

SHEFFEY BIBLE COLLEGE
Course: Hermeneutics 101
Chapter 7 Student Handout
WHAT DO WE BRING TO THE TEXT?
Instructor: Dr. Mike Sage

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

WHAT YOU SHOULD LEARN FROM TODAY'S LECTURE

By the end of this lecture you should understand:

- Why the **reader's background influences interpretation**
- The meaning of **preunderstanding**
- How **culture shapes our interpretation of Scripture**
- The difference between **preunderstanding and foundational beliefs**
- Why believers must submit their assumptions **to the authority of Scripture**

I. INTRODUCTION — THE CONTEXT OF THE READER

When we read the Bible, we do not come as neutral observers. We bring our own experiences, culture, and assumptions to the text.

Example discussed in lecture:

The **Ethiopian Christmas pageant** illustrated how people naturally fill in gaps in the biblical story based on their cultural understanding.

Key Principle:

Readers often interpret Scripture through their **own cultural lens** without realizing it.

Notes:

II. PREUNDERSTANDING

Definition

Preunderstanding refers to the **ideas, assumptions, and beliefs** we bring to the text before we study it carefully.

Sources of preunderstanding include:

- Sunday school teaching
- Sermons and Bible studies
- Christian music and literature
- Cultural influences
- Personal experiences

Key Principle:

We must not assume that our preunderstanding is always correct.

Notes:

The Danger of Pride

Some interpreters assume they already know the meaning of the passage before studying it.

This attitude prevents careful study.

Key Principle:

Interpretation requires **humility before the text**.

Notes:

“Overstanding”

“Overstanding” occurs when readers stand **over the Bible** and force the text to support their ideas.

Correct interpretation requires placing ourselves **under the authority of Scripture**.

Notes:

The Danger of Familiarity

When we think we already know a passage well, we may stop studying it carefully.

This leads to shallow interpretation.

Key Principle:

Familiar passages still require **careful study and observation**.

Notes:

III. CULTURAL BAGGAGE

Culture strongly influences how we interpret Scripture.

Culture includes:

- Family background
- National traditions
- Media and entertainment

- Social values
- Economic experiences

Example from lecture:

Jesus teaches believers to turn the other cheek.

Matthew 5:39 (KJV)

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

This command often conflicts with cultural ideas about retaliation or strength.

Key Principle:

Culture can pressure us to reinterpret Scripture to fit cultural expectations.

Notes:

Cultural Illustration: Jonah

Many people picture Jonah sitting inside the fish as if it were a large hollow room.

This image likely comes from modern culture rather than the biblical text.

Key Principle:

Cultural images can influence how we imagine biblical events.

Notes:

IV. INTERPRETATIONAL REFLEX

Interpretational reflex describes the automatic way readers interpret Scripture through their cultural background.

This occurs in two primary ways.

1. Filling in missing details in the text using cultural assumptions.
2. Limiting possible meanings of the text before studying it carefully.

Key Principle:

Interpretational reflex can distort our understanding of Scripture.

Notes:

V. CULTURE AND ROMANS 13

The chapter discusses how cultural values can influence how we read passages about government authority.

Romans 13:1

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

Romans 13:2

“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”

Romans 13:3

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:”

Romans 13:4

“For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

Romans 13:5

“Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.”

Romans 13:6

“For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.”

Romans 13:7

“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”

Key Principle:

We must allow the **Bible to evaluate our culture**, not the other way around.

Notes:

VI. SUBMITTING PREUNDERSTANDING TO THE TEXT

Preunderstanding is not always wrong.

However, it must always be **open to correction** through careful study of Scripture.

When studying the Bible we should:

- Examine our assumptions
- Study the text carefully
- Allow Scripture to correct our views

Key Principle:

Our preunderstanding must be **placed under the authority of Scripture**.

Notes:

VII. FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

Foundational beliefs are different from preunderstanding.

They are the basic theological convictions Christians hold about the Bible.

Key foundational beliefs include:

1. The Bible is the Word of God.

2 Timothy 3:16 (KJV)

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”

2. The Bible is trustworthy and true.

John 17:17 (KJV)

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

3. God works in human history and performs miracles.

Luke 1:37 (KJV)

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.”

4. The Bible is unified and trustworthy.

Psalms 119:160 (KJV)

“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”

Key Principle:

Foundational beliefs shape our approach to Scripture but are not renegotiated with each passage.

Notes:

CLOSING SUMMARY

This chapter reminds us that readers bring many influences to the Bible when they interpret it. These influences include culture, personal experiences, theological assumptions, and previous teaching.

These influences create what is called **preunderstanding**. While preunderstanding can sometimes help us understand Scripture, it can also distort the meaning of the text if it goes unchecked.

Christians must therefore approach Scripture with humility, submitting their assumptions to the authority of the Word of God. At the same time, believers interpret Scripture within the framework of foundational beliefs about the Bible as the inspired and trustworthy Word of God.

Faithful interpretation requires recognizing our cultural influences, examining our assumptions, and allowing the biblical text itself to shape our understanding.

THINGS TO KNOW (EXAM ANCHORS)

Students should understand the following concepts from Chapter 7:

- The reader's context influences biblical interpretation.
- The definition of **preunderstanding**.
- The dangers of **interpretive pride**.
- The concept of **overstanding**.
- The danger of familiarity with biblical passages.
- The influence of **cultural baggage**.
- The meaning of **interpretational reflex**.
- How culture can limit interpretive possibilities.
- The importance of submitting preunderstanding to Scripture.
- The difference between **preunderstanding and foundational beliefs**.

ASSIGNMENT

Read **Chapter 8** in *Grasping God's Word* in preparation for the next lecture.

