DEALING WITH LANGUAGE, 3 pgs

Thinking about Scripture means dealing with language. Mostly what we need to do is to think in very basic common sense ways. Words and phrases occur in several forms (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, participles, etc). Some knowledge of basic english is necessary in order to be able to think through passages.

Though the basic terms are defined differently, their definitions overlap reflecting the interconnected relationships of various concepts. Definitions give us a starting place, but flexibility allows usage and context to determine meaning in a given place. The more technical the subject, the more precisely definitions must be drawn.

There are all kinds of symbols (things that stand for or represent something else). In art, a **halo** represents holiness. A **white wedding dress** represents the bride's purity. Words themselves are symbols ie, the word *chair* is not the thing you actually sit on, but is representative of the idea of something made to actually sit in or on. Carefully defined words are more objective in their use, yet many still have a **subjective** connotation (the suggestive effect on the reader or listener). *Persistent* suggests something positive - not giving up easily. One of it's synonyms, *stubborn*, impresses the reader as being unreasonable, narrow-minded, and unwilling to listen.

Flexibility is one of the great characteristics of language. Most misunderstandings of what Jesus said come from taking His words in a material temporal sense. Both the Pharisees and modern cults exhibit comparable ignorance. I use the term *literalistic* to refer to such a rigid literal handling of Scripture that robs it of it's meaning and it's richness (nuances of beauty, color, and depth) [cf **RPCD – Chap.1**].

METAPHORS: Figurative language often involves the substitution of another word or phrase for a literal word that actually means what is being said. The expression *fallen asleep* is used of Christians as a **substitute** for their physical death. The word *blood* is frequently used in the NT to refer to Christ's physical death. *Blood* appropriately ties His death back into the symbolism of OT animal sacrifices (**Heb.9:21-22**). Neither the Bible verses mentioning it nor the sentiment expressed in Christian songs and hymns (There's Power in the Blood) refer to a **magic fluid** that has the power to wash away sins. It's figurative language.

In order to get at the meaning of a passage, our first objective is to think along the direction the passage leads us – to follow the thrust of it without fully working through the details. Read the context of the passage you are interested in. – [cf ***The Force and Flow of the Passage*** **at RPCD – Appendices**] The following passages are clarified by using the meaning of the Greek in the flow of the passage.

Change or transition of status, condition, or situation can be recognized by either the context or by the word ***become*** (***Jn.1:12****; come to be or came into being* ***Jn.1:3, 10***) in contrast to the steady state or unchanged condition (be – was, were >> am, is, are,) [unfortunately translations are inconsistent].

What is the thrust of **Jn.1:13**? It is speaking about a change in our spiritual status [***to become****,* ***v.12***] that is not physical and that we cannot cause [the negative details] that changes our standing with God [the positive detail], **v.12**.

The **ESV** uses a literal word-for-word translation, *But to all who **did receive** [the Word who was God (**v.1-3**) and brought the world into being, **v.10**], who **believed** in His name [explanation:], He gave the right [authorization, lawful entitlement] to **become** children of God [supernatural beings], [13]who were [spiritually] **reborn**, not of blood [plural] nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but [by the will] of God.*

The **NIV** employs a word-for-word **equivalency** with the original language. *[13]children [spiritually] **reborn** not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but ~~born~~ [unnecessary repetition] of God.*

Phillips paraphrases the text, *these were men who truly believed in Him, [13]and **their** [spiritual] **rebirth depended** not on the course of nature, nor on any impulse or plan of man, but on God.*

What other passages make the same point or lead in the same direction?

*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God [because it is spiritual in nature], **1 Cor.15:50***

*He brought us forth [lit. gave birth to us] of His own will [supernaturally], **Jas.1:18***

The details are modifiers – words, phrases, and clauses that provide additional information to the basic thought that serve to clarify or condition its meaning.

Some words, phrases, and clauses are ambiguous and require clarification (ie, *of*). The Bible often takes shortcuts that invite the reader to interpret - to fill in the obvious words to complete the thought and clarify its meaning (ie, pronouns; **Jn.1:13**)

Stating what something means as well as what it doesn't mean clarifies the thought.

***Tit.3:5** God saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own **mercy** by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.*

Changing active sentence construction to passive and visa versa helps us explore implications: **Tit.3:5**, *He saved us* > we were or have been saved; we are (or are being) saved; we will be saved.

Notice that verbs have both factual and temporal implications.

Actual situations or experiences contain much more information than their written accounts which are abbreviated. Therefore what is written or included as well as what is omitted about an event, circumstance, etc, is by design. The written account serves the purposes of the author. The same is true of *paraphrases*. To paraphrase what the text says means to restate in your own words the line of thought you are interested in. It results in an accurate concise tracing of events or progression of thought.

What do you picture when I say, Joe and I walked to the church"? If the context has something to do with the Sunday school class, you would be warranted in thinking I meant we walked a block from the Tunkhannock Baptist Church Sunday school building to the Grace Baptist Church building. What else do you suppose? About what time was it? Were we together? Was anyone else tagging along? Were we the only ones to take that walk? What were the conditions like, icy walkways, cold, windy?

Passages carry a limited amount of information. Anything beyond that is speculation. What can appropriately and logically be implied or gleaned from a passage vs. faulty assumptions is largely dependent upon context and exclusionary clarifications.

Sanctification means making holy, setting apart to God. It is most often associated with growth as a Christian, progress in the Christian life as we *work out our salvation*. However it is also used to describe God's definitive work at conversion, the inception of our new lives as believers. ***2 Thes.2:13***, God saved people *through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.* Therefore sanctification is like salvation in that it refers to the work God has begun in us that He has not yet completed.