II. Foundations of Biblical Interpretation

What are our presuppositions and our basic framework?

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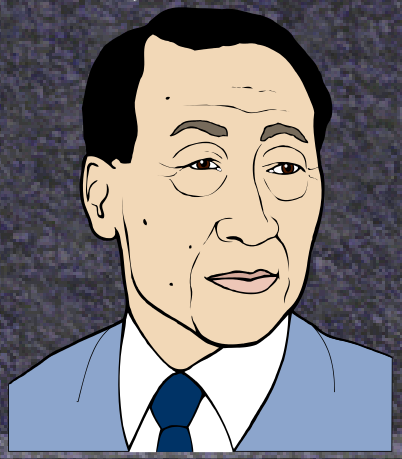
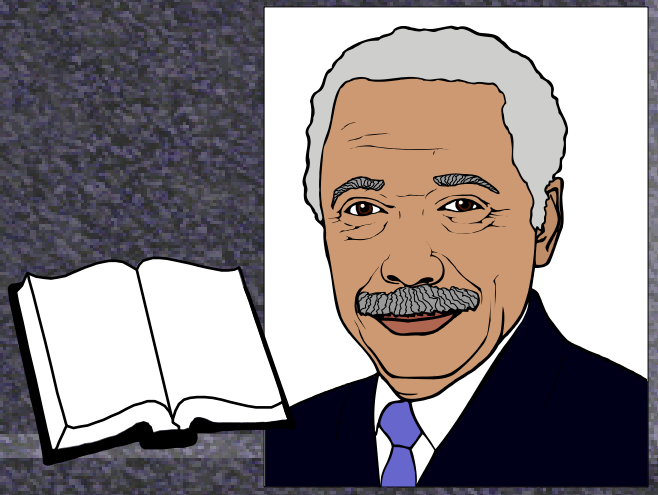
The Challenge

So where do you get your ideas for how to interpret?



The Bible itself has much to say about it.



Reading Assignments

- Required:
  - Poythress, "Introducing *Lex Christi*."
  - Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation 11-39 (history of interpretation)
  - Poythress, God-Centered Biblical Interpretation (foundations)
- Optional:
  - Berkhof, Principles 40-60 (inspiration)
  - Van Til, An Introduction to Systematic Theology 62-158, especially 110-145.

Where Are We?

- I. Course arrangements
- **II. Foundations of biblical interpretation**
- III. Basic steps in biblical interpretation
- Elaborating on the steps:
- …

- Looking at <u>principles</u> and framework

Where Are We?

- I. Course arrangements
- **II. Foundations of biblical interpretation**
- III. Basic steps in biblical interpretation
- Elaborating on the steps:
- …

- Let's look at the <u>principles</u> and framework for biblical interpretation.

0. Introducing *Lex Christi*

Use of *Lex Christi*

- Ten Commandments as perspectives on theology and biblical interpretation
- Useful as a cross-cultural teaching framework
- 4C, as focusing on dynamic, or process
- Interpretation is a <u>process</u>, normed by Scripture (*lex*)

A. Legitimacy of Biblical Interpretation

1. Is There a Problem?

Does the Bible Need Interpretation?

- Hermeneutics = how to study the Bible.

But if the Bible is sufficient,

do we need method?

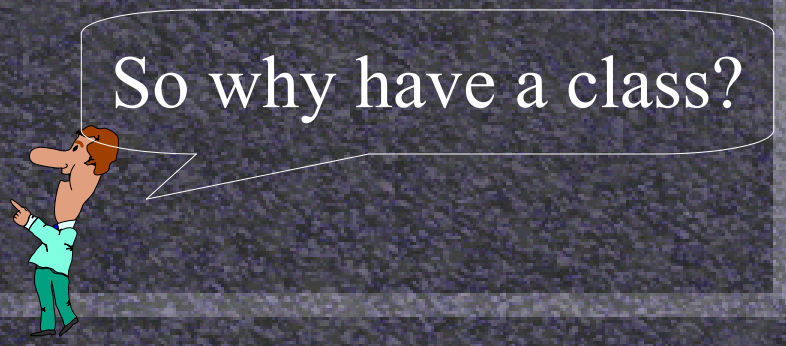
?

So why have a class?

Does the Bible Need Interpretation?

- Hermeneutics = how to study the Bible.

But if the Bible is sufficient, why use any study techniques at all? Aren't we undermining the Holy Spirit?



2. Biblical Mandate for Biblical Interpretation

The Gift of Teaching

- The Bible speaks of teachers and teaching (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:7).

Interpret for others

Christ Interprets

Luke 24:25-27: … (27)And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he **interpreted** to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

27b: διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.

Christ Interprets

Luke 24:25-27: And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (26)Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (27)And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he **interpreted** to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

27b: διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.

Christ Interprets More

Luke 24:45: Then he **opened** their minds to **understand** the Scriptures.

τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς·

The Holy Spirit Interprets

John 16:13: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will **guide** (**ὁδηγήσει**) you into all the truth.

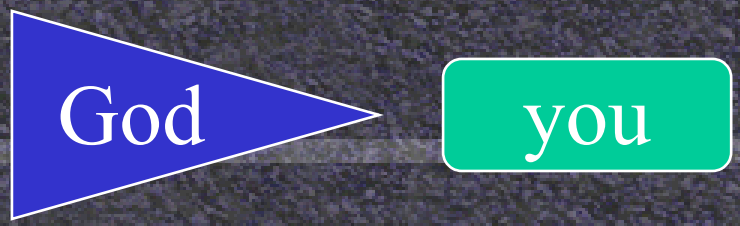
- "Guiding" is a hermeneutical function.

Spirit Motivates Effort

- The Spirit motivates effort, not relaxation.

Acts 8:26-40 (Philip and the Ethiopian)

Phil 2:12-13: **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who **works in you**, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.



Spirit Motivates Effort

- The Spirit motivates human effort rather than leading to quietism.

Acts 8:26-40 (Philip and the Ethiopian)

Phil 2:12-13: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling, 2:13 for it is God who **works in you**, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Translation Requires Interpretation

- The gospel goes to all nations (Acts).
- Translation to new languages requires interpretation.

Missionary mandate

↓

Translation

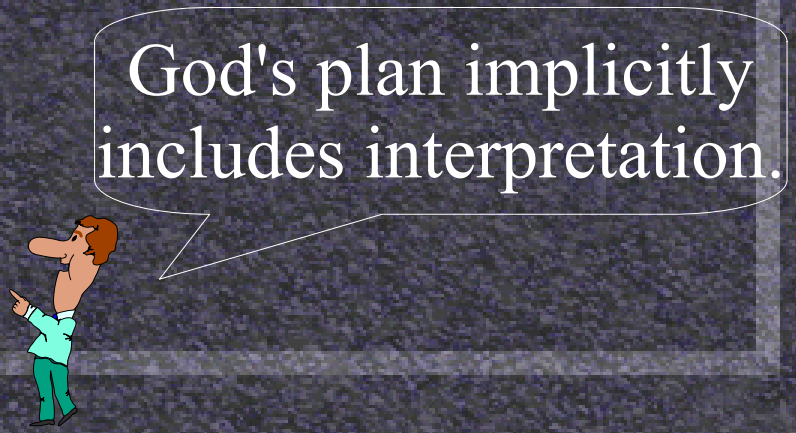
↓

Translation

God's plan implicitly includes interpretation.

Translation Requires Interpretation

- Acts endorses the spread of the gospel to all nations.
- Translation and the spread of the gospel to new linguistic groups requires interpretation.



Some Things are Difficult

2 Pet. 3:16: There are some things in them [Paul's letters] that are **<u>hard to understand</u>** (δυσνόητά τινα), ...

- The subject-matter is intrinsically difficult.

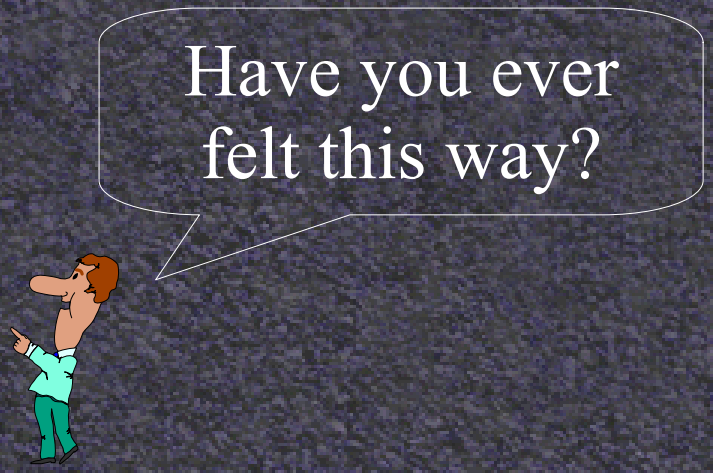
Some Things are Difficult

2 Pet. 3:16: There are some things in them [Paul's letters] that are **<u>hard to understand</u>** (δυσνόητά τινα), which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

- The subject-matter is intrinsically difficult.

We May Be Dull

Luke 24:25: O foolish ones, and **<u>slow of heart to believe</u>** all that the prophets have spoken …



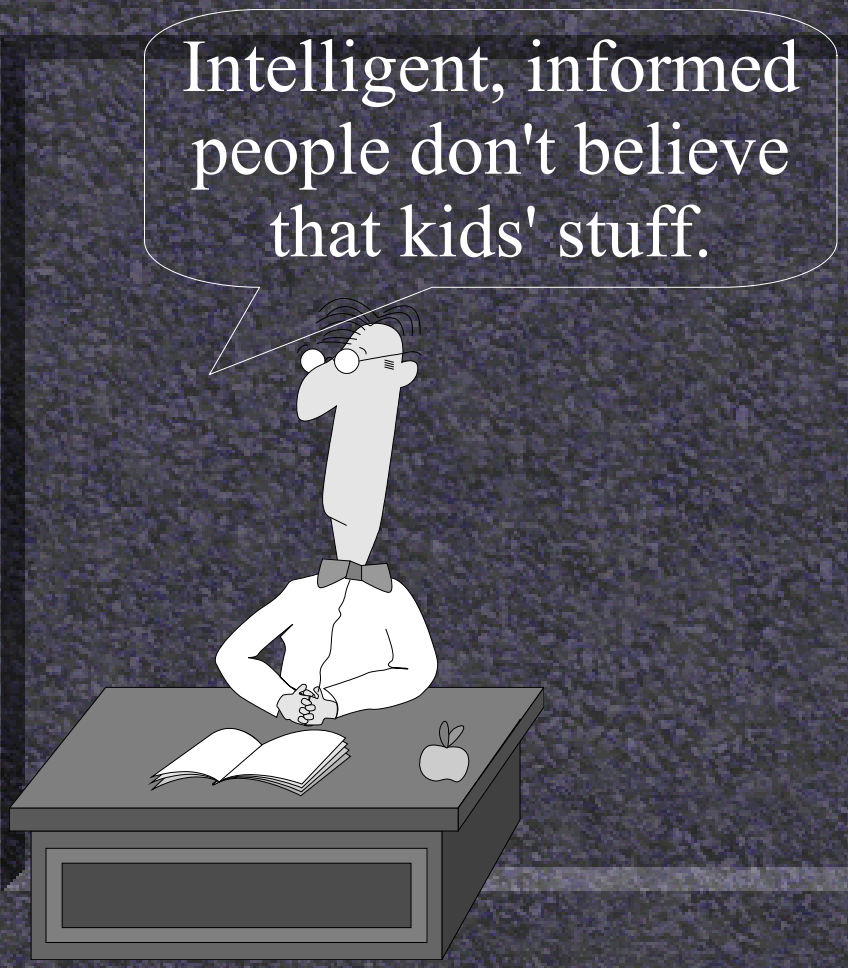
Positive Role of the Mind

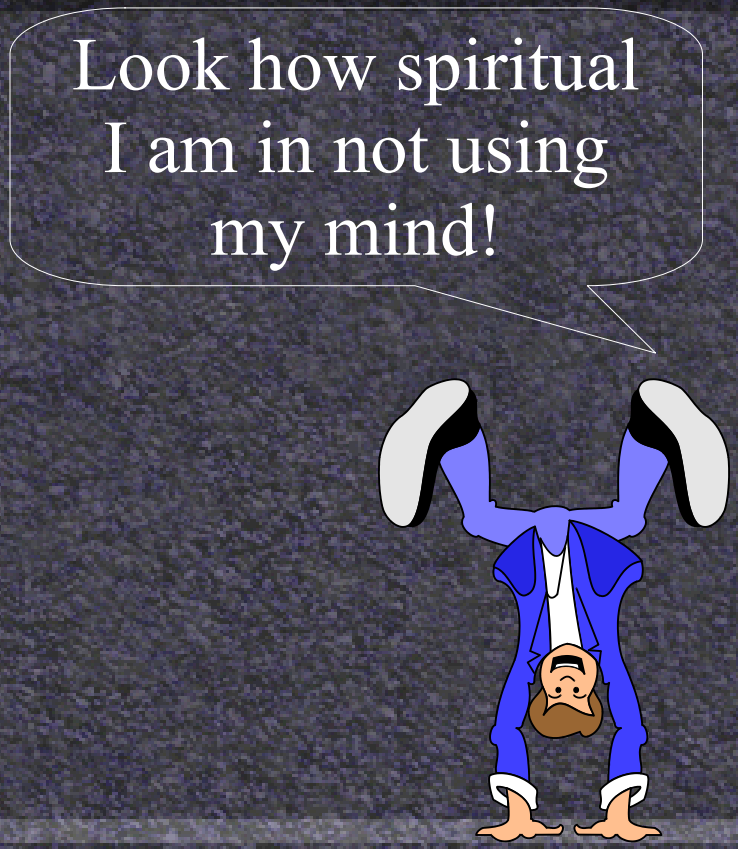
- The mind is not intrinsically unspiritual (Matt. 22:37; Eph. 4:17-24; Rom. 12:1-2).
- Tension between mind and Spirit comes from a crippled view.
- The Holy Spirit created the mind (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; Job 32:8).
- Redemption destroys sin, not creation.

Positive Role of the Mind

- The mind is not intrinsically unspiritual (Matt. 22:37; Eph. 4:17-24; Rom. 12:1-2).
- Supposed tension between mind and Spirit comes from a crippled view.
- The Holy Spirit is the Creator of all (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; Job 32:8), including mind.
- Redemption does not destroy creation but destroys sin, the perversion of creation.

Pride Corrupts the Mind

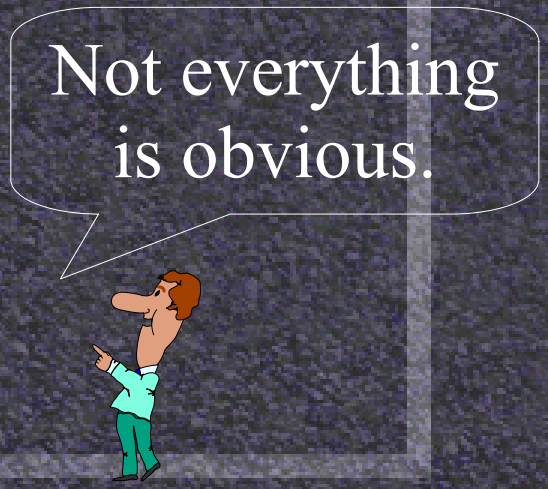




3. Clarity of Scripture

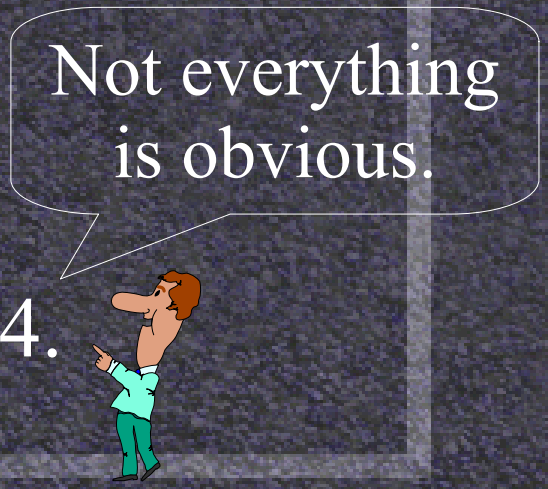
Meaning of Clarity

- The Bible's basic message is clear.
- But naive reading can make mistakes. For example:
  - Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9-14).
  - The banquet (Luke 14:15-24).



Meaning of Clarity

- The Bible's basic message is clear and accessible to all.
- But sincere, naïve first reading can make mistakes. For example:
  - Identifying with the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14.
  - The banquet in Luke 14:15-24.



4. Nonreflection Does Not Eliminate Bias

- Biases exist unawares.
- Reflection can create <u>further</u> biases, but can also eliminate biases.
- Hermeneutics arises to solve problems.

4. Nonreflection Does Not Eliminate Bias

- Biases exist even when we are not aware of them.
- Reflection can create <u>further</u> biases, but can also eliminate biases.
- Hermeneutics does not create the problem, but arises when people already have a problem.

Implications of *Lex Christi*

1C: God is Lord of all.
7C: God is present in every aspect of life.

Together, these imply that we should apply ourselves comprehensively to reform the way we respond to Scripture.

B. The Interpretive Framework Provided by a Biblical Worldview

Lex Christi Framework

- From 1C: God is all-important
- 2C: Covenantal words are from God, through speech, to man
- 1C: God is God
- 2C: God specifies his covenant
- 3C: Man receives under obligation

1. Lordship of God

- God is absolute Lord of all.
- We owe absolute allegiance, in all things.
  - Matt. 22:37: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."
  - 2 Cor. 10:4-5: We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

2. Biblical Worldview

Creator/Creature Distinction

- Listen; don't impose

NO to:

- Pantheistic mysticism
- Platonic reminiscence
- Rationalism
- Autonomous hermeneutics

The doctrine of God makes a difference!

Immanence of God

- God meets us where we are.
- Interpretation is fruitful.

Immanence of God

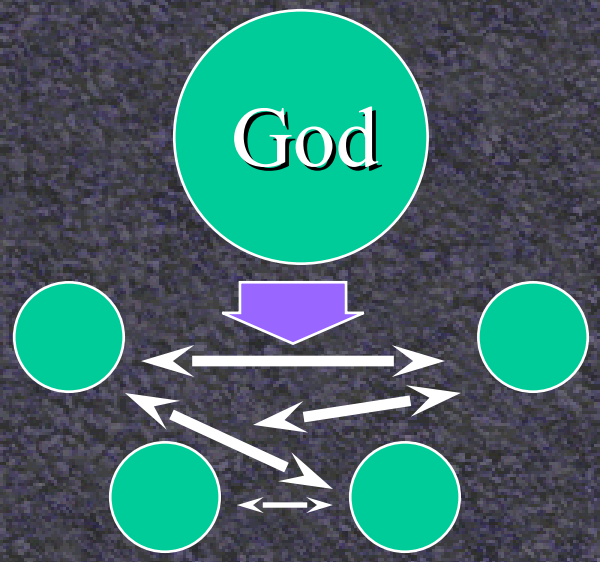
- God meets us where we are.
- Interpretation is not hopeless, groping for an inexpressible something, but fruitful because God provides.

God Plans History

- Interpretation has a goal.
- We are responsible to God for interpreting.

God Designs Human Relationships

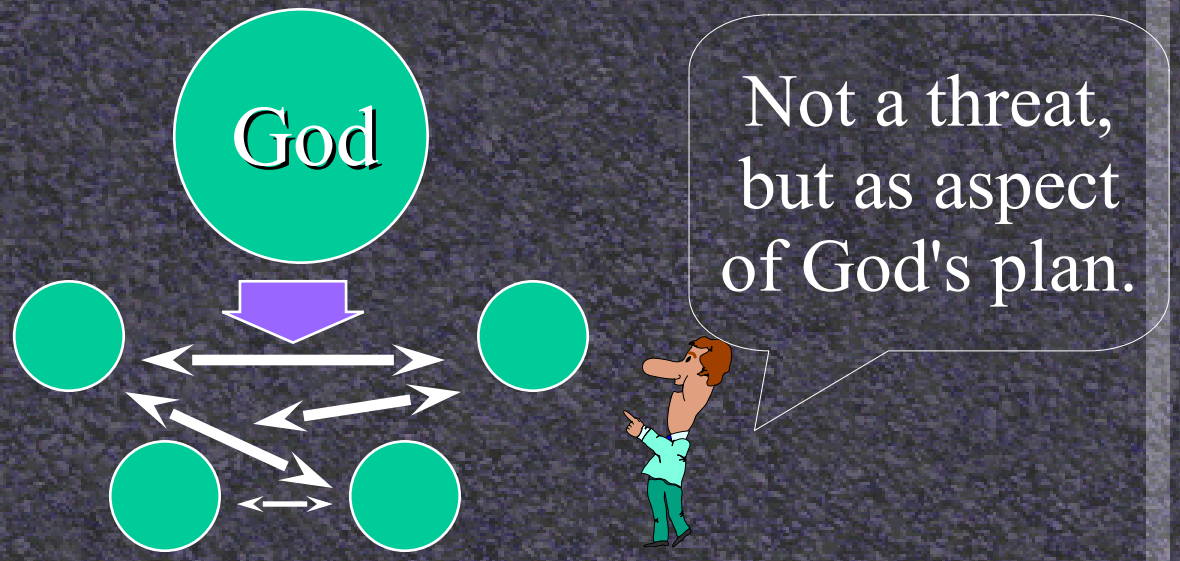
- We depend on others.



Not a threat, but as aspect of God's plan.

God Designs Human Relationships

- We are dependent on God <u>and</u> on other human beings, but not so as to be puppets.



3. The Word of God

What Is the Word of God?

- The Bible is the word of God.
- The word of God is what God says; it is God speaking.

I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out
of the land of Egypt …

Forms of the Word of God

- The eternal word (John 1:1)
- God speaks to us (covenantal; Heb. 1:1-3)
  - Direct address
  - Divine messengers
  - Written word
  - Incarnate Christ
- God speaks to the world (Pss. 33:6; 147:18; etc.)

4. Functions of God's Word

Covenantal Words

- 2 Cor. 3 uses covenant for Moses and Paul.
- Covenant is a perspective on all.
- Ancient treaties offer an analogue.

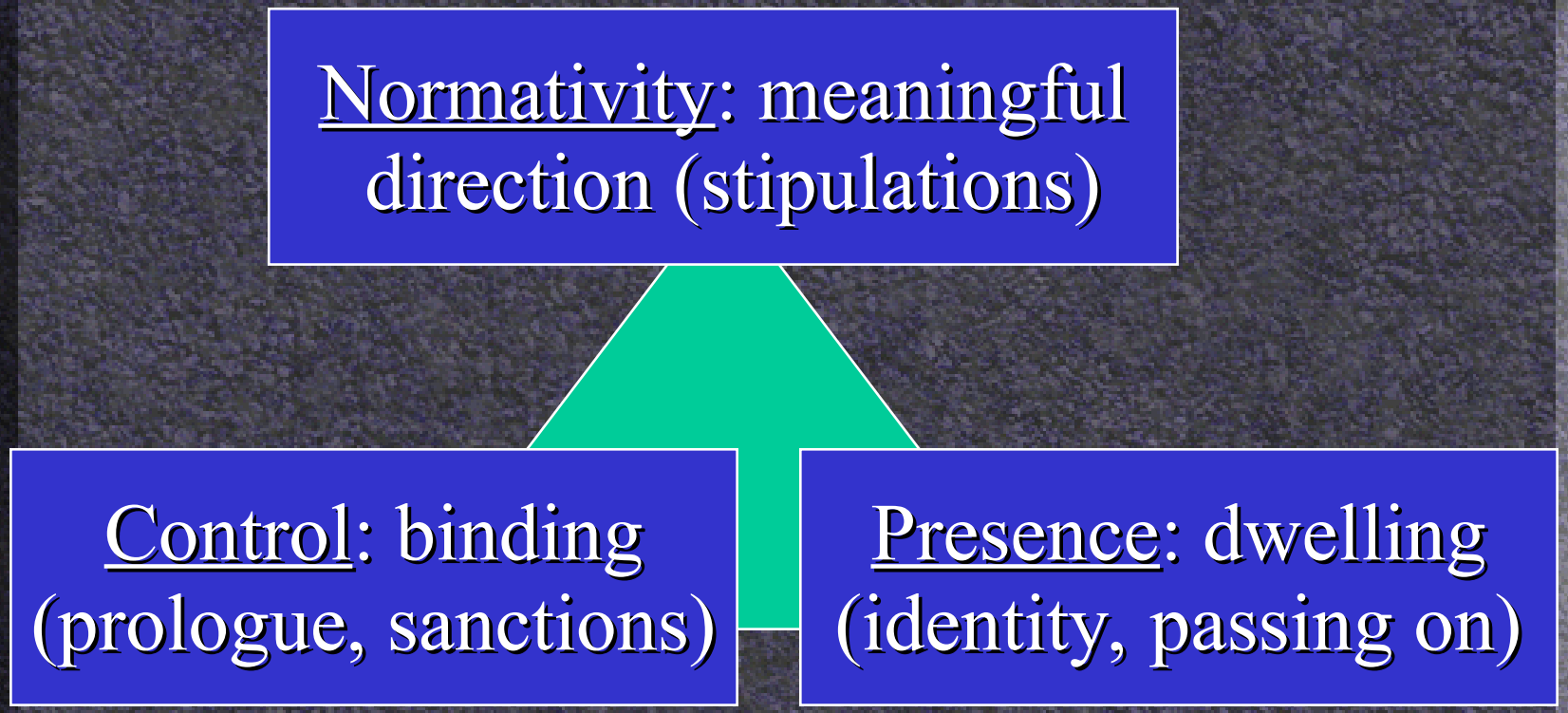
Covenantal Words

- 2 Cor. 3 sees Mosaic words and gospel as covenantal.
- Covenant can be used as a perspective on all God's communication.
- In the Ancient Near East, treaties between suzerain and vassal offer an analogue.

Analogy with Treaty

- Hittite suzerainty treaties had five parts:
  - Identification of suzerain: “I am the Lord”
  - Historical prologue: “who brought you out”
  - Stipulations: “You shall have no other gods”
  - Sanctions: “the Lord will not hold him guiltless”
  - Passing on: Deut. 31-32.

Generalizing Three Aspects



Dependence on God

- Three aspects interlock.
- No scientifically isolated “meaning” (to dominate interpretation).
- No isolated mysticism (without rational obedience).

Dependence on God

- Three aspects interlock.
- We cannot isolate “meaning” (normative) in order scientifically to dominate interpretation.
- We cannot isolate presence in order mystically to commune without responsible obedience.

5. Human Nature

Creation of Man

- Image of God (Gen 1:26-28)
- Intrinsically imitative of God in knowledge
- Capable of understanding God's word

Kinds of Human Nature

- Original innocence (Adam, Eve, Gen 2:25)
- Fallen, unregenerate
- Fallen, regenerate
- Christ in his human nature in humiliation
- Christ in exaltation
- Consummate, perfected saints
- Consummate reprobates (hell)

The Antithesis (Kuyper)

Regenerate	Unregenerate
• Loves God	• Hates God
• Submits to Christ	• Self governed
• Submits to God's word	• Critical
• Thinks God's thoughts	• Autonomous

Mixed Results

Regenerate

- Still sinful
- Gradual growth
- Sinful in interpretation

Unregenerate

- Made in the image of God
- Lives in God's world
- Knows God (Rom 1)
- Receives gracious benefits (common grace)
- Lives on "borrowed capital"

Implications for Society

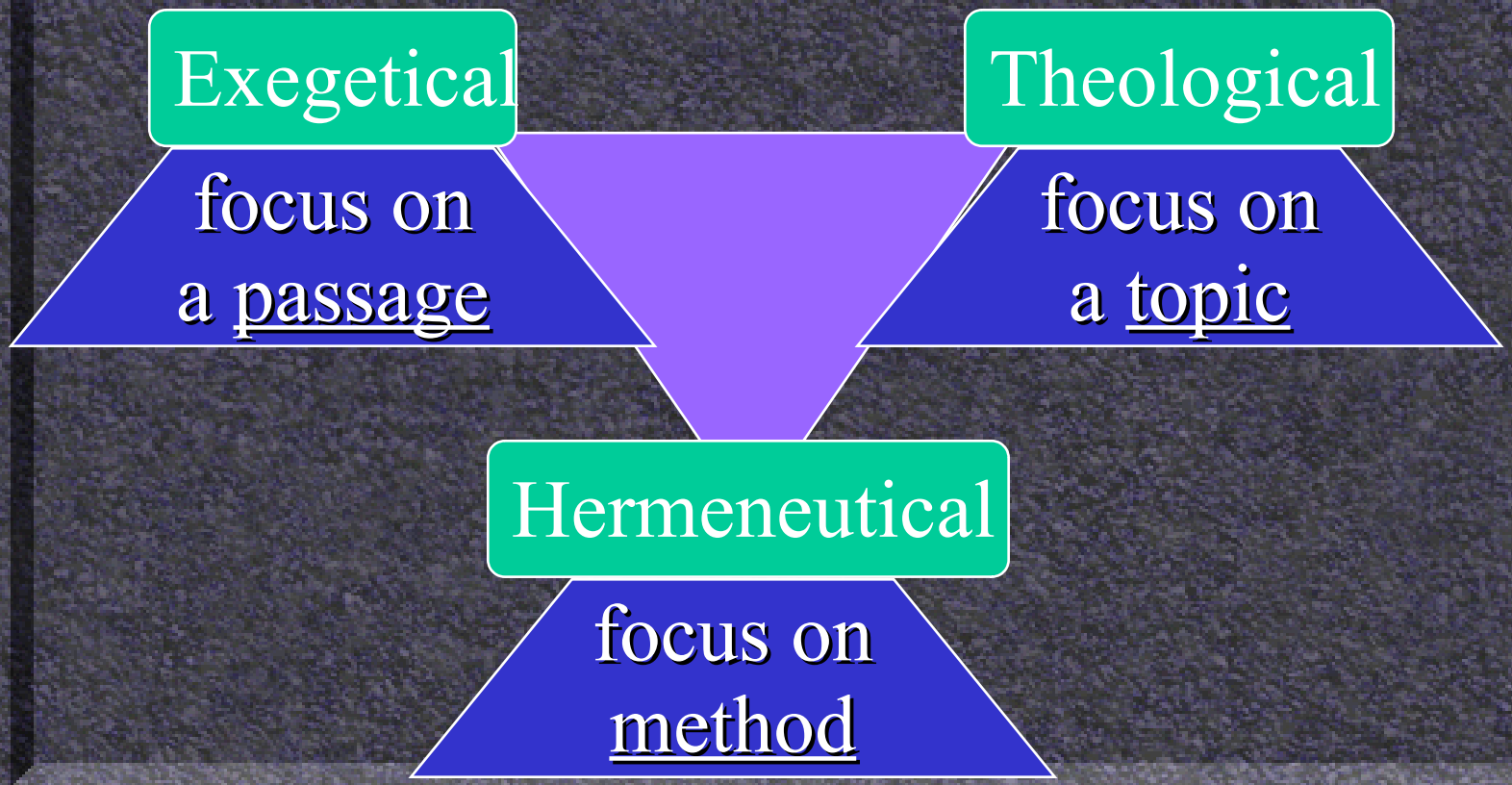
- Two religions (with compromises and mixes)
- Two ways for sciences (with mixes)
- Two ways for politics
- Two ways for arts
- Two ways for family, marriage, business
- Two ways for biblical interpretation!
- Mitigated by common grace

Implications for Interpretation

- Implicit antithesis since Eden
- Orthodoxy versus heresy
- Liberalism/modernism as heresy
- Thorough renewal in progress

6. Function of Hermeneutics

Distinguish Hermeneutics



Danger of Dominance

Exegetical

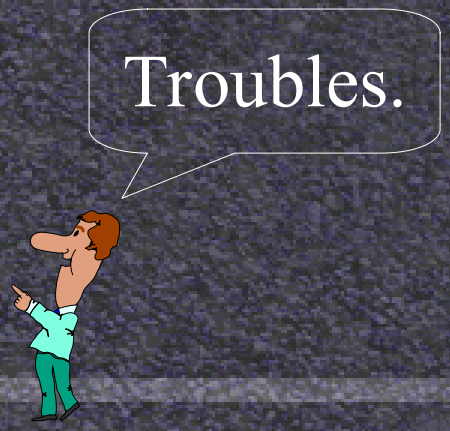
American Fundamentalism

Theological

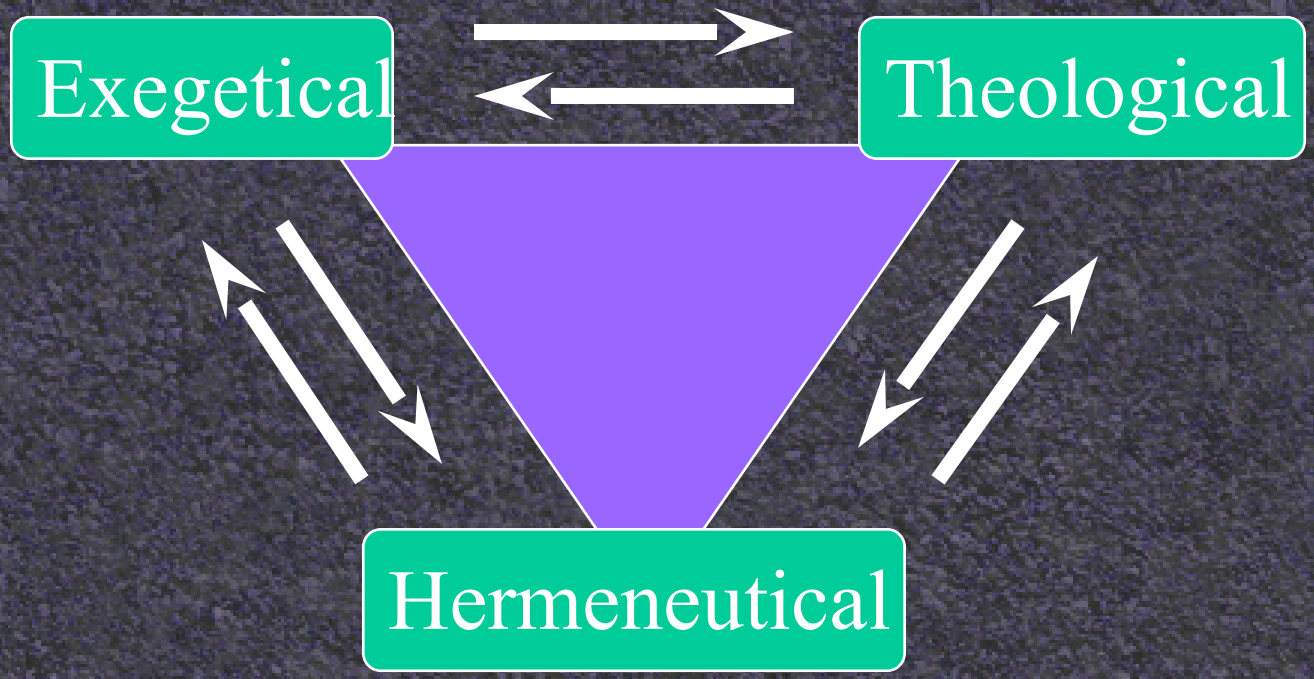
Roman Catholicism

Hermeneutical

Bultmann



Hermeneutical Interaction

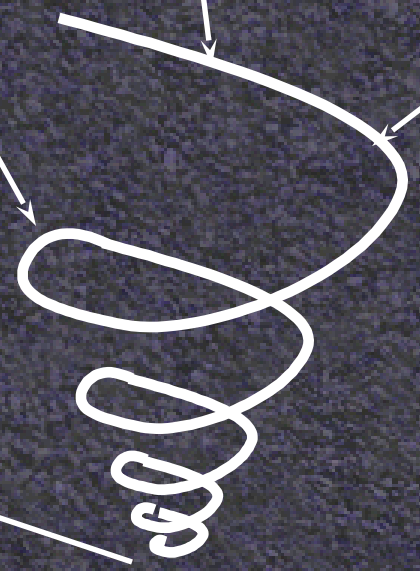


Spiral Progress in Interpretation

Biblical-exegetical

theological

hermeneutical



Holy Spirit as guarantee

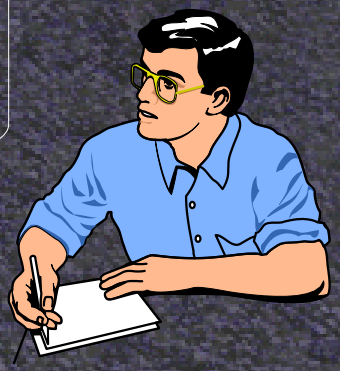
Pastoral Application of Relations between Disciplines

- Find the underlying root of a dispute.

The verse can't possibly mean that!

What are your theological assumptions?

What is your hermeneutics?



Basic Responsibilities in Interpreting the Bible

C. Submission to the Author of the Bible

Definitive Inerrancy

God speaks truth.

- An ordinary historian may get it right.
- God is always right.
- God provides a definitive account.

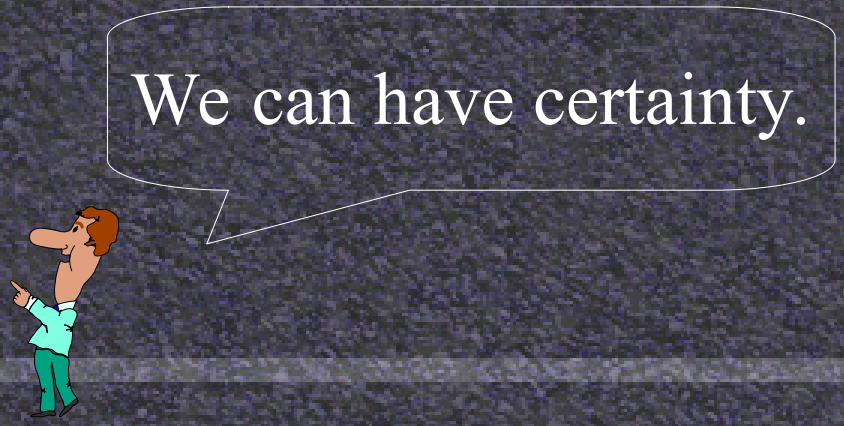
Definitive Inerrancy

God speaks truth.

- An ordinary historian may happen to get it right (his account has no errors).
- God is always right
- God provides a definitive account.

Epistemological Ultimacy

- God can be trusted.
- <u>Believe</u> what he says.
  - Even when it is in tension with other sources.



Perfect Ethical Purity of Speech

- God's speech is a righteous model.
- Supposed "defects" revise our standards.
  - Round numbers
  - Selective history
  - Interpretive quotations

Perfect Ethical Purity of Speech

- God's speech is a righteous model.
- Supposed "defects" in the Bible should lead to revising our standards of what is "defective."
  - Round numbers
  - Selective history
  - Interpretive quotations

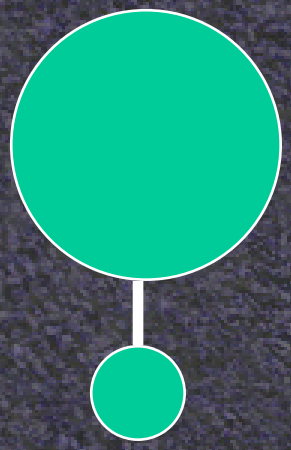
D. Submission to the Structured <u>Organization</u> of the Bible

Unity of a Single "Book"

- One divine Author (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; Heb. 1:1)
- One unified account,
  - in history of redemption
  - in doctrine

God-Centered Book

- God is central topic.
- Presupposed when not mentioned (Esther)

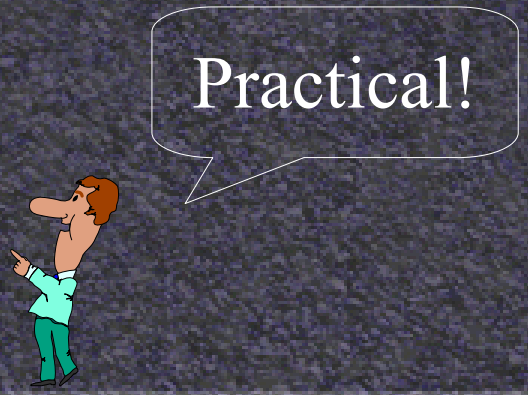


God-Centered Book

- God is a central topic and concern
- He is presupposed even when not explicitly mentioned (for example, Esther)

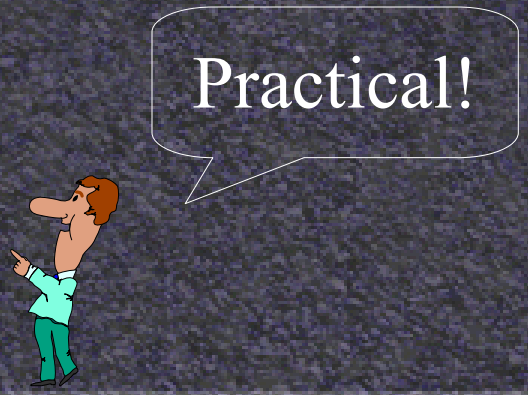
Redemptive Goal of the Bible

- Not just informs, but transforms (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 1:1; 2:3; 3:5).



Redemptive Goal of the Writing

- The Bible is not just random information, but designed to transform, equip, and encourage us (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 1:1; 2:3; 3:5).



Word and Deed in Genesis 1

- Word and deed are interwoven (for example, Genesis 1).

"Let there be light!"

word

God called the light

"day"

word

… and there was light.

deed

Word and Deed in God's Plan

- Word and deed interpret each other.
- God's with us includes both word and deed.
- Redemption consists in word and deed.
- In interpreting, see word in context of deed.

Word and Deed in God's Plan

- Word and deed each point to and interpret the other.
- God's communion with us includes both verbal content (word; propositions) and action (deed; historical events) in a unity.
- Redemption consists in an accomplishment (Christ died and rose) and a message (the gospel announces the accomplishment).
- Interpretation must see word in context of deed.

The Bible Is Christ-Centered

Luke 24:25-27: … And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

The Bible Is Christ-Centered

Luke 24:25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Pervasive Witness

all canon

totality

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Main Theme of OT

summary

international focus of Acts is in the OT

46 and said to them, "Thus is it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Other Passages about Christocentricity

- 2 Cor. 1:20
- 1 Pet. 1:10-12
- John 5:39; 5:46-47; 8:56
- Matthew