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Exposing the Liberal Lie: What the Bible Says About Political Correctness

by Jim Alexander

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Chapter One:

I Proclaim What Is Certain

Romans 1:16-17 -- *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

Psalms 19:7-11 -- (of David) *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*

More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.

In the opening passages of this book I asked readers not to take my word for anything written herein, indeed, not to take the word of any man or any church body for what the word of God proclaims as *truth*. All knowledge of God's truth should come from a personal study of His word, and that alone. Anyone who attempts to add to or subtract from the word of God should be dismissed with all haste.

In the opening passages I also quoted from the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Galatians where he instructed believers to condemn any who preach a gospel other than the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-9). As such, I ask readers to look for themselves into everything I (or any others) proclaim as *true*. To further that end, a chapter on the basic essentials of Bible study is mandatory.

The Bible is a book intended for all people, regardless of education, culture, language, financial status, position, age or gender. It is not a book which is to be set aside and interpreted by only a few. It is a book that the common man, with all his flaws, should be able to understand, not in perfect clarity (for there isn't one among us who can rightfully claim such understanding), but in discernible truths as revealed through the Holy Spirit. The only things required for its study are the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a proper translation, an open heart and a few basic principles in hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics, or the science of Biblical interpretation, has established a few basic principles which I believe are essential for an in-depth study of God's word. It enables readers to better understand passages from God's word within the context they were written.

Now, this chapter is by no means a complete or last word on Bible study. To be certain, there are scores of highly-detailed, full-length volumes on the subject, and this brief chapter is meant only

The Christian Arsenal

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as a basic, bare-bones guide. It is strongly recommended that all Christians engage in as detailed a study of hermeneutics as their circumstances allow.

Where the Bible Comes From

To begin with, how did the Bible come to include those books which are today accepted by most as the sacred canon of Scripture? The Hebrew Old Testament, all of which predates Christ's earthly ministry, has survived essentially intact from that period on. The first five books of the Old Testament, often referred to as the *Pentateuch*, comprise the *Law*, or the *Books of Moses*: **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy**. These were the earliest books to be considered Scripture, and contain both narrative, historical sections, as well as the Law of God as given through the prophet Moses.

After the *Law* come the *Prophets*, both former (**Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings**) and latter (**Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi**). While some of these books contain historical narrative as well, they mostly consist of prophecy, much of which had been soon thereafter fulfilled, but also some yet-to-be-fulfilled *end times* prophecy.

The third division of the Hebrew Old Testament, called the *Writings* (**Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles**) consists largely of poetry with minimal historical narrative -- the majority of which lies within the books of **Ruth, Esther, Daniel and Chronicles**. Whereas the order in which these books appear may differ somewhat from the original Hebrew Bible, today's Christian Old Testament has survived essentially unchanged, and differs only very slightly with its Hebrew predecessor. Also, most Christian Bible scholars divide the Old Testament according to the Greek canon as *Law, History* (**Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther**), *Writings* (**Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon**), *Major and Minor Prophets* (**Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel; Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi**). Whichever method of division one prefers, only classification and order of books are different; the text remains essentially unaltered.

Originally written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek beginning in the Third Century B.C. Called the *Septuagint* (Latin for *seventy*; it was translated by seventy Jewish elders in Alexandria for Greek-speaking Jews), this translation was widely used in the early Christian era, and is quoted extensively throughout the New Testament.

The Christian New Testament contains twenty-seven books, all of which were written either by an apostle, or someone very closely associated with an apostle (such as Luke or Mark). This standard was strictly adhered to, to assure authenticity. The entire New Testament was written during the First Century, with the vast bulk, if not all of it, written in the last half of that century.

The Inerrancy and Infallibility of the Bible

None of the Bible's original autographs are known to have survived to the present day. Even so, there are so few portions of the Bible in dispute -- when compared with the oldest known, surviving texts -- that most Bible scholars would agree our "reliable", current translations are reasonably preserved.

The finding of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* from 1947 on, further corroborates the accuracy of modern

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Old Testament translations, as many of the texts which have been found among the *Dead Sea Scrolls* are virtually identical to the current translations. Also underscoring the authenticity of the Old Testament as the true and inspired word of God, all but only a handful of the books of the Old Testament are quoted directly in the New Testament. Only seven books of the Hebrew Old Testament are not quoted or referred to in the New Testament: *Ruth, Esther, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah*. Eleven are quoted by Christ, himself: *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah, Zechariah, Malachi*. And, as the Old Testament in use today is virtually identical to the Old Testament in Christ's day, and the Lord accepted the Scriptures of that day as the true and inspired word of God, we also should have confidence in the divine inspiration and authenticity of the Old Testament.

In John 10:34, the Lord quotes from Psalm eighty-two, then refers to it as Scripture: "...and the Scripture cannot be broken...." (John 10:35). Earlier, in both the fifth and seventh chapters of John, Jesus refers to the Law of Moses -- in the one instance, actually endorsing it, as He applied it to Himself.

John 7:19 -- (Jesus speaking) *"Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law?"*

John 5:46 -- (Jesus speaking) *"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me."*

In Matthew and Luke we also find Jesus testifying of the truth and reliability of the Old Testament.

Matthew 5:17-19 -- (Jesus speaking) *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."*

In Acts, chapter three, the Apostle Peter, while addressing the people at the temple gate, first quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, then endorses much of the remainder of the Old Testament, as well.

Acts 3:22-24 -- (Peter speaking) *"For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days."*

Throughout the Old Testament itself, there are many evidences of an acceptance of Scripture as the word of God. In Exodus twenty-four the people acknowledge the Book of the Covenant as the word of God.

Exodus 24:7 -- *Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient."*

II Kings twenty-two and twenty-three relate the finding of the Book of the Law during the reign of

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King Josiah. Verse three of chapter twenty-three ascribes the Law to God, and both king and people pledge themselves to keep it.

II Kings 23:2-3 -- He [King Josiah] went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets -- all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. The King stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD - - to follow the LORD and keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. (NIV)

The eighth chapter of Nehemiah relates a similar account in the time of Ezra where the Book of the Law is read before an assembly of the people of Israel. Again, the people acknowledge the Law as God's and honor it.

A full six centuries before the coming of Christ, the prophet Jeremiah wrote of the coming of a new covenant with God.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 -- "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them," says the LORD. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the LORD: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Similarly, the New Testament was also accepted as Scripture by even the earliest of first century believers. A classic example of this is found in I Timothy 5:18, where the Apostle Paul quotes both Deuteronomy (from the Old Testament) and Luke (from the New Testament), and calls both "Scripture".

I Timothy 5:18 -- For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

In II Peter 3:15, Peter makes reference to the writings of the Apostle Paul as written "with the wisdom that God gave him" (NIV), and in verse sixteen, equates these writings of Paul's with Scripture.

The third chapter of Hebrews attributes its quote of Psalm ninety-five to the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 3:7-8 -- Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear his voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness..."

Later, in chapter four, this very same quotation from Psalm ninety-five is again ascribed to God.

Hebrews 4:7 -- Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later He spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (NIV)

The whole of Hebrews chapter one attributes seven Old Testament passages as God's word.

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Hebrews 1:5a -- For to which of the angels did He [God] ever say....

Hebrews 1:6a -- But when He [God] again brings the firstborn into the world, He says...

Hebrews 1:7a -- And of the angels He [God] says...

Hebrews 1:8a -- But to the Son He [God] says....

Hebrews 1:10a -- He also says.... (NIV)

Hebrews 1:13a -- But to which of the angels has He [God] ever said...

Indeed, the whole of Scripture testifies of its infallibility and perfection.

Psalms 12:6 -- (of David) *And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.* (NIV)

II Samuel 22:31 -- (David speaking) *"As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless."* (NIV)

Proverbs 30:5-6 -- (of Agur) *"Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar."* (NIV)

Hosea 12:10 -- (the LORD speaking) *"I have also spoken by the prophets, And have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets."*

Isaiah 40:6-8 -- *"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."* (NIV)

In the New Testament the origin of Scripture is ascribed to the Triune God. The fourteenth chapter of John, in recording Jesus' words to His disciples, clearly indicates that they (Jesus' disciples) would be taught and made able to recall the words of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 -- (Jesus speaking) *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, attributes the revelation of the gospel to Jesus Christ: *But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 1:11-12) II Timothy, Hebrews and II Peter all emphasize the inspiration of God in the origins of all Scripture.

II Timothy 3:16-17 -- *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the*

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man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 1:1-2 -- *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...*

II Peter 1:19-21 -- *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

How To Approach a Study of the Bible

Acts 17:11 -- *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (NIV)*

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the importance of a serious, in-depth study of God's word can never be overstated, particularly in relation to its role in the process of Christian growth. The passage above wonderfully illustrates the attitude with which a study should be inaugurated. The Bereans received the word of God with *great eagerness* and they *examined the Scriptures* daily to see if what they'd heard was true.

It is my personal belief that most errors in interpretation are derived not from an improper knowledge of basic hermeneutics, but rather an improper attitude in approaching a serious study of God's word. Again, the Bereans were of more noble character why? "Because they built better houses of worship than those trouble-making Thessalonians?" I don't think so. "Because they better provided for their poor, widowed and orphans?" Not quite. Read it again: *The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

One's attitude in approaching God's word is vital. A haphazard, hodgepodge stumbling through the word of God simply will not produce required Christian growth. Seed sown along the path is eaten up by birds. Good soil is necessary for growth, and the best soil in which to germinate the truth and knowledge of God's word is an eager and open heart.

Which brings us to the first important principle mandatory for any penetrating perquisition of the Scriptures: **One must have a mind completely open to the will and guidance of the Holy Spirit.** Any attempt to delve into the eternal truths of God while clinging onto biased presuppositions and traditions will launch the reader down the dangerous and all-too-frequently traveled road of misinterpretation.

All too many Christians fall into the trap of dragging the excess baggage of presupposition and tradition into their study of God's word. Living, as we do, in a culture which promotes an entirely different view of God, good, evil, and the world (often in blatant contradiction to God's word), it is easy to presuppose the Bible is saying one thing, when actually it's saying another. Disciplining ourselves to approach God's word with a mind open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential if we are to grasp the actual meaning of what God has said. Approaching God's word with preconceived ideas in an attempt to make any given passage conform to what we already believe

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is an extremely dangerous practice, averse to any study of truth.

One example I can give of entering a Bible study biased by presupposition is in the method of baptism. "To sprinkle or to immerse?" Well, if one enters his Bible with an unshakable belief in sprinkling, then I'd virtually guarantee that's what one's going to find his Bible's teaching him, regardless of the facts. To the solidly entrenched immersionist, I say the same. Don't look into the Bible for a confirmation of preconceived prejudices -- because you'll always find it. We're natural deceivers, and our primary victims are generally ourselves. It's too easy to delude ourselves into accepting untrue confirmations of a notion we've already accepted as truth, dissentient of the facts. Enter your personal study of God's word with an open mind (not an *empty* mind) and the Spirit of God to guide you.

Of course, in order to be able to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit, one must -- to use the words of Christ in John 8:47 -- "*belong to God.*" Any attempt to gain spiritual discernment apart from God is nothing less than an exercise in futility; Jesus made this perfectly clear in the eighth chapter of John.

John 8:42-47 -- *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."*

"Therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." It is obvious from this passage, and the passage below, that understanding and insight into the word of God is only possible through the Holy Spirit to one who is a regenerated child of God. The Apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, left no room for argument.

I Corinthians 2:14-16 -- *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

A nonbeliever or professing Christian who's not been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb will never attain spiritual discernment, and any effort on his part to attempt such is sheer foolishness. One must first come before the mercy seat of God, and in repentance of sin, accept by grace through faith, the atoning work of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin. It is only through the blood of Christ we can be saved, and in being saved, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and enabled to understand the truths of God's word.

II Timothy 2:7 -- *Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.*

It is through prayerful reflection that the Holy Spirit will guide those who seek God's will.

I Chronicles 28:9 -- (David speaking to Solomon) *"If you seek Him [the LORD],*

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He will be found by you...."

Psalm 34:10 -- (of David) *The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.*

Psalm 105:3-4 -- (of David) *Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!*

Psalm 119:9-16 -- *How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word. I seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You. Praise be to You, O LORD; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your word.*
(NIV)

I will not neglect Your word. How does one seek the LORD? Again, the Bereans, like the psalmist above, seem to have had the right idea, for they *received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

I will not neglect Your word. We seek God through His word. We understand His word through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit when we are regenerated by the Son.

Jeremiah 29:13 -- (the LORD speaking) *"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*

Breaking the Commands of God for the Sake of Tradition

Matthew 15:1-9 -- *Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."*

He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" -- then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Mark 7:8-9 -- (Jesus speaking) *"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."*

Mark 7:13 -- (Jesus speaking) *"Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition*

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that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (NIV)

"Their teachings are but rules taught by men." (NIV) >From the passage quoted above in Matthew fifteen, as well as its parallel in the seventh chapter of Mark (and the words of the LORD in Isaiah 29:13), it's obvious the religious leaders of Christ's day were not all that different from their counterparts of today. Breaking the commands of God for the sake of tradition is an all-too-common legacy found throughout many factions of professing Christendom today.

Colossians 2:8 -- *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*

Jesus found Himself frequently at odds with the religious leaders of His day over the issue of tradition. The entire first portion of Matthew twenty-three is another fine example of the Lord's calling the teachers of the law and Pharisees to account for their aggrandizement of tradition over Scripture. Often the Lord would contrast the two by beginning His quotations of Scripture with an *"It is written..."* as opposed to *"You have heard that it was said..."* when referring to an instance where rabbinic tradition had distorted the true and intended meaning of Scripture. In the Old Testament there is never a doubt as to which words are God's and which are men's. It can be generally assumed that any passage prefaced with a *"This is what the LORD says..."* (or in the all-too-recognizable, archaic syntax of the KJV, a *"Thus saith the LORD..."*) is a genuine directive from the LORD God Almighty, and no mere tradition of men.

Be that as it may, it is difficult in our world today not to rely on tradition. After all, tradition, by its very nature, carries weight simply because it is tradition, and inherited from generation to generation, it tends to gather more weight with the passage of time. And whereas certain sects of Christianity are certainly more guilty of relying on tradition than others, I've yet to encounter any within the Christian church (genuine or merely professed) where tradition does not play a role. This is unfortunate, particularly as tradition is often used to usurp or equate itself with the word of God. And, as much as I, and many other believers in the true word of God, might like to just omit all reference to the traditions of men from our worship and instruction, I can't see it realistically happening anytime prior to Christ's return.

The problem with reliance on tradition over, or equal to Scripture is a major one, and one which I cannot overemphasize. Indeed, it is serious enough to warrant a volume of its own; however, I don't wish to dwell on it further at this time, other than to briefly reiterate the warning of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1:9: *As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!* (NIV)

The warnings of Christ in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew (mentioned previously) are also very much applicable to this topic, and I will be discussing them at greater length in the section on false teachers in chapter three of this volume. The important thing to remember concerning traditions in a study of the Scriptures is that Scripture always, and without exception, has authority over any and all tradition of men -- and this includes the "organized church".

Literal Interpretation

Before entering into any comprehensive Bible study, several basic principles should first be understood, particularly regarding a *literal* interpretation of the Scriptures. The literal, "according to the letter" meaning of any text must be weighed within the context of the historical and cultural background of the passage, as well as the context of each individual paragraph, chapter and book, and also the Bible as a whole. **Scripture will never contradict Scripture.** If it seems to,

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you're not interpreting it properly.

To begin with, it should be understood that the Bible, like other works of literature, employs many literary devices. One such literary device utilized quite frequently throughout the Scriptures is the **metaphor**.

In Psalm sixty-two, David writes that God alone is his *rock* and his *fortress*. Now, although it is never safe to assume anything as true which is not unquestionably spelled out as such directly in the Scriptures, I would venture in this particular instance that the LORD our God is not actually a *rock* or a *fortress*, but that David is employing metaphors.

Another literary device frequently used in the Bible is **hyperbole**. Generally, intentional exaggeration is easy to detect; however, when dealing with the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God of the universe, it can present a problem. In most cases though, unless otherwise indicated within the passage itself (or elsewhere in Scripture), the safest interpretation would be the literal one. Our God is a God of miracles, and far too often I've seen the miraculous acts of God dismissed outright and rendered inane by liberals who feel much more secure promulgating the image of a helpless, doting God, than the all-powerful, righteous and holy King of all creation.

Thirdly, there is **anthropomorphism**, or the attribution of human characteristics to that which is not human, particularly common in the Bible relative to describing God in human terms. Again, as our knowledge and perspective of God is far from complete, I would recommend literal over anthropomorphic interpretation whenever in doubt.

A fourth, commonly-employed literary feature found in Scripture is the **parable**. Used for illustrative purposes, parables utilize stories to relate moral principles. They should not be interpreted in the same light as when interpreting historical narratives.

Crucial to any fuller understanding of Scripture is an awareness of the **historical** and **cultural setting** of the Bible. This requires determining the original, actual application of the passage as it pertained to the original readers for whom the passage or book was intended. Then, it must be determined whether and how the passage is applicable today. This principle of interpretation must be maintained in a reading of all Scripture, as not all passages of Scripture are applicable all the time. It is here we must be able to discern passages which were applicable only under the circumstances and conditions of the original cultural and historical setting, from passages illustrative of external principles, applicable to all people in every time, regardless of culture.

Conditioned as we all are by our own culture, it is also likely we miss meanings we might've otherwise discerned had we been more familiar with the background under which these circumstances occurred. Still, it is all too easy to fall into the opposite trap of applying every situation in terms of the historical and cultural setting of the Bible, while neglecting its more likely application today.

One example which finely illustrates the setting of a principle within the cultural and historical background of the time is found in Matthew, chapter five.

Matthew 5:23-24 -- (Jesus speaking) *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

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Now, should it be inferred from this passage that we are to reconcile with our brothers only *because* we are offering gifts at the altar? Whereas the reconciliation to our brothers may be applicable today, the reference to offering gifts at the altar is entirely inapplicable, and should not be used to distort this passage into implying something it does not -- namely, the citing of a specific condition requisite for the application of the directive.

One needs to exercise extreme caution in applying the principle of interpretation through cultural and historical setting in an effort to avoid allowing the local, cultural and historical setting of a passage to contradict what the text actually says. Whenever there is a doubt as to whether any particular passage of Scripture is to be interpreted as applicable only in light of its precise, historical and cultural setting, or an eternal principle, applicable to all time and circumstances, it is safer to interpret the passage as an eternal principle.

Another danger prevalent in Bible study is *eisegeisis*, or reading *into* a passage what one already believes. Scripture should always be read *exegetically*, or interpreting passages in light of what they actually say, and not what we want them to say, or believe they say.

As stated previously in this chapter, it is also very dangerous to interpret Scripture through assumption. Never assume! Even in instances of obscure or unclear passages (and the Bible is full of them), it is best to accept our limitations as such, and trust God for what we do not know, as well as for what we do know. I realize the temptation to assume is all-too-attractive, particularly in light of our very limited knowledge in spiritual matters, and controlling this urge is something we can only successfully accomplish in the power of the Holy Spirit.

One classic example of assumption is found in the tenth chapter of Romans -- and, whereas I have no intention of debating election and free will at this time, I will attempt to illustrate this point, nevertheless. The passage in reference is Romans 10:13, which, like Acts 2:21, is a quotation of Joel 2:32: "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"

Now, I've heard those who emphatically proclaim this passage as clear evidence of the doctrine of free will in the procurement of salvation; however, and I loathe to cite this, this passage indicates no such thing. An exegetical reading of this passage shows that it is simply stating that those who "do call" will be saved. It does not say that all "may call", and this is where the assumption incorrectly falls. However, as it is not my intention to debate election and free will, I only cite this passage as an example of the pitfalls of reading the Bible *eisegetically* rather than *exegetically*.

The Whole Word

As stated previously, it is not advantageous in a study of God's word to *read into* a passage something that is not explicitly there. A passage must be read within the context of the whole word of God, and never contradictorily to the rest of Scripture. The word of God should be used to interpret itself, and a comparison of passages throughout the Bible will, in most cases, eliminate seeming contradictions. Note I say *seeming contradictions*, as the Bible can never contradict itself. A Scripture which contradicted itself would either not be from God, or the product of an all-too-fallible, not-very-godly God. If the interpretation of any given passage *seemingly contradicts* other, clearer passages of Scripture, the interpretation is in error, and the passage must be interpreted in light of the context of the clearer passage or passages. One example of a *seeming contradiction* in the Scripture can be found among passages in Exodus and Proverbs, regarding the acceptance of bribes.

Exodus 23:8 -- (the LORD speaking) "*And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe*

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blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous."

Compare this passage with Proverbs 17:23, which is seemingly in agreement.

Proverbs 17:23 -- *A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice.* (NIV)

In Exodus twenty-three, the LORD God forbids the acceptance of a bribe, and in Proverbs seventeen, one who accepts a bribe is called *wicked*. No contradiction so far. But, now compare the above-mentioned passages with both Proverbs 17:8 and 21:14.

Proverbs 17:8 -- *A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds.* (NIV)

Proverbs 21:14 -- *A gift in secret pacifies anger, And a bribe behind the back, strong wrath.*

At first glance, and even at second and third glance, there seems to be a contradiction here. On one hand the acceptance of a bribe is condemned, and on the other, it not only seems to be a pleasant course of action, but the recommended one. But, is this really what the passages are saying? Look more closely, and **do not assume anything not explicitly stated**: *A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds*. Is this actually condoning bribery or merely a reflection on the sinful state of affairs of this world in which we live? Read Proverbs 21:14 again, as well.

Proverbs 21:14 -- *A gift in secret pacifies anger, And a bribe behind the back, strong wrath.*

So, which is it? An endorsement of sin or a doleful commentary on the natural condition of mankind? If there is still any doubt as to the actual meaning of these passages, it would do well to note that the passage in Exodus is a direct and didactic quote from the LORD God Almighty. **Didactic** passages (passages which teach or instruct), particularly those uttered by God, are always to be given weight over passages of poetry or historical narrative where interpretation may be in doubt or passages seem contradictory.

"Does this mean the words of Solomon carry less significance than the words of God? I Kings 4:29-34 indicates Solomon's wisdom was greater than any man's."

I Corinthians 1:25 -- *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Okay, stupid question. The point is this: **The Bible never contradicts itself. Never!** Those who attempt to pit one book, one passage, one author against another will never fully understand or grasp the verity and significance of the perfect, holy and infallible word of God. Sure, a directive from God carries more weight than an observation of Solomon's on the condition of mankind, but both are still in complete agreement, and didactic passages **always** interpret non-didactic passages, not the reverse.

Let's try another example. Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1-2, 27:19-24, Exodus 1:15-20 and Joshua 2:1-7 all portray godly men and women deceiving others. Do these passages encourage deceptions? Read the words of *He who sat on the throne in heaven*, in Revelation 21:8.

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Revelation 21:8 -- *"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

From this passage there should be little doubt as to the status of lies and liars in God's sight. Do these passages contradict one another? Not at all. Neither are didactic, although the latter, as a prophecy from the Lord certainly ranks liars with a rather iniquitous, depraved and wicked lot. Both are historical narratives -- the latter in a sense that the prophecy was both viewed and recorded as actual, historical (albeit future) events. The historical narratives regarding the accounts of Abraham, Jacob, the Hebrew midwives and Rahab are just that: historical accounts of events which actually took place. Neither endorsing nor condemning their actions, they merely relate them as they happened.

Finally, I must emphasize that the Bible, as the inspired and inerrant word of God, must be accepted as a whole. Selecting only those portions which suit us is not only foolish, but dangerous. **As Christians professing a belief in the Bible as God's word, we need to accept all parts of it, even those unpleasant or difficult portions we may not understand or agree with.**

I realize I've only touched upon, and in many instances just barely, some of the basic, albeit crucial principles requisite for a comprehensive and thorough study of God's word. I recommend serious Bible students make an effort to delve further into other, more detailed and precise studies of hermeneutics. Those who claim to rest in the authority of God's word, yet find themselves ignorant of it, will never truly grow or encourage growth in others. A daily, in-depth study of the Scriptures is essential for Christian maturation, and should be neglected only to our shame.
