WHAT'S THE ULTIMATE GOAL??

"SANCTIFY THEM IN TRUTH; YOUR WORD IS TRUTH!" John 17:17

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:

Consider the following two verses and discuss what questions must be answered about these verses in order to discover what the authors meant when they wrote them.

#1: Romans 5:9

- NASB: *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*
- NKJV: *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*
- NIV: *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*
- ESV: *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

#2: James 2:17

- NASB: *Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*
- NKJV: *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
- NIV: *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*
- ESV: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*