



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 7 – HERMENEUTICS: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

LESSON 134 –THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF SCRIPTURE

PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION – LOUIS BERKHOF, PGS. 157-166

KNOWING SCRIPTURE – RC SPROUL

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The Implied Sense of Scripture

- ▶ The Bible as the Word of God contains a fulness and wealth of thought that is unfathomable. This is evident not only from its types and symbols and prophecies, but also from what it contains implicitly rather than by express assertion.
- ▶ Even in the case of human compositions we distinguish between what is expressed and what is implied.
- ▶ In writings of a superior order, it is often found that the language suggests and involves important truths that are embodied in words. Great minds contain a wealth of knowledge, and whatever they communicate of it is related to and suggestive of that vast store, so that it becomes quite possible to read between the lines. If this is true of the writings of men, it applies that much more to the infallible Word of God

The Implied Sense of Scripture

- ▶ There is an important distinction to make – man only knows in part, and is not always conscious of what he knows.
- ▶ For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. – 1 Cor. 13:12
- ▶ Moreover, man often fails to see the implications of what he says or writes. It is quite possible that his words contain implications which he did not see and to which he would not subscribe.
- ▶ It may very well be that what can fairly be deduced from his explicit assertions by means of a logical inference or comparison lies entirely outside his range of thought and is, in fact, the very opposite of what he means.

The Implied Sense of Scripture

- ▶ The rule then is to avoid charging the author of guilt regarding what might be implied from his writings especially when and if he has not avowed or adopted the implications in those statements. He may not have even thought of them or seen them so how can he be held responsible for them. They are implied...not explicit.
- ▶ We must also be careful when assigning the author a motive or opinions based on incidental expressions.
- ▶ In the case of the Word of God, however, these restrictions do not apply. The knowledge of God is all-comprehending and is always conscious knowledge. In giving man His Word, He was not only perfectly aware of all that was said, but also of all that was implied.

The Implied Sense of Scripture

- ▶ God knew the inferences that are deduced from His written Word. “The Revealer not only knew that men would deduce consequences, but designed that they should do so. A comparison of the various Scripture statements among themselves were foreseen by infinite wisdom in the very act of supernaturally inspiring the record from which they are inferred.” – Bannerman, *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p. 585.
- ▶ Jesus Himself demonstrates this for us. When the Sadducees came to Him with a question which, in their estimation, clearly proved the untenableness of the doctrine of the resurrection, He referred them to the self-designation at the burning bush: “I Am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”; and deduced from it by good and necessary inference, the doctrine which they denied. God is God of the living, not the dead. He then said to them, “You err, not knowing the Scriptures.” (Matt. 22:29-32; Mark 12:24-27; Luke 20:37-38; see also Rom. 4:5-12; 1 Cor. 9:8-10; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Heb. 4:5-9).

The Implied Sense of Scripture

- ▶ “The deductions of doctrine made from its (the Bible’s) statements on a comparison between them, if truly drawn, are as much a part of God’s meaning and of His revelation, being indeed virtually contained in it, as these statements themselves.” (Bannerman, p. 587).
- ▶ It goes without saying (so we are going to say it) that great care must be exercised in drawing any inferences from the written Word. The deductions must be good, ie. Truly contained in the inspired statements from which they are ostensibly derived; and also necessary, or such as force themselves upon the mind that honesty applies itself to the interpretation of Scripture.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ The helps that may aid the expositor in the theological interpretation are two-fold: 1) Parallels of Ideas, and 2) The Analogy of Faith. Both proceed on the assumption that the Word of God is an organic unity of which all parts are mutually related, and are together subservient to the whole of God's revelation; and that, in the final analysis, the Bible is its own interpreter.
- ▶ Parallels of Ideas are those similar passages in which the likeness or identity consists not in the words or phrases, but in facts, subjects, or doctrines.
- ▶ Prov. 22:2 and 29:13, for example, while sounding similar, are not actually parallels:
- ▶ The rich and the poor have this in common, the Lord is the maker of them all.
- ▶ The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: the Lord gives light to the eyes of both.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ There are 2 types of parallels: historical and didactic.
- ▶ There are times that the same historical event is reported by different authors from different perspectives. Some details may differ but they are the same event.
- ▶ There are passages in which the same narratives are couched in different words, and the circumstances are more detailed in one account than the other. In these cases, it is natural to expect that the more circumstantial narrative will illumine the other. Compare Matthew 9:1-8 with Mark 2:1-12.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ Matthew 9 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. 2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” 3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!” 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’? 6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” 7 And he arose and departed to his house. 8 Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ Mark 2:1 And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. 2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. 3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. 4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” 6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, 11 “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ There are other narratives that are undoubtedly identical, but which occur in connections that are altogether different. These are most numerous in the Gospels. In such instances, the one most likely gives the true historical setting, and, insofar, sheds light on the other.
- ▶ Matthew 8:2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” 3 Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus said to him, “See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ Mark 1:40 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. 43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45 However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ Luke 5:12 And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." 13 Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him. 14 And He charged him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded." 15 However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. 16 So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ Finally there are passages that do not duplicate a certain event, but add an additional circumstance, and are therefore, in a way, complementary.
- ▶ Didactic Parallels demonstrate cases where the same subject is treated, but not in the same terms. The “Spiritual sacrifices” of which Peter speaks in 1 Peter 2:5 find a partial explanation in Rom. 12:1, which in turn, is explained by Romans 6:19.
- ▶ 1 Pet. 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Rom. 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice...
- ▶ Rom. 6:19 For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ There are parallel passages that correspond in thought and expression, but of which the one has no direct connection with the preceding or following context.
- ▶ In Matthew 7:13-14, the words, “Enter by the narrow gate” occur without any historical setting. Luke 13:23-24 supplies it, “23 Then one said to Him, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” And He said to them, 24 “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”
- ▶ Finally there are also parallels that occur in connections entirely different, though equally fitting. The same saying, for example, may have been uttered on various occasions. Compare Matt. 7:21-23 with Luke 13:25-28; and Matt. 13:16-17 with Luke 10:23-24.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ The Analogy of Faith, wherein Scripture is used to interpret Scripture, there are two degrees which may be applied – positive analogy and general analogy.
- ▶ Positive analogy consists of those teachings of the Bible that are so clearly and positively stated, and supported by so many passages, that there can be no doubt of their meaning and value. Such truths as the existence of a God of infinite perfection, holy and righteous, but also merciful and gracious; of the providential rule of God and His beneficial purposes or the existence and heinousness of sin; of the redeeming grace revealed in Jesus Christ and of a future life and reward or retribution...

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ General analogy does not rest on the explicit statements of Scripture, but on the obvious scope and import of its teachings as a whole, and on the religious impressions they leave on mankind. For example, we see throughout the Scripture a principle of hostility toward formalism in worship that separates the words spoken from the mouth and the motives and thoughts of the hearts of “worshippers.”
- ▶ The analogy of faith will not always have the same degree of evidential value and authority. This will depend on 4 factors:
- ▶ 1. The number of passages that contain the same doctrine. The analogy is stronger when it is found in 12 passages, than when it is based on 2 passages, for example.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ 2. The unanimity or correspondence of the different passages. The value of the analogy will be proportional to the agreement of the passages on which it is founded.
- ▶ 3. The clearness of the passage. Naturally, an analogy that rests wholly, or to a great extent, on obscure passages, is of dubious value.
- ▶ 4. The distribution of the passages. If the analogy is founded on passages derived from a single book, or from a few writings, it will not be as valuable as when it is based on passages of both Old and New Testaments, dating from various times, and coming from different authors.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ Always keep the following rules in mind when using the Analogy of Faith:
- ▶ 1. A doctrine that is clearly supported by the analogy of faith cannot be contradicted by a contrary or obscure passage.
- ▶ 2. A passage that is neither supported nor contradicted by the analogy of faith may serve as the positive foundation for a doctrine, provided it is clear in its teaching.
- ▶ 3. When a doctrine is supported by an obscure passage of Scripture only, and finds no support from the analogy of faith, it can only be accepted with great reservation.
- ▶ 4. In cases where the analogy of faith leads to the establishment of two doctrines that appear contradictory, both doctrines should be accepted as Scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves in a higher unity. For example, the doctrine of God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

Helps for Theological Interpretation

- ▶ I am taught in one book to believe that what I sow I shall reap: I am taught in another place, that "it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." I see in one place, God presiding over all in providence; and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions to his own will, in a great measure. Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act, that there was no presidence of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to Atheism; and if, on the other hand, I declare that God so overrules all things, as that man is not free enough to be responsible, I am driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring. - Spurgeon

Next Week

- ▶ Lesson 135 – Practical Tools for Bible Study