

## Determining How Bible Passages MAY BE USED, 5 pgs

In his classic 544 page work, *Prophecy Viewed in Respect to Its Distinctive Nature, Its Special Function, and Proper Interpretation* (revised edition, 1865) reprinted as *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, **Patrick Fairbairn** systematically laid out **distinct principles for interpreting Old Testament prophetic passages**.

**Are there criteria like those for the interpretation of prophecy** that govern the legitimate uses of Scriptures? Is there some framework that encompasses and defines how Scripture ought to be dealt with, one that excludes certain categories of use? Are there principles laying out proper and improper uses of scripture?

These questions are related to purpose – Why is this information given and how ought it to be directed? What would constitute inappropriate use? Do categories of use such as **moral or practical lessons** from the lives of Joseph, David, Daniel, etc. without reference to the story of redemption constitute wrong use of Scripture? Is there anything wrong with stand-alone Bible lessons? This discussion is framed by what the Bible is and is for in contrast to what it is not and is not for.

### CENTRALITY OF REDEMPTION<sup>1</sup>

What is it about a message that makes it distinctly Christian? Does it stand alone as points of organizational or behavioral wisdom, financial guidance, marriage counseling, or ethical teaching, as an island in a sea of islands, or does the instructor convey its vital connection to the Bible and its God?<sup>2</sup> If he does, does he **integrate the message** with rest of Scripture or does he tack it on in a perfunctory manner?

What is a Christian? Whether clergy or laity, are not Christians products of the Gospel as well as ministers of the Gospel? **Is not the foundation of the Church the truth relayed by the apostles and prophets** - meaning the Word of God laid down in the New Testament era (**Eph.2:20**), *the faith* [body of doctrine] *that was once delivered* [completed cannon] *for all the saints* (**Jude 3**) **about Christ our founder** (**Heb.2:10**)? **The White Horse Inn** weekly program has an advertisement for Westminster Seminary, Wouldn't it be great if, instead of moral lessons from the life of David, there were a seminary that taught pastors to preach Christ from all of scripture? **Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company** is dedicated to publishing excellent books that promote biblical understanding and godly living as summarized in The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. <http://prpbooks.com/> A P&R add in *World* magazine advertising From Famine to Fullness, The Gospel According to Ruth has an endorsement by **D.A. Carson**, One of the most urgent needs of the church is to grasp how the many parts of the Bible fit together to make one 'story line' that culminates in Jesus Christ. The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption by **Dennis Johnson**, 1997, is another example of this.

In the introduction to his 1982 book, *Preaching with Purpose*, **The urgent Task of Homiletics**, **Jay Adams** writes, *That, with ... very few notable exceptions, preachers need to change what they are doing is not a point that I shall argue. If you are of the mind that, on the whole, preaching in is tolerably good (or ... even tolerable), then you and I are on such entirely different wavelengths that I don't think I could convince you to see it otherwise ...* [he is not thinking of precisely the same things

I have in mind in this discussion.] In the preface to his 1990 book, *Truth Applied, Application in Preaching*, **Adams** quotes **Haddon Robinson's** 1980 book, *Biblical Preaching*, *Many homiletics have not given application the attention it deserves. No book has been published devoted exclusively, or even primarily to the knotty problem raised by application.* He says in his introduction, *Do you ever have an uneasy conscience over the way you applied a text? How can you be sure you are not misapplying the truth of God's Word? Do you wonder what constitutes legitimate application of a passage to the contemporary scene?*

**Chapter 1**, explains that the word *apply* means to knit or join one thing to another in such a way as to change or affect that to which something is joined. The term *application* has replaced two older terms, **improvement** and **use**, which mean giving people truth in such a way as to *improve* their lives, something **pertinent** and **practical** they could *use*. **Adams conjectures that application has taken precedence because it is more active in that it actually accomplishes something more than merely informing. It exerts moral pressure to change.**<sup>3</sup> [Again, he is not focusing on exactly what I'm trying to express here.] **John Piper almost never preaches things that can be deemed immediately practical.**

My inquiry does not address application only, but the way passages are spoken about and how the teacher is directing us to think about them. Are the passages really making the points you are driving for or are you making them say what you want even though you're not twisting them? In other words, even if your observations from passages are accurate and principles are actually derived from them, even if the illustrations and examples are true to the text, **what is it about the passage that ought to impress people - be better, do more, and work harder for Christ? Instead, shouldn't it be something that draws hearts to God** through Christ?<sup>4</sup> What is more practical than this?

**Biblical theology** ... seeks to allow the Bible's message about God to come through in the way the Bible tells it ... We need the approach of biblical theology to enable us to see the significance of individual sections or texts of the Bible for what they are ... to prevent us from falling into the prevalent error of using texts as springboards for sermons and lessons on almost anything other than the original significance of the text ... as Christians, we can no longer come to the OT as if we were pre-Christian Israelites. Our faith-quest for the truth of the Bible begins with our relationship to Jesus Christ ... who is consistently presented in the NT as the one who can be understood and known only as the fulfillment of the OT ... we no longer have the option to read the OT as if we didn't know to whom it is leading, or as if Jesus had not come. **We, as Christians, now read the OT with the prior knowledge that it is about Jesus.**<sup>6</sup>

What did Paul mean ... *I decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified? 1 Cor. 2:2 ... Paul repudiates the worldview of the pagan, the philosopher, and even the Jew who attempts to get a handle on reality apart from the truth that is in Christ. We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor.1:23-24).* **The reason for this Christ-centeredness is so that the faith of his readers might not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God (1 Cor.2:5).** This means that the only appropriate way to respond to God's

revealed power and wisdom is by being focused on the person of Christ. Elsewhere [1 Cor.1:17, 24; Rom.1:16] Paul defines the power of God as Christ and His Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

In **Chapter 2** of Preaching,<sup>5</sup> **Goldsworthy** discusses **what** the Bible is under the headings:

The Bible is the Word of the *One God*: the *One Word* of God: the *One Written Word of God* about the One Way of Salvation: Therefore it is a Book about Christ

There is often a **failure to think through** how the link between the people and events of the OT are to be made with us ... This failure leads to some major defects in preaching ... the tendency to moralize on OT events, or simply to find pious examples to imitate.<sup>5</sup>

One aspect of the misuse of Scripture is the propensity ... to separate the matters of ethics and godly living from their **roots in the Gospel**. In a series on the marks of the mature church ... Various qualities were set forth as what one should expect to find in the truly mature church. **The implication is** that we as a congregation needed to be more diligent in producing these marks of maturity. **What was missing** was the way these texts belonged in the New Testament context of the exposition of the Gospel. **The primary focus became law, not Gospel** ... Without the Gospel all exhortations of the New Testament become not just law, but legalistic ... Good exegesis of a limited text turned the text into law without any visible grace.<sup>5</sup>

Application of the truth of God's word to the hearer *can only be achieved in terms of the Gospel*. Since we are all legalists at heart, preaching often shifts to exhortation that plays to that legalistic tendency within us. My son, Kevin, once made the comment about services he was attending, *Even though grace is taught, it still feels like law*. [see Commands in Scripture <http://pop.eradman.com/>] Because **the Gospel is the theological center of the whole Bible**, proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the person and work of Jesus. Expository biblical preaching is always an exposition of the Gospel and its implications.<sup>5</sup>

All the dimensions of the Gospel of Christ are present in OT form, that is, as prefigurations or foreshadowings of that which is given its final expression in Jesus of Nazareth ... **the New Testament presupposes the Old** and thus we do not grasp as well as we should the meaning of the New if we sever it from the Old. The Old Testament, in so many ways, gives us the texture of the Gospel. It shows us in great detail what it is that Jesus achieves in His death and resurrection. **We must read the two Testaments as a unit** if we are to avoid an irrational cleavage of understanding of Christian existence into an Old Testament form and a New Testament form.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, **Goldsworthy** cautions against erring by trying too hard - **forcing the analogies** as *mistaken zeal to find Christ in all Scripture* in approaches to typology by using ... free association of ideas ... *When this spurious approach was applied to the directions for building the tabernacle, every detail prescribed by God was seen to speak somehow of Christ. The wood of the ark represented His humanity, while the gold overlay represented His divinity ...* **The problem with such an approach** is that it does not inquire into the real relationship between the texts in question and the fulfillment in Christ. Such wild typology is really allegory.

In reaction to such typological excesses (uncontrolled allegory), some scholars have so narrowly restricted the criteria of types as to greatly reduce their usefulness in interpretation. Our concern should not be so much with the occurrence of the word type as with *how the New Testament authors made the connection between their contemporary situation and what had gone on before in the OT ... typology is neglected because the word in the NT is tied to only a few actual examples ... we are not dealing merely with scattered examples, but with a broad pattern.*<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT SCRIPTURE IS FOR

**Ephesians** contains a lot of instruction on our behavior as Christians. Much of it presses us to **change**, **become**<sup>7</sup> kind to one another (**4:32**), **become** imitators of God (**5:1**). In what is usually considered a practical section governing various relationships, **Eph.5:21-6:9**, the relationship of a husband to his wife and visa versa is spoken of as an analogy of Christ's relationship to the church (**5:23-30**). In **verse 32**, **the mystery of the union of Christ and His bride is not put in terms of an analog of marriage, but as the fundamental reality which marriage is meant to portray.** Even here, amazingly, unexpectedly, the focus is on redemption and what flows from it (**v.25-27**).

Above all, apostolic preaching must be Christ-centered ... Yet, **Christ centeredness in preaching must not be reduced to portraying Jesus as example** ... there is a distinctive apostolic way of being Christ-centered, and it is this hermeneutic that places appropriate checks on the preacher's hyperactive imagination ... **Apostolic preaching is redemptive-historical** ... It emphasizes the organic unity of the history of redemption ... Integral to this approach is careful attention to biblical typology and an openness to seeing typological connections between OT persons, events, and institutions ... **Redemptive-historical preachers oppose the moralistic, particularly the exemplaristic, preaching of biblical historical narratives** ... The indicative mood (declaration of God's redemptive action in history) precedes the imperative (specifying the appropriate response on our part, **p.51** ... **How can contemporary preachers preach 'nothing but Christ' and at the same time preach the whole Bible?** ... Paul preached nothing but Christ because he knew Jesus to be the supreme revealer of God the creator and the only reconciler of God's people ... **Preaching Christ is preaching the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for history** ... God has chosen to tie His self-revelation to the outworking of His saving plan in the history of redemption ... Hebrews sees **Old Testament persons, institutions, and events (outlines) pre-embedded by God in Israel's history, now fulfilled (filled in) by reality in Christ** ... the OT prophets themselves treat earlier redemptive acts of God as typological. **Him We Proclaim – Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures, 07 by Dennis Johnson** ... *the sermon cannot do any good unless there be a savor of Christ in it. C.H. Spurgeon*

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**1. Redemption is not set against or in contrast to the Glory of God.** Doing so would create an unnatural and inappropriate division as is sometimes done between *faith* and *works*. All God's works redound to His glory because everything He does in creation, redemption, and judgment is perfect and right. **His works and ways show Him to be wonderful and beautiful.** The way some people speak of *the Glory of God* as His main purpose, you'd think God was peeking around every corner, looking for ways to show off and gain recognition.

2. This is not to imply that every single message must have a 5 minute segment explaining its connection to the rest of Scripture. But some such tie-in is needed for continuity's sake for each given body of work such as a book or a series of messages on a given topic. **The point, emphasis, or focus of the message** ought to be an expression of true Christianity and stated as such as opposed to pragmatic principles, psychological insights, marriage counseling, or anything else that can be classified as wisdom – not that such things should be excluded. **Is your message so neutral that it can be used by any religious or self-help group**, seen on Oprah or heard on NPR, or is it definitively Christian? [See NPR interview with John Piper:]

<http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Interviews/1678> The NPR Tsunami Interview/

3. It has been said that there is a desperate need to be taught the practical use of Scripture. I'm not so sure. To borrow a phrase from another of Adam's books, **The Scriptures Are Practical - the doctrines themselves are inherently useful to make the heart strong toward God**. What people need is to learn how to read and understand the Bible. For Christians, renewing the mind is a spiritual discipline, an essential exercise they must engage in for themselves. A little meditation on God's word goes a long way toward receiving down-to-earth here-and-now benefits (such as quieting the heart before God under adverse circumstances). In a way, like giving a child something they could obtain by working, **telling people outright what they should be discovering for themselves** [see 1<sup>st</sup> essay on God's Training, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph] **by thinking through Scripture bypasses a whole host of real benefits**. Like the illustration of working in order to have or achieve, much character improvement is derived through the work and waiting process, and **appreciation** for the thing will always be greater. [see <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2009/01/getting-theologically-humiliated/>] Without question there is benefit from gathering as a body, teaching, help, guidance, and encouragement, but to what end if not to move us to seek to know and follow Christ ourselves. It always comes down to this. [Now in April 2024, I still agree with this. See my recent essay series on God's Training which serves as a framework for a 3 tier approach to truth described in Beyond David.]

4. The 2008 theme for The White Horse Inn discussions was **Christless Christianity**.

[http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/the\\_white\\_horse\\_inn/](http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/the_white_horse_inn/)

5. Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, 2000 by Graeme Goldsworthy

6. Prayer and the Knowledge of God, 2003 by Graeme Goldsworthy

7. Gk, **ginomai – become** refers to a change of status or condition resulting in a new status or condition