II. Foundations of Biblical Interpretation

What are our presuppositions and our basic framework?
The Challenge

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

The Bible itself has much to say about it.
• Required:
  – Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation
    11-39 (history of interpretation)
  – Poythress, God-Centered Biblical Interpretation (foundations)
• Optional:
  – Berkhof, Principles 40-60 (inspiration)
Where Are We?

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

♦ Looking at principles and framework
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?
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
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 More

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

τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφὰς.
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.
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.
Some Things are Difficult

2 Pet. 3:16: There are some things in them [Paul’s letters] that are hard to understand (δυσνόητα τινα), ...

- The subject-matter is intrinsically difficult.
Luke 24:25: O foolish ones, and **slow of heart to believe** all that the prophets have spoken ... 

Have you ever felt this way?
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.
Intelligent, informed people don't believe that kids' stuff.

Look how spiritual I am in not using my mind!
3. Clarity of Scripture
Meaning of Clarity

- The Bible’s basic message is clear.
- But naive reading can make mistakes. For example:

Not everything is obvious.
4. Nonreflection Does Not Eliminate Bias

- Biases exist unawares.
- Reflection can create further biases, but can also eliminate biases.
- Hermeneutics arises to solve problems.
B. The Interpretive Framework Provided by a Biblical Worldview
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.

We are going somewhere.
God Plans History

- Interpretation has a goal.
- We are responsible to God for interpreting.
• We depend on others.

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

- **Normativity**: meaningful direction (stipulations)
- **Control**: binding (prologue, sanctions)
- **Presence**: dwelling (identity, passing on)
Dependence on God

- Three aspects interlock.
- No scientifically isolated “meaning” (to dominate interpretation).
- No isolated mysticism (without rational 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**
- Loves God
- Submits to Christ
- Submits to God's word
- Thinks God's thoughts

**Unregenerate**
- Hates God
- Self governed
- Critical
- 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

Exegetical
focus on a passage

Hermeneutical
focus on method

Theological
focus on a topic
Danger of Dominance

Exegetical

American Fundamentalism

Theological

Roman Catholicism

Hermeneutical

Bultmann

Troubles.
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.
Epistemological Ultimacy

- God can be trusted.
- **Believe** what he says.
  - Even when it is in tension with other sources.

We can have certainty.
Perfect Ethical Purity of Speech

- God’s speech is a righteous model.
- Supposed “defects” revise our standards.
  - Round numbers
  - Selective history
  - Interpretive quotations
D. Submission to the Structured Organization 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)

Pay attention to God's actions.
Redemptive Goal of the Bible

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

Practical!
Word and Deed in Genesis 1

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

“Let there be light!”

God called the light “day”

... and there was light.

...
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.
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.
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.
46 and said to them, “Thus is it 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