



every
member
able to
admonish

"I myself also am convinced that you
yourselves are full of goodness, filled
with all knowledge and able also to
admonish one another."
- Romans 15:14

review: historical/cultural analysis

Historical/cultural Analysis is all about understanding the circumstances at the time in which a passage was written. The following steps lay out a procedure to follow when examining a passage.

step 1: are there historical circumstances that clarify the passage?

- What were the political, economic, and social situations?
- What was the main source of livelihood?
- What were the major threats and concerns?

step 2: do the subject's actions relate to a custom?

step 3: discern the level of spiritual commitment of those in the passage

Remember to use a variety of good resources. The challenge with historical/cultural analysis is locating the sources that will provide the information you need. Unfortunately, there is no one stop shop. A compilation of various books each provides a piece of the puzzle you must put together.

theological analysis

The final level of textual analysis we will investigate is theological analysis. In this step, we look at the interpretation derived from careful historical/cultural, contextual, and lexical/syntactical analysis and compare it with the whole of God's revealed truth in the Bible. This is perhaps the easiest step to explain but one of the most time-consuming to do because it involves the accurate interpretation of several Scriptures.

A bedrock statement of Christian theology is found in Hebrews 13:8, which states, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." In Malachi 3:6, God also says, "For I am the LORD, I change not..." There is no variableness nor shadow of turning in Him (James 1:17). Because of His immutable (unchanging) character, His words share the same quality. Isaiah echoes this concept when he says "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." (Isaiah 40:8)

The immutability of God is the backbone of theological analysis. God inspired the writing of the Scriptures over the course of around 1500 years. Beyond this limited span of time, the Scriptures contain words God spoke at the beginning of time (Let there be light) and prophesy of His actions at the end of time and throughout eternity. As we interpret a portion of His word, we must make sure that our interpretation is consistent with the rest of His revelation. If it does not harmonize, we have erred in our interpretation. Let's get into the principles of theological analysis:

step 1a: interpret scripture with scripture: The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge

Assuming that you have come up with an interpretation of a passage that is consistent with its context, we should proceed to check with other passages of Scripture. How do we do this? There are some tools that I would recommend. The first is called the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge (TSK) and it is by far the tool I use most in my studies. It is organized by book, chapter, and verse and breaks each passage down into different phrases and then directs you to other passages of Scripture that address the same issue. Keep in mind that TSK's list of Scriptures is not exhaustive, but it is thorough enough to get you going. Take a look at the following example from TSK:

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2 Timothy 2:15

Study. Heb 4:11; 2Pe 1:10; 3:14

approved. Ac 2:22; Ro 14:18; 16:10; 2Co 5:9; 10:18; Ga 1:10; 1Th 2:4

a workman. Mt 13:52; 2Co 3:6; 6:3-4; 1Ti 4:6,12-16

rightly. Mt 13:52; Mr 4:33; Lu 12:42; Joh 21:15-17; Ac 20:27; 1Co 2:6; 3:1-2; 2Co 4:2; 1Th 5:14; Heb 5:11-14

In the above example, the passage from 2 Timothy 2:15 is broken down into four sections: (1) Study to shew thyself (2) approved unto God, (3) a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, (4) rightly dividing the word of truth. Notice that the TSK does not write out the whole phrase, just the first word of the phrase. After each word, there are Scriptural references to take you to other passages that address the same issue that is raised in the phrase you are studying. Because we just finished an in-depth lexical study of the word, “study”, let’s take a look at the passages referenced by the TSK for “study to shew thyself” (Hebrews 4:11, 2 Peter 1:10, and 2 Peter 3:14)

What is the consistent theme in these passages?

Is it consistent with your interpretation the word, “study” in 2 Timothy 2:15?

A final note on the TSK: Keep in mind that this book is not perfect and the references for Scripture provided by the author are consistent with their interpretation of the meaning of the passage.

step 1b: interpret scripture with scripture: Nave’s Topical Textbook

Nave’s Topical Textbook (Nave’s) is useful for doing extensive study on a singular defined issue. This issue can be a doctrine, person, place, etc... Nave’s organizes Scriptures that address this issue below the title, which is listed alphabetically. Take a look at the example below from Nave’s:

DIVORCE

General scriptures concerning

Ex 21:7-11; De 21:10-14; 24:1-4; Ezr 10:1-16; Ne 13:23-30; Jer 3:1; Mic 2:9; Mal 2:14-16; Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mr 10:2; Lu 16:18; 1Co 7:10-17

Disobedience of the wife to the husband, a sufficient cause for, in the Persian empire

Es 1:10-22

See MARRIAGE

FIGURATIVE

Isa 50:1; 54:4; Jer 3:8

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If your study is defined by an issue more than a single passage, Nave's is a great resource to use. There are some others I can suggest as well:

- Thompson Chain Reference Bible or another Bible with a good topical study tool
- Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling, by John G. Kruis
- Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling Women, by Patricia A. Miller
- Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling Youth, by Patrician and Keith Miller

step 2: determine where your passage fits into God's progressive revelation

The concept of progressive revelation is important in accurately interpreting the meaning of the passage to the original audience, and therefore its meaning to us today. In the garden of Eden, God made the first prophecy about the seed of woman who would be bruised on the heel by the serpent. In return, the seed of woman would bruise the head of the serpent. This was of course a prediction of the coming of Jesus Christ. However, the clarity with which we view this prophecy was completely foreign to Adam and Eve and the first humans. To our knowledge, that was the extent of the revelation God gave at that time.

As we see history progress in the Patriarchal era, God provides more prophecy when He tells Abram that by his seed, all nations of the world would be blessed. God called out a special people through Abram, from which Jesus eventually arose. Many other prophecies continued to be given as time continued. Each one provided more and more information about how God would bring the Messiah into the world and what His purpose would be.

As we look at a passage and consider its meaning, it is helpful to understand where it fits in the continuum of progressive revelation. Let's look at the following example.

Illustration: The Satanic attempt to destroy the lineage of Jesus Christ

What are three examples of Satan's attempts to prevent the coming of Christ by reacting to the level of revelation provided by God?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

step 3: let the clear passage dictate the meaning of the unclear passage

Many times, there is one well-developed passage in the Bible that defines significant doctrines. The other passages that deal with the doctrine provide additional insight or further develop a thought that is addressed in the major passage. Sometimes the other passages are not quite as clear or use illustrations that can be confusing. Most of the heretical doctrines of the cults and unsound Christian denominations come from passages like these.

The best way to address the more confusing passage is to let the clear passage dictate its meaning. The principle at work here is the harmony of God's Word. God is not contradictory, nor is His Word. If we have two passages that address the same subject, they will harmonize. We need to study both passages and find the clearer meaning of the more direct passage. Then, take the results and let that serve as a standard for interpreting the confusing passage. Let me make a very important observation here. You must make sure both passages address the same issue. It is possible to look at two passages that appear to deal with the same issue and later find out they do not. This is your first, and perhaps most important task. If you do well at the first step, the last two steps will be much easier to complete satisfactorily. Let's look at an illustration.

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Illustration: Reconcile Acts 2:38 and Acts 10:44-48

Step 1: Are both passages addressing the same issue? If so, define the issue:

Step 2: Which passage is the clearer passage and which one is more difficult to understand?

Step 3: Determine the meaning of the clearer passage. Does it harmonize with the more difficult passage when you look at it from that perspective?

questions

question 1:

Some churches have refused to pay pastors because of their interpretation of Acts 20:33-34, 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9 and 1 Timothy 3:3. Is this interpretation consistent with the rest of God's revelation on this subject? If not, what do these passages mean?

question 2:

Susan has been a church member who regularly attends service for over 30 years. For the past twenty years she has successfully hidden a drinking problem from all but her closest family members. One family member finally worked up the courage to confront her, to which she replied, "God knows I drink too much, but He'll forgive me; I just can't help it." How do you respond to Susan?

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question 3:

Your cousin, also a Missionary Baptist, hears that you've been learning to study the Scriptures by analyzing the historical, cultural, contextual, lexical, and theological context of a passage. You also mention meditation and prayer as important parts of your study. He mocks your "modern" Bible study method and says that all he needs is the Spirit of God and he points to 2 Corinthians 3:6 as his proof-text. How would you respond?

question 4:

Frank has been your friend for years and you've been looking for an opportunity to talk to him about the Lord. Finally, he seems to be open to talking about religion but when you invite him to church he responds, "I would love to come with you but I've been looking for a church with Saturday night service so I don't have to miss any of the Sunday football games." How do you respond?