

Protestant Biblical Interpretation

A Textbook of Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants

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CHAPTER IV

THE PERSPECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

By *perspective principles* we mean those principles of interpretation which act as a general guide for all interpretation. Such principles have a superintending function. They have a wide generality of application and they serve as guides for every passage of Scripture under interpretation. Hence they form the set of mind for the interpreter as he approaches the several passages of Scripture. They constitute an over-all exegetical orientation. They are general and thereby flexible principles of interpretation. They help the exegete make decisions where a narrower, more restricted principle, offers no help. There is a measure of convention in the interpretation of any document and the perspective principles give guidance at this point.

(1). *The principle of the priority of the original languages.* The purpose of this principle is neither to confine the study of the Bible to the students of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek nor to discourage the average Christian from reading his Bible. The average Christian with the proper books and hard work can learn much of the genuine sense of the Scriptures. As long as the interpreter does not work with the original languages he has no method of judging the accuracy of his translation. There is always a veil which separates the interpreter from the original text, and although most of the times this veil is thin if not diaphanous, there are times when it is thick. But there is no method of knowing how thin or thick the veil is, if the interpreter is not a student of the original languages.

We cannot establish the great doctrines of our Faith on any basis less than that of the original languages. In the great debates about the nature of the atonement the theologian is greatly handicapped unless he knows the differences in meanings of the Greek prepositions employed and the verbs used in conjunction with the doctrine of the atonement. The situation is even more acute if the *heretic* professes to know the original language, and the defender of the Faith does not.

Whether it be in matters of great theological concern, or of routine exegesis, the original languages are necessary for accurate, factual interpretation. Some examples are as follows:

The Scripture speaks of "taking away" the fruitless branch (John 15:2). Some have said that the word means "to lift up," that is, the vine is on the ground and needs to be propped up. It is true that the simple meaning of the Greek word here employed is "to raise, to lift up." But this Greek word has many meanings. Thayer's *Lexicon* treats the word under three main headings and thirteen subheadings. The *Lexicon* notes that this word (*airō*) is the customary word for *pruning*. John 15:2 must then refer to a pruning of branches, not to the lifting up of branches.

Hebrews 7:26 reads: "For such a high priest became us." This appears on the surface to be a reference to the incarnation but one glance at the Greek verb used reveals the impossibility of that interpretation. It is the verb, "to be fitting." Hence the verse informs us that we have a high priest who suits us, who fits our needs and situation.

In Hebrews 2:16 the taking on of the seed of Abraham appears again like a reference to the incarnation. A check of the Greek text reveals first of all that the words "on him the nature of angels" is not there; and further, that the verb means "to grasp, to lay hold." The verse is not speaking of Christ's becoming a man rather than an angel, but rather that in redemption He is saving ("laying hold of") men not angels.

Hebrews 7:3 speaks of Melchisedec's having no father, nor mother, and of his being "without descent." The latter means in English, "without children." But the Greek word means, "without genealogy." Hence Melchisedec could have had children, but if their genealogical list were not kept, then Melchisedec would be without genealogy. The verse does not tell us that he had no children, but that no genealogy of Melchisedec is recorded in Scripture.

In the same verse it has been urged that the text teaches that Melchisedec was a Christophany. That cannot be maintained from the close study of the verb. The verb means "to copy, to make a resemblance, to make a facsimile," and has been used with reference to painters making copies of works. The noun derived from this verb actually means "copy, resemblance." The writer of the epistle is affirming that Melchisedec is a copy, a resemblance, a picture of the Son of God, and not literally the Son of God himself.

(2). *The principle of the accommodation of revelation.* The Bible is the truth of God accommodated to the human mind for its proper assimilation. The Bible was written in three *human* languages. The Bible is written in the terms of the *human* environment (physical and social). The truth of God made contact with the *human* mind else it would stand *meaningless*. To be a meaningful and assimilable revelation, the revelation had to come in human languages, in human thought-forms, and referring to objects of human experience. *Revelation of necessity must have an anthropomorphic character.*¹

The accommodated character of divine revelation is especially obvious in such instances as the Tabernacle and in the parabolic teaching of Christ. In both instances the human and earthly vehicle is the bearer of spiritual truth. Our understanding of the spiritual world is *analogical*. The fact of God's almightiness is spoken of in terms of a right arm because among men the right arm or hand is the symbol of strength or power. Preëminence is spoken of as sitting at God's right hand because in human social affairs, that was the place of honor in relation to the host. Judgment is spoken of in terms of fire because pain from burning is the most intense known in common experience. The gnawing worm is the fitting analogy for the pain that is steady, remorseless, and inescapable. Similarly, the glories of heaven are in terms of human experience--costly structures of gold, silver, and jewels, no tears; no death; and the tree of life. The question as to whether descriptions of hell and heaven are *literal* or *symbolic* is not the point. The point is that they are *valid descriptions* of inescapable realities.

1 Cf. the extended discussion of this under the caption, "Does Inspiration Exclude All Accommodation?" by Cellérier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 266 ff., and in P. Fairbairn, *Hermeneutical Manual*, p. 88 ff. Both agree that there is an accommodation in the *form* of revelation, but not in *matter*.

The particular character of those realities will become apparent in their own time.

This anthropomorphic character is nothing against the Bible but is necessary for the communication of God's truth to man. This the interpreter will always keep in mind. The point has been excellently stated by Seisenberger:

We must not be offended by anthropomorphic expressions, which seem to us out of keeping with our conception of God. It is with a well-considered design that the Holy Scripture speaks of God as of a Being resembling man, and ascribes to Him a face, eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet and the sense of smell and hearing. This is done out of consideration for man's power of comprehension; and the same is the case when the Bible represents God as loving or hating, as jealous, angry, glad, or filled with regret, dispositions which apply to God not *per affectum* but *per effectum*. They show us that God is not coldly indifferent to loyalty or disloyalty on the part of man, but notices them well. Moreover we must not forget that man is made in the image and likeness of God, and that therefore in the divine Being there must be something analogous to the qualities of men, though in the highest perfection.²

The interpreter who is aware of anthropomorphic character of the divine revelation will not be guilty of grotesque forms of literal exegesis. More than one unlettered person and cultist has taken the anthropomorphisms of the Scriptures literally and has so thought of God as possessing a body.

Before leaving this subject of accommodation of Scripture it is necessary to declare our rejection of the liberals' use of the idea of accommodation. This particular species of interpretation by accommodation stems from Semler. Accommodation to liberalism was the evisceration or enervation of the doctrinal content of the Bible by explaining doctrinal passages as accommodations to the thought-patterns of the times of the Biblical writers.³ Thus they asserted not only accommodation of form, but of *matter* or *content*. The atonement as a sacrifice was, by way of example, the manner in which first century Hebrew Christians thought of the death of Christ, but it is by no means binding upon Christians today.

(3). *The principle of progressive revelation.* By this principle is not meant the liberal and infidel theory of an evolving religion. By this method a genuine revelation was denied, miracles discarded, and the uniqueness of the religion of Israel destroyed. It received a clear treatment in Fosdick's *The Modern Use of the Bible*.

By progressive revelation we mean that the Bible sets forth a movement of God, with the *initiative* coming from God and not man, in which God brings man up through the theological infancy of the Old Testament to the maturity of the New Testament. This does not mean that there are no advanced elements in the Old Testament, nor any simple matters in the New, but that this is *the general pattern of revelation*. That this is the teaching of the New Testament may be argued from the following:

(a). In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord is not instructing His disciples to *break* the law for he came

2 Seisenberger, *Practical Handbook for the Study of the Bible*, p. 466.

3 B. Bacon, *He Opened Unto us the Scripture*, does this sort of exegesis repeatedly throughout the volume.

not to break the law but to fill the law full.⁴ That is, he came to bring out its wider, larger, higher significance. The law was proper as far as it went, but it did not go far enough. It taught a basic morality to the children of Israel, but our Lord invites us to a higher plane in the Sermon on the Mount. No mere abstinence from killing will do; we must come up to the full measure of love. No mere refraining from cursing is adequate; we must have a serious attitude toward the sanctity of a promise. The law of Mount Sinai taught a necessary but elementary morality; the Sermon on the Mount explains and develops this morality to its wider and fuller meaning.

(b). In his epistle to the Galatians Paul divides up the dealings of God into the period before Christ, and after Christ. The period before the birth of Christ is the period of childhood and immaturity. It is the period of elementary education and preparation. In the fulness of time Christ came and with him comes the full revelation with its maturity of doctrine and Christian living. The Old Testament was a period of learning the alphabet, of carnal ordinances and elementary teaching. In Christ the fulness of revelation comes, and God's sons are reckoned as mature heirs.

(c). Exceptionally clear in relation to this point under discussion is the teaching of Hebrews 1:1-2. We are told that God has two great revelations, one of which was given through prophets to Israel, and the other through a Son to the church. Three adverbs commence the book of Hebrews (in the Greek text) and they each describe part of the manner in which God spoke through the prophets to Israel. First, the Old Testament was uneven in its progress through *time*. The revelations came sporadically. The *method* of revelation greatly varied. We have such a diversity as the law written with the finger of God, and Balaam rebuked by the voice of his ass. The *period* of this revelation is the ancient times (*palai*), that is to say, the time of man's theological infancy and youth. In contrast to the first verse is the second which asserts that God has spoken his final word through his Son. God spoke clearly, directly, and conclusively through the highest possible organ of divine revelation, his Son, and so brought into existence his full revelation, the New Testament.

It is the additional teaching of the book of Hebrews that the Old Testament revelation was a *material* revelation, the spiritual truth being encased in earthly and cultural shells, and one of *types, shadows* and *parables*. Whereas the New Testament is a *spiritual* revelation, and contains the substance, reality and fulfilment of the Old Covenant forms.

This perspective of progressive revelation is very important to the interpreter. He will not force New Testament meanings into the Old, yet he will be able to more fully expound the Old knowing its counterparts in the New. He will adjust his sights to the times, customs, manners, and morals of the people at any given stage in the Old Testament revelation, and he will be aware of the partial and elementary nature of the Old Testament revelation. He will take Augustine's words ("Distingue tempora et concordabis Scripture"--distinguish the times and you will harmonize Scripture--as a guide so as not to create a contradiction in Scripture by forcing a New Testament standard of morality or doctrine upon an Old Testament passage. Monogamy was a distinct emphasis of the New Testament and must not be urged as a contradiction to the polygamy of the Patriarchs who apparently had no revelation at this point.

Progressive revelation in no manner qualifies the doctrine of inspiration, and it in no way implies that

4 Cf. Broadus' excellent interpretation at this point in his commentary on Matthew (*The American Commentary on the New Testament*) *in loco*.

the Old Testament is less inspired. It states simply that the fullness of revelation is in the New Testament. This does not mean that there is no clear Old Testament teaching nor that its predictions are nullified. On the other hand, the heart of Christian theology is found in the New Testament which contains the clearer revelation of God. Christian theology and ethics must take their primary rootage in the New Testament revelation.

(4). *The principle of historical propriety.* Historical interpretation as such is discussed in this book under the division of cultural interpretation in Chapter III. Berkhof's chapter on historical interpretation is exceptionally fine.⁵ By historical propriety we mean that an interpreter must have some sense as to what men may or may not have believed in any given century of Biblical revelation. As Maas has properly asserted, "The true sense of the Bible cannot be found in an idea or thought historically untrue."⁶

Typical of a lack of historical propriety are efforts to prove baptismal regeneration from John 3:5, and the "real presence" in the mass from John 6. Certainly the latter was uttered *before* the Last Supper, and if it were a treatise on the same it hardly would have been meaningful to the multitude which heard the words. It is also doubtful if Nicodemus would have understood that the word *water* meant baptismal regeneration. That he could have imagined it meant baptism possibly could be argued from the popularity of John's baptism, but this is only a possibility. Some interpret the *water* to mean the word of God (Ephesians 5:26) but Nicodemus could hardly have read Ephesians!

At least in historical terms water would most obviously mean *cleansing*. Christ would then be making the basic assertion that regeneration is both a *cleansing* and *renewing* experience just as Titus 3:5 calls it "the washing of regeneration."

Lack of propriety in historical perspective is the source of a misinterpretation of Acts 15. The majority of the commentators interpret the speech of James as a summary of the findings of the council which asserted among other things that the Gentiles were *now* being saved. The citation from Amos used by James is to prove, therefore, that God is *now* saving the Gentiles. Lacking historical perspective at this point some interpreters make the *now*-salvation element of James' speech incidental, and conceive the full force of the Amos quotation to be a description of the *future* salvation of the Gentiles during the millennium. It hardly seems historically proper that James would make the burden of his reply something about the *future* millennium. The question may also be raised as to the degree to which anything eschatological had been crystallized in the early church at the time of James' speech. The wisest course in such a situation is to take the advice of Angus and Green:

Of two meanings, that one is generally to be preferred which was most obvious to the comprehension of the hearers or original readers of the inspired passage, allowing for the modes of thought prevalent in their own day, as well as for those figurative expressions which were so familiar as to be no exception to the general rule.⁷

Another interpretation of questionable historical propriety is that one which asserts that Genesis 4:1

5 Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, Chapter VI. Cf. also Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching*, Chapter XIV ("The Expositor and Historical Interpretation").

6 A. J. Maas, "Exegesis," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, V, 698.

7 Angus and Green, *Cyclopedic Handbook to the Bible*, p. 180.

contains a reference to the God-man. The text is made to read: "I have gotten a man, *even Jehovah*," as if Eve comprehended the full future meaning of the words of Genesis 3:15. This interpretation presumes far more theological content in the mind of Eve than the record as it stands will allow. The *eth* in the passage more normally means, "with the help of," so the line would read, "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah."

(5). *The principle of ignorance.* Farrar cites the Talmudic rule, "Teach thy tongue to say, I do not know."⁸ That there are passages that are puzzling and have to date yielded to the skill of no interpreter must be candidly admitted. Lindsay has put his finger on the cause when he wrote: "The obscurity of ancient documents is far more frequently occasioned by our ignorance of multitudes of things, then so familiarly known, that a passing allusion only was needed to present a vivid picture, than any difficulties connected with the language itself."⁹

Speech occurs within a context of conversation, and a cultural context. The meaning of a given sentence is dependent upon the context of conversation and the context of culture. When we have Biblical sentences without the full conversational context out of which they arose and where the cultural context is imperfectly known, we can certainly expect some of them to be very puzzling.

We must add to this the observation that language itself is very complex, and it takes a number of occurrences of a word to capture and reflect its diverse meanings. What we say of words also applies to all points of grammar. If we did not have sufficient extra-Biblical materials to supply us with the necessary linguistic and grammatical information we would lack the means of interpreting the Bible as clearly as we would wish. The interpreter must come to the Bible then with the realization that some matters are going to be obscure for the reasons we have just suggested.

Let one who doubts this assertion take some of the commentaries and see their speculations on such verses as Malachi 2:15 or 1 Peter 3:19 or 1 Corinthians 15:29 (with over thirty interpretations) or Hebrews 6:1-9. On the expression "tasted of the heavenly gift" (Hebrews 6:4) there are over ten contending interpretations. Still to be rescued from the obscurity of their meaning are such matters as our Lord's reference to swords (Luke 22:38), or Matthew's reference to the bodies coming out of the grave at the time of the crucifixion (27:52), or the reference of Moses to Azazel (Lev. 16:26).

When there is not sufficient interpretative material on hand the prudent interpreter will admit his ignorance and teach his tongue to say, "I do not know." The interpreter's hope is that archeology will turn up the material which will clear up these obscure references.

(6). *The principle of differentiating interpretation from application.* Another form of this principle is: "Interpretation is one; application is many." A passage of Scripture has one meaning and if it had several (as Cell erier notes)¹⁰ hermeneutics would be indeterminate. But it seems rather clear from Scripture itself that although it has one meaning, there are moral *applications* of the Scripture. For example Paul wrote "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). He further stated

8 Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 474.

9 Lindsay, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, I, 169.

10 Cell erier (*op. cit.*, pp. 35-50) has some sharp but excellent observations about double-sense interpretation.

that things which happened to the Israelites in the wilderness journey were for our examples (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). In 2 Tim. 3:16 we are told that the Scriptures are for our profit with reference to doctrine, reproof, correction, and education in righteousness.

A given passage in Exodus or Leviticus has one meaning, but the moral principles of the passage may be capable of many applications. We must keep in mind that applications are not interpretations and must not receive that status. We must also be aware of the temptation to misinterpret a passage so as to derive an application from it.

For example, John the Baptist said, "He must increase, and I must decrease," (John 3:30). The strict interpretation of the passage is that John must decrease in *popularity* with the people as our Lord increases in popularity. Only very cautiously may we apply this to our lives, i.e., our plans, programs, and self interests must give way in consecration to Christ. If this application is given as an interpretation, then the one true meaning of the text is lost.

John also mentions that our Lord "needs must go through Samaria" (John 4:2). This was a geographical "must." The only convenient way our Lord could go from Judea to Galilee was by way of Samaria. The application is that our lives should be conducted with an eye open to opportunities for personal work, and we must accept certain dispositions as from God for that very purpose.

The point of this principle may be summed up in the judicious words of Todd:

After the meaning of a passage has been learned one is in a position to apply it to the life of the individual or of a company. The application is, however, quite a distinct thing from the interpretation . . . Much has been lost in the study of Scripture by using them almost entirely by way of application, without inquiring into the literal meaning . . . In devotional study, the important matter is to be able to apply the Scriptures intelligently to the life, so that they may truly affect conduct. Sometimes, however, lessons are drawn which are, to say the least, very farfetched, and not really warranted by the passage. The lesson may be perfectly correct, but it will generally be found that there is some Scripture from which it may be learned without forcing an application which in any way interferes with the interpretation.¹¹

(7). *The checking principle.* The purpose of this principle is to check for our own blind spots and peculiarities, to save us from pitfalls of previous erring exegesis, to improve our work with the wisdom of the past, and fill in our imperfect knowledge.

Our results should be checked with *secular* studies if the passage borders on matters of science or history. Whoever comments on Genesis 1 should learn something of contemporary geological, biological, and anthropological studies, and whoever comments on the book of Acts should inform himself of the relevant studies in classics.

Our results should be checked with some great *doctrinal* document to see if we have kept the rule of faith. We may learn that in some matters we have been premature, or that our research has been inadequate. It might, on the other hand, reveal shortcomings in our doctrinal symbols.

¹¹ Todd, *Principles of Interpretation*, p. 24.

Our results should be checked with the great *exegetical* labors of the past. Spurgeon, in his customary practical wisdom, wrote that "you are not such wiseacres as to think or say that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men, who have labored before you in the field of exposition . . . It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others."¹²

Such regard for the exegetical literature of the past does not mean slavish conformity nor bookishness in interpretation. However, when men have spent a lifetime studying Hebrew and Greek, and for years have labored on commentaries, it is not the better part of wisdom to ignore such results. On the contrary, it takes a man of extraordinary ability to contribute something genuinely new and fresh in exegetical work. Any interpretation that is quite apart from the commentaries is not necessarily wrong, but it is at least suspect. Too frequently the by-passing of commentaries is done by one whose exegetical labors evidence that he is in the sorest need of helps from commentaries.

(8). *The principle of induction.* In our interpretation of Scripture we must *discover* the meaning of a passage, not *attribute* one to it. Luther wrote that "the best teacher is the one who does not bring his meaning into the Scripture, but brings it out of the Scripture."¹³ *Exegesis* is bringing the meaning of a text to the surface; *eisegesis* is reading our ideas into the text. Induction in exegesis means that the Scripture is allowed to speak for itself. Happy is the man who can approach his Bible relatively free from predilections, prejudices, and biases. Too frequently the Bible is approached with stock-in-trade or mere traditional interpretations. But the task of the interpreter is to determine the meaning of the Bible, not to verify his prejudices.

The parable of the Ten Virgins has suffered from such treatment. It has suffered from the Arminians who wish to prove the amissibility of Christians; from the Perfectionists who wish to prove the second blessing from it; from Calvinists who wish to demonstrate the worthlessness of empty profession; from typologists who wish to make it teach pneumatology; and from eschatologists who have derived timetables from the parable. What senseless questions have gathered about this parable! The more restrained commentators take oil to mean readiness, and Jeremias takes it to mean repentance.¹⁴

We should take Luther's advice and seek to extract the meaning from Scripture, not import one into it. We should take Calvin's advice and not play with Scripture as with a tennis ball. We should approach the inspired record as humble learners and not as controversialists or dogmatists.

(9). *The principle of preference for the clearest interpretation.* Frequently the interpreter is confronted with two or more equally probable interpretations as far as grammatical rules permit. One is a strain on our credulity; the other is not. One meaning is rather obvious, the other recondite. The rule is: choose the clear over the obscure, and the more rational over the credulous. Or, in the words of Horne, "Of any particular passage the most simple sense--or that which most readily suggests itself to an attentive and intelligent reader, possessing competent knowledge--is in all probability the genuine sense or

12 Cited by Briggs, *Biblical Study*, p. 300. Briggs himself warns us that the exegetical literature of the past, as helpful as it may be, may also be very confusing.

13 Cited by Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 475. "Das ist der beste Lehrer, der seine Meinung nicht in die sondern aus der Schrift bringt."

14 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 132.

meaning."¹⁵

Consider the moot question about the sons of God in Genesis 6. Are they angels or pious men? Linguistic evidence can be marshalled for both interpretations. By the application of our present convention or rule we would say take the interpretation that interprets the sons of God as pious men, the godly line of Jehovah worshippers. If we interpret *sons of God* as meaning angels then we have on our hands a host of theological and scientific problems. Where do angels get bodies? how are such bodies able to copulate? what is the status of the children produced as far as the question of "in Adam" is concerned? If we take the expression to mean pious men then the verse means that the godly line of Jehovah worshippers was corrupted by inordinate marriages. We are accordingly free from the nest of scientific and theological difficulties the other alternative creates for us.

The same Hebrew word is used for *side* and *rib*. Thus Eve was made either from Adam's rib or side. Those who interpret the word as *side* believe that Adam was bisexual, and that he was subsequently divided into opposite sexes. In the other interpretation the woman is built up from part of man to show their essential physical and spiritual kinship. Certainly the latter is the simpler interpretation and ought to be accepted rather than the grotesque version of a bisexual Adam.

According to Colossians 1:6 and Romans 10:18, the gospel (in the span of Paul's life) was preached in all the world. There are two interpretations possible: (a) we may take the word "world" literally and insist that all the world was evangelized at that juncture in history, or (b) we may take the world in its popular sense of "the then known world."

If the first interpretation is taken, then the question arises how the world was evangelized. The answer given is that the apostles were raptured around the world like Philip was in his ministry. In the second sense, the expression means simply that the major cities and territories of the Roman empire were reached with the gospel. Certainly the latter is the far easier interpretation to accept than the former. Nor can we approve of the notion that it takes more spirituality to believe an extreme interpretation.

But some insist that *verbal* inspiration demands a strict *literal* interpretation at every point. This cannot be defended because no *necessary connection* can be made between verbal inspiration and literal interpretation to the extent that every word or expression verbally inspired can only be literally interpreted. Not only can this connection not be established, but the very data of the Bible forbid such a dictum. First, we would have to take all anthropomorphisms about God literally, which is simply impossible. Secondly, we cannot interpret literally the poetic imagery and figures of speech found so plentifully in the Bible.

Verbal inspiration does not pledge the interpreter to a crude literalism.

(10). A corollary to this principle is this one: *obscure passages must give right of way to clear passages*. The main principle asserted that in any given passage where two interpretations were proposed, the clearest and simplest should be accepted. This corollary principle asserts that when there are two passages dealing with the same topic, the clear passage should interpret the obscure and not the obscure the clear.

15 T. Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, I, 326, italics omitted.

There is no question that much mischief has been done with Scripture in the history of interpretation, by interpreters who found more than they should in obscure passages of Scripture. Certainly Saul's encounter with the witch at Endor is an obscure passage from which no great doctrine of the spirit world should be constructed. There is no question that 1 Corinthians 15:29 is exceedingly obscure and no doctrine of proxy baptism can be deduced from it. Our guidance should always be to take the record where it is clear as a guide to doctrine, rather than where it is obscure.

All of the preceding is based upon the proposition that *everything essential to salvation and Christian living is clearly revealed in Scripture*. Essential truth is not tucked away amongst incidental remarks, nor is it contained in passages whose meanings are yet sealed mysteries.

The real doctrinal meat of the Bible is those passages where doctrine is dealt with extensively. For example, the Deity of Christ is explained at some length in John 5; the doctrine of sin in Romans 1-3; the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15; the relationship of law and grace in Galatians. In an extensive discussion of a doctrine we can get our bearings and determine our meanings.

When we use verses as pegs to hang doctrinal beliefs upon we violate this principle. Baptismal regeneration may not be taught in John 3:5 simply because the word "water" occurs. If such a doctrine is taught in Scripture the exegete must be able to turn up an extensive discussion of it, or such a compilation of individual references as to be sufficient evidence that it is taught. The Catholic exegetes are the greatest violators of this principle because according to their views all they require to "prove" one of their doctrines which they have in their traditions is but a passing reference in Scripture, e.g., their doctrine of purgatory or the sacrifice of the mass or Peter's popedom or prayers for the dead.

This is seen in practice so clearly in one passage of Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua* in which on the flimsiest of Scriptural evidence he "proves" the Catholic doctrine of nuns and monks.¹⁶ Newman comes to the Bible with a full-fledged dogma about nuns and monks, he finds a verse which bears a resemblance to the dogmas, and thus the dogma is considered proved. But if we demand *extensive Scriptural references* no such dogmas of nuns and monks is forthcoming.

The same may be said concerning elaborate doctrines of proxy baptism argued from 1 Cor. 15:29. The exegete derives his full-orbed doctrine from his religious tradition, and finding a verse which superficially suggests it, he announces that his doctrine of proxy baptism is Scriptural. Again, the doctrine would collapse if it had to meet the requirement of *extensive Scriptural references*.

Others who err at this point are those who approach 1 Peter 2:24 ("by whose stripes we are healed") with an elaborate doctrine of divine healing. Again the procedure is the same. A doctrine is formulated within an ecclesiastical tradition, a verse in Scripture is found which sounds like it, and the doctrine is pronounced Scriptural. But an examination of 1 Peter 2:24 reveals no *extensive* discussion on healing in the atonement.

What is essential to salvation and sanctification is treated *extensively* in Scripture either in terms of distinct passages or abundance of references. We are in constant danger of extending our theology beyond the information given in Scripture. This danger can be checked only when we limit our

16 Everyman's Library edition, pp. 253-54.

theology to extensive references in Sacred Scripture. We may consider a doctrine Scriptural when there is extensive treatment of it in Scripture, not when we can find only a passing reference to it.

(11). *The principle of the unity of the sense of Scripture.*¹⁷ There are two basic reasons for urging this principle. The first is that hermeneutics is possible only if it is determinate, and it is determinate only if the meaning of the Scripture is one. The second is that when more than one sense is imposed on Scripture the meaning of the word of God is obscured. Some check must be put upon the uninhibited exegesis of many of the early Fathers which is representative of all improper spiritualizing, symbolizing and typifying. The temptation which overtook these Fathers is not as far removed as it would appear.

It is not uncommon to hear sermons which allegorize the healings in the Gospels and the book of Acts. Nor is it uncommon to encounter studies in types which are far beyond any sober exegetical defense. Certainly, too, many historical Old Testament passages are indefensibly allegorized by one who is seeking something to edify or inspire.

Rahab's cord is taken as a type of redemption because it was red in color--an interpretation springing from the allegorical interpretation of the Fathers! These early Fathers saw baptism in every Old Testament reference to water, and the crucifixion in all references to wood. Studies in the Tabernacle may at times be more appropriately called "studies in religious imagination." There can only be confusion of the meaning of the Word of God, and even obscuration, when under various pretexts the unity of the sense is abandoned.

The unity of the sense of Scripture does not intend to deny that there is figurative language in the Bible. The *literal* meaning in such cases is the *proper* meaning as determined by the specific form or type of the figure of speech. Nor does this principle deny typology nor multiple fulfilment in predictive prophecy. There is a *connection* between type and anti-type, prediction and fulfilment, so that the anti-type and the fulfilment are expansions of the original meaning of the text, not new additional meanings. When connections cannot be made between immediate meaning and the expanded meaning, then we are on insecure exegetical ground.¹⁸

(12). *The principle of the analogy of faith.*¹⁹ The origin of this notion is in the Reformation during which period it was used hundreds of times. It has also appeared as "scripture interprets scripture," or, "scripture is its own interpreter" (*scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*). It was aimed at refuting the

17 We are indebted to Berkhof for elements of this discussion (*Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 57 ff.).

18 This general theme must again be discussed with reference to typology and prophecy. Berkhof admits that there is a deeper sense to Scripture and uses the word "hyponoia"--the word used by allegorists to indicate the secret meaning of text--for he realizes this is essential to preserve the unity of Scripture. Old Testament passages must have a deeper meaning by which they anticipate the New Testament church.

19 The expression, "the analogy of faith" is derived from Romans 12:6. Most scholars believe that theologians and expositors who make this mean "the system of theology contained in Scripture," misinterpret the passage. It really refers to the amount of faith the believer possesses. Some still insist it means the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. Cf. J. H. Blunt, "Analogy of Faith," *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology*, pp. 18-19.

special place the Roman Catholic Church had assumed in the interpretation of Scripture. The Catholic Church had insisted that it had the power to interpret Scripture, and it could by this power make the obscure Scripture clear. The Reformers countered by stating that the guidance in understanding the obscure Scripture is to come *from other Scripture* where the given doctrine is treated with clarity. It was, as Torm notes,²⁰ a move not only to rebut the Catholic position at this point, but to give the Bible to the laity. The principle has been subsequently expanded to mean that the Bible is to be interpreted as one whole, one harmonious system of doctrine.

Horne defines the analogy of faith (as a principle of interpretation) to be "the constant and perpetual harmony of Scripture in the fundamental points of faith and practice deduced from those passages in which they were discussed by the inspired penmen either directly or expressly, and in clear, plain, and intelligible language."²¹

As indicated, the principle moved on from the assertion that the clear passages of Scripture were to hold priority over the obscure passages to the assertion that there is one Faith in the Scriptures, and no passage may be interpreted out of keeping with this one Faith. The problem of "this one Faith," is the problem of the unity of the Bible.²² The unity of the Bible may be a *formal theological unity*. The assumption here is that there is one counsel of God underlying the Scriptures and with diligent exegesis and theological interpretation it can be recovered. The result would be a systematic theology. The unity of the Bible may be in its *perspective*. Lutheran theologians find it in a Christological unity.²³ Torm finds it in the identity of the God of revelation ("Und das ist er, insofern die Bible von Anfang bis Ende ein Bericht über die Offenbarung des einem und selben Gottes ist").²⁴ It is the same self-revealing God in all parts of the Bible. Others find the "one Faith" in the *dogmatic teachings of the Church* e.g., Anglicans and Catholics.

Most theologians would settle for a measure of formal theological unity centering around the Person of Christ as the "one Faith" of the Scriptures.²⁵ Students of hermeneutics have further indicated that this principle of analogy of faith must be carefully understood. (i) It must not efface the difference between the Old and New Testaments. There is "one Faith" but it has been progressively revealed which grants a priority of weight to the later revelation. (ii) It must allow for the rich individuality of the personalities of the writers and the literary forms they employed. Paul must not be made to speak like Luke, nor can we speak in the same breath of the prose of James and the poetry of Isaiah. (iii) It must allow for help from the contemporary literature of the Scriptures for its interpretation.²⁶

20 Fr. Torm, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, p. 230. The term, "analogy of Scripture," is used as equivalent to the "analogy of faith."

21 Horne, *op. cit.*, I, 342. Italics omitted.

22 For a recent thorough study of this problem with excellent bibliographical materials see Rowley, *the Unity of the Bible*.

23 "Hermeneutics," *The Lutheran Cyclopaedia*, p. 221. Cf. Torm's remarks: "Das alles führt Luther dazu, das Schriftganze mit, 'Christus' zu identifizieren. Die Einheit der Schrift sei in Christus gegeben; dagegen sei keine 'schrifstellerische Einheit' vorhanden." *Op. cit.*, p. 230.

24 Torm, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

25 Exemplified by Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, pp. 297, 429, 477, and 527.

26 Cf. Torm, *op. cit.*, p. 229 ff.

In actual practice the analogy of faith expresses itself in several corollary maxims: e.g., the obscure passage must always give way to the clear one; no doctrine may be founded on one verse or a few miscellaneous verses; points of doctrine not settled by specific reference may be settled by "the general tenor of Scripture"; doctrines are more secure as they are taught in much Scripture or which are taught in several different parts of the Scripture; if two doctrines are clearly taught which apparently contradict, accept both of them (e.g., predestination and free will, and, depravity and responsibility);²⁷ and passages marked by brevity of treatment should be expounded in light of passages of greater length which deal with a common matter.

The analogy of faith principle is a good principle if it does not get out of hand.²⁸ It is out of hand when dogma dictates to Scripture, and not Scripture to dogma. Properly used the analogy of faith is of great service. It binds all our interpretation and theological thinking into one well-knit system.

By following the analogy of faith we part with the critics who constantly oppose one writer of the Bible to another. Typical of this is opposing Jesus to Paul. Further, liberals claim there is no *one* theology of the Bible--only theologies.²⁹ They speak of Johannine, Petrine, and Pauline theologies. That there are peculiar emphases in these writings would be foolish to deny. To claim that these emphases fracture the unity of Scripture must be challenged. The principle of the analogy of faith forbids such a fragmentation of the Bible.

The analogy of faith thus prevents any glaring theological contradictions from appearing in our interpretations. It would forbid interpreting Romans 8 to mean the security of the believer, and then interpreting Hebrews 6 as teaching the amissibility of salvation. The Bible cannot teach many millennial doctrines at one time. The principle of analogy of the faith or the harmonious interpretation of the Bible is rooted in the conviction that if the Scriptures are inspired of God they contain only one true system of theology, even though that system might not be easy to reconstruct.

27 Cf. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 163-166.

28 Behm speaks of it as follows: "In dem reformatorischen Grundsatz *scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres* ist auch das A and O aller hermeneutik enthalten, dass exegetisches Verständnis nur auf dem Weg lebensvoller historischer Erfassung der Zusammenhänge zu gewinnen ist." *Pneumatische Exegese?* p. 19.

29 Cf. Parsons, *The Religion of the New Testament*, pp. 1-4.