

Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 15, Evaluation and Application

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 15, Evaluation and Application.

It's well at the conclusion of the interpretation of the passage to bring together your inferences, specific inferences, in a paragraph that actually serves as a nub of the interpretation.

So, from our interpretation of 1:5 through 8, this would be our general conclusion. Wisdom is the ability fully and profoundly to know the meaning of the reality that God has revealed primarily through his word, but also derivatively through the world, and the understanding of the process by which we translate this right thinking about reality into right action, and the capability actually to implement right thinking into right action, thus experiencing a life of wholeness and unity, Peter dubs perfection, or James, I should say, dubs perfection, and one that alone is pleasing to God, who is perfectly and wholly one, unified in his commitment to give. This wisdom is itself a divine gift from the divine giver, not present in humans in general, and not possible for humans on the basis of any human or earthly help, nor is it a necessary concomitant of Christian conversion, but it is a divine gift offered to Christians and is thus divine and transcendent in its very nature.

This gift of wisdom is freely accessible to all Christians through the prayer of faith, that is, an active and continuous mode of asking, which involves a profound conviction that it comes from God alone and that it comes from a God who is one in his absolute desire to give good and only good gifts to all persons. Wisdom is the ability, understanding, and capability to know reality and to express this reality in the embodiment of life, that is, the right action; pertains in James 1:5 specifically to trials and temptations implicit within them but also pertains more generally to every human situation. I hope it's clear how we brought in various specific aspects of our inferences into this holistic general conclusion.

Now, we have been talking about observation and interpretation. It behooves us now, just briefly, to say something regarding evaluation and application. That is to say, discerning exactly what aspects of the truth of the interpretation that we have come up with may be directly applied in our lives, and also exactly how we can apply this truth or these truths to our lives.

This is basically what we have in mind for evaluation and application. So, as I say, in terms of specific process, we want to identify from our interpretation, really that paragraph that is a general conclusion from our interpretation, identify from that the

specific teaching or teachings of the passage and articulate this teaching in a brief paragraph, which we have done, and on the basis of evidence to be discussed below, determine if the specific teaching or teachings of this passage is transcendent, that is, properly applicable to times and including our own, or is situation-bound, that is, so exclusively bound to the original situation as not to be properly applicable to the present time. If you find the teaching or teachings of the passage to be situation-bound, it's important to explain implications, both assumptions and outgrowths, from the teaching that may, in fact, be transcendent.

Now, let me just say something with regard to evaluation and application. In terms of evaluation more properly, evaluation really does have to do with ascertaining which teachings or which aspects of the teaching of your interpretation are situation-bound and which are transcendent. That is to say, whether the teaching or teachings or aspects of the teaching from your interpretation are situation-bound in the sense that they are so tied to the original situation in which they were communicated that they could not legitimately be taken up and directly applied in other times and in other places including our own, or whether they are transcendent, that is to say, not so tied to the original situation that they cannot be taken up and directly applied, but are legitimately directly applicable in other times and in other places, including our own.

This is usually the way most biblical scholars talk about biblical evaluation. It actually has to do with the appropriateness or legitimacy of application of the truth of a passage interpreted, appropriateness or legitimacy. But in fact, there are other aspects of evaluation as well.

Another aspect of evaluation really has to do with the force and the scope of application. In terms of the force of application, even if a teaching is judged to be transcendent, it is not so tied to the original situation that it cannot be directly applied in other times and other places. Even for transcendent sorts of teaching, we need to evaluate that teaching in terms of its force. Is it presented as an absolute requirement, either for thinking or for acting, an absolute requirement, or something that is recommended, even perhaps strongly recommended, or simply a tactical suggestion, a good idea under certain circumstances, the force of applicability, but also the scope of applicability?

That is to say, the evaluation also attempts to ascertain whether the teaching of this passage is properly applicable to all persons or whether it applies only to certain persons, say, only to leaders within the church. There is also the issue of the degree of concession. That is to say, does the teaching of this passage present a truth that involves a kind of divine concession? That is to say, God's ideal would be something much more than this, but this passage indicates that this is a level of thinking or behavior that God is prepared to live with, that God concedes over against the ideal.

Or does the passage present an ideal with a suggestion that a certain degree of concession is admitted? Now, really, all of this has to do with what we call biblical evaluation. That is to say, the evaluation of the biblical truth in terms of appropriateness or legitimacy of applicability, force of applicability, scope of applicability, and degree of concession of applicability. Coming back to this for a moment, to this business of degree of concession of applicability, a couple of examples.

In terms of a passage where you have a kind of divine concession that falls short of the ideal, I think a very telling passage here is the story of Naaman, the Syrian general, which is related to 2 Kings 5. You remember this man was a leper, and he comes to Elisha for healing. And he is, in fact, healed in the river Jordan. And he is quite grateful to Yahweh, the God of Israel, for his cleansing from leprosy.

And he wants to become, and in fact has become, a worshipper of Yahweh, the true God, the only true God. Yet he is in a difficult situation. He has a responsibility, actually, of accompanying and perhaps aiding the king of Syria into the house of the god Rimmon for worship.

And it would be a matter of the sentence of death if he were to enter Rimmon's house and not bow in worship. So, he pleads or asks for a concession from the prophet if, in fact, it would be allowable to the God of Israel if, in fact, he did bow the knee with a recognition that in his heart he was not actually worshipping Rimmon. This obviously is a technical violation of God's law.

It's a violation of God's will at some level. And yet God, through the prophet, grants his concession to Naaman. So, it's not a matter then of saying that this kind of thing is always all right or that it does represent God's will.

It does not represent God's will. It does not represent God's ideal. But it shows that God is prepared to concede to these kinds of official necessities, at least in cases like this.

On the other hand, in the case of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul presents the ideal of celibacy. It is better, he says, for a man not to marry. That is better, for I wish that all would remain as I am, Paul says.

And yet he explicitly indicates the concession there. But he says there is such a thing as hormones, raging hormones, in fact. And it's better for a man to marry than to burn with passion.

There you have the ideal presented along with the concession. The divine ideal, Paul believes, in this situation is celibacy, but there is the concession that is indicated there. Now, with regard to what is kind of the basic level of evaluation, and that is

the appropriateness or legitimacy of applicability, what you really have here in the Bible is what we might refer to as a continuum of transcendence.

On one end of the continuum, we have passages such as, well, we might say such as Matthew 22:34 through 40. Matthew 22:34 through 40. You remember this passage.

The lawyer asked Jesus, what is the great commandment in the law? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. This is a first and great commandment. The second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Upon these two commandments, hang or depend on all the law and the prophets.

We're going to come back in a moment to indicate why we believe that that is, in fact, a transcendent teaching that is directly applicable in other times and other places, including our own. On the other end of the continuum, you have passages like 1 Timothy 5, verse 23, where Paul admonishes Timothy to no longer drink water but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

This, at least on the surface, appears to us to be a situation-bound teaching. The issue really has to do with whether the teaching of a passage, whether our interpretation of a passage, involves a teaching that directly expresses a more fundamental truth, more fundamental according to the passage in its context and according to a broad biblical perspective. On the basis of the passage in its context and on the basis of context of the Bible as a whole, we answer the question whether this teaching directly expresses a more fundamental truth that transcends the original situation in which it was addressed, that is to say, is essentially transcendent, and thus can legitimately be appropriated in other times and other places, including our own, over against being largely shaped or determined by circumstances surrounding the original situation, that is to say, circumstantially contingent, essentially transcendent or circumstantially contingent.

That decision is made especially according to the passage in its context and according to a broad biblical perspective. Now, in the case of Matthew 22, 34 through 40, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. The context really indicates that this allows for broad applicability and that this is not situation-bound. The lawyer asks the question with regard to God's will as expressed in the law.

It has to do with what is the center of the law in terms of an index to the will of God. It is not limited in terms of its immediate context to any particular situation. The immediate context presents it in the broadest possible terms.

And, of course, in the rest of the Bible, it is presented this way over and over again in the New Testament, not just in Matthew 22. The double love command is seen as

the center of God's will. And as a matter of fact, it is encouraged that this double love command be applied in the various situations of life.

Now, with regard to 1 Timothy 5:23, though, here we note that the immediate context suggests a situation-bound condition. No longer drink water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. So, it becomes contingent, for one thing, upon the particular health situation of Timothy.

That, of course, is suggested by the immediate context. And, of course, in the broader biblical perspective, nowhere else in the Bible is water forbidden. Is the drinking of water forbidden, or the taking of wine as absolutely required, and the like?

So, on that basis, again, it seems that this is a circumstantially contingent sort of teaching. Now, there are, of course, it is true, as I say, there's a continuum here, which means that you have many, many passages, maybe most passages, lie somewhere in between the extremes of this continuum. This normally involves certain aspects of the teaching of a passage being situation-bound and other aspects of that teaching being transcendent.

But anyway, that is, in a nutshell, the task of biblical evaluation. Now, there are, of course, some passages that you could not take up and directly apply if you wanted to. Take as an example Deuteronomy 18:6, And if a Levite comes from any of your towns out of all Israel where he lives, he may come when he desires, to the place which the Lord will choose, that he may minister in the name of the Lord his God, like all his fellow Levites, who stand to minister there before the Lord, they shall have equal portions to eat, besides what he receives from the sale of his patrimony.

Now, of course, we do not have Levites. We do not have a central shrine any longer. So, as I say, this is a kind of teaching that could not be taken up and directly applied, even if one attempted to do so, tried to do so. Now, I mentioned that, really, making the decision with regard to biblical evaluation must be based upon evidence.

And, of course, this is not surprising, given that we're operating according to an inductive approach. It's not simply a matter of saying, almost intuitively, this just doesn't seem to be the kind of thing that can be taken up and directly applied, or this seems to be the kind of thing that we can take up and directly apply. We really need to operate on the basis of evidence, and especially biblical evidence, in making that decision, not only with regard to the legitimacy of applicability but also force, scope, and degree of concession of applicability.

And there are especially two types of biblical evidence that are relevant for doing this biblical evaluation. The first is context. And here, let me give just a couple of examples.

Again, I think examples are most helpful that illustrate the employment of contextual evidence for making the decision about applicability. In Matthew, chapter 16, verse 20, and, once again, if you have Bibles and should have Bibles, it's well to open them. One of my professors at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, in my doctoral studies, was Paul Achtemeier, and he said on one occasion, that doing Bible study without a Bible is like playing tennis without a ball.

And so, it is really quite important always to have a Bible open. But if you look at Matthew 16:20, we read there that Jesus charged them to tell no one that he was a Christ. Now, this Jesus says to his disciples.

This is a charge he gives to his disciples. In Matthew's gospel, of course, Christians are disciples, and in many ways, the twelve disciples in Matthew's gospel are representative of post-Easter Christians. So, it does raise a question, can this charge of Jesus to his disciples be taken up and directly applied? Don't tell anyone that Jesus is a Christ.

Keep his Messiahship a secret. Well, the answer, of course, is manifestly no. This is clearly situation-bound.

But how do we know that it is? We know it on the basis of the broader context of Matthew's gospel. Matthew's gospel comes to a climax in the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:18 through 20, where the disciples are commanded, Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. An interpretation of make disciples there in Matthew 28:20 makes it very clear that that part of, and as a matter of fact central to, the making of disciples is declaring the Messiahship, the Christhood of Jesus.

By the way, another example from Matthew, which is quite interesting, is in Matthew 10, verses 5 and 6. Jesus commands his disciples there, Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now again, is that the kind of thing that can be taken up and directly applied? No, again, because of the broader book context, and again, in part, because of the climax of the gospel there at the end of chapter 28. Go and make disciples of all nations.

Which, by the way, is a word that could be translated by all Gentiles. It certainly includes Gentiles. So that the Great Commission, really, the climax of Matthew's gospel, renders that charge in Matthew 10:5, and 6. Go nowhere among the Gentiles, enter no town of the Samaritans, renders that situation bound.

It was appropriate for the twelve disciples during Jesus' earthly ministry but is no longer appropriate, no longer applicable, to Christians who live on this side of the resurrection. On the other hand, you have in Romans 1, 18 through 36, the clearest statement in the New Testament against homosexual behavior. And this passage, you know, has become a storm center of controversy in recent years.

For the most part, the controversy with regard to Romans 1:18 through 36 does not involve the interpretation of the passage. That seems to be pretty clear, at least in large measure, but involves especially the evaluation of it. Can this be taken up and directly applied? In other times and other places, including our own.

Now, the claim is sometimes made that it is situation-bound because it has to do specifically with, well, with caught prostitution, male caught prostitution. That it's really an argument against pagan idolatry over against an argument against homosexual relationships as such. But the immediate context, at least in terms of evidence for immediate context, will not allow that kind of judgment with regard to its being situation-bound, in my estimation, because Paul roots, if you look at the argument there Paul makes, Paul roots his objections to homosexual behavior in creation, and in the order of creation.

It is really, as far as he's concerned, a violation or a sin against the creator, a repudiation of the sovereignty of the creator God. Insofar as that is the case, it would be considered a transcendent teaching that continues in force as long as creation continues. Now, another example, another type of evidence, what we've done is to cite evidence from context to make the decision.

Another type of evidence is evidence from scriptural testimony, the broad biblical perspective, and evidence from scriptural testimony. If you look at Exodus chapter 21, verses 23 and 24, Exodus 21:23, and 24, if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. The famous eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.

But Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 5, verse 38, says, You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles, etc. So here Jesus says, explicitly says, that this commandment from the law in Exodus 21 is no longer directly applicable.

It is no longer applicable in the terms in which it was stated, no longer directly applicable. You have heard that it was said; he quotes it, but by way of contrast, I say to you.

So here then you have a case where scriptural testimony, and especially what we call the progress of revelation from Old Testament to New Testament, which is a form of scriptural testimony, indicates or renders, I should say, this teaching from Exodus 21-24 situation bound. Appropriate, legitimate for Israel prior to the coming of Christ, but now no longer directly applicable to the disciples of our Lord. Now, it's important to note here that even situation-bound teachings, or situation-bound passages, might be relevant.

This raises a question of whether there are any passages to speak of or many, even many, passages in the Bible that are not capable of being applied, are not capable of being preached on, or are the subject of preaching or teaching. Are there passages in the Bible that are essentially excluded from the possibility of any use for us in terms of personal formation or any use by us in terms of preaching and teaching within the church? And my inclination is to say no.

That there are virtually no passages that are beyond the reach of contemporary applicability. That's why I say that even situation bound passages might be relevant. In cases like this, though, the relevance, the applicability, would be in applying the answers to the rational and implicational questions, rather than the answer to the definitive question.

In situation-bound passages, it's almost always the answer to the definitive question that is not directly applicable. But if you pursue the reason for what is said, not simply the meaning of what is said, but the reason that lies behind what is said, or the implications, the theological implications, of what is communicated in this passage, almost always the answers to the rational and the implicational question may be directly relevant. Now, of course, also, beyond that, situation bound passages or teachings are relevant for people in the same situation.

For most of us in the Western world, I count myself, of course, in the Western world; for most of us who live in the Western world, the commands with regard to eating meat offered to idols are not pertinent. It's not relevant. In a sense, it is situation-bound.

It cannot be taken up and directly applied in other situations. But it is directly relevant for people who live in cultures where you continue to have meat offered to idols. It does speak directly to persons such as them.

Now, there is also, along with biblical evaluation, what we might refer to as situational evaluation. It's important in making the decision with regard to whether

the teaching of this passage is directly applicable in our own times. It's important also to evaluate the contemporary situation that we are facing in order to make the judgment as to whether there is sufficient congruity or correspondence between the biblical teaching and this contemporary situation to warrant applicability.

So, we need to ask ourselves, what exactly is going on in the contemporary situation to which we think this biblical teaching might be applicable? It's precisely here, in fact, that oftentimes preachers or teachers in the church run into problems. It's not unusual to find a situation where a teacher or preacher within the church will do the exegesis, the interpretation well, and even the biblical evaluation well, but in applying it to a contemporary situation, misunderstands that contemporary situation and misreads that contemporary situation. And if that happens, then misapplication is inevitable.

When you're attempting to apply, for example, biblical teaching to complex contemporary situations, such as euthanasia, the arms race, war and peace, cloning, and the like, those kinds of complicated sorts of contemporary situations, it is, in those cases, quite obviously important to understand them in depth in order to relate properly the biblical teaching to how we should think and what we should do as we live into these contemporary situations. But even when it comes to applying biblical teaching to more personal and direct sort of situations, I remember hearing about a superintendent who was called in to deal with conflict in a local church within his conference, the conflict between pastor and people. Unfortunately, that superintendent misread the dynamics of that situation terribly and misapplied the biblical truth and biblical teaching to that situation and did great further damage because of that misapplicability.

Now, if this kind of evaluation leads then to application proper, sometimes this is referred to as appropriation. In some ways, appropriation is a more apt word because it's a broader word. Apply carries with it the connotations of behavior.

But appropriation carries broader connotations. It suggests things like broad moral and spiritual formation, not simply what to decide to do behaviorally in a particular situation, a kind of way of thinking over against necessarily specific decisions with regard to particular behavior. So, appropriation may be a bit of a better word.

But anyway, when it comes to appropriation, it involves asking and answering this question: exactly how does the teaching of this passage inform my understanding and my living in this contemporary situation that I face? Exactly what difference does it make as to how I think about and how I live in this contemporary situation that I or my congregation, my denomination, and my nation face? Now, the key here, there are, I think, two keys in this business of appropriation, two principles. One is a principle of correspondence. We need to make very sure that there is a

correspondence between biblical teaching and this contemporary situation and to relate that correspondence appropriately.

But also the principle of specificity. What tends to happen in biblical appropriation is that the appropriation is made in a very general sort of way. I actually find this again and again and again as I teach seminary students.

As I ask them to go about the process of applying the biblical truth that they have interpreted, they tend to come up with very broad applications, not specific at all. That kind of broad application is not helpful because we do not live in the clouds. People do live in the nuts and bolts of the specificities of life.

What we really need as individuals, as congregations, all of us really need insight into specific applicability. We also need help when we are working with individual passages to determine how this passage functions in the canon in such a way as to address in specific ways the kinds of problems or challenges that we are facing today. If in your application of a passage you come up with an application of a passage, say a given passage that you're working on, that could be an application that could be directed, or could, I should say, arise from a hundred different other passages, your application has not really been, is not really sufficiently specific.

The ideal would be to ask exactly how this particular passage, interpreted in a specific way, can be applied specifically to specific situations or to specific decisions that I must make. What difference does this passage make in terms of how I live in these particular situations? See that draws on the richness of the passage itself, the uniqueness of that passage in the biblical canon. What that passage has to offer us that no other passage has to offer us with regard to insight into how we live our lives. And it offers us insight that we can actually put into practice because we are relating it to specific situations in our lives.

So, I urge students, when they go about the process of application, to think of situations in their lives that may be applied or situations in the lives of other Christians that they know to which this can be specifically applied so that it makes a difference. As you say, my life in this situation is different because of this passage and my application of this passage. So, if this passage were not here, if the particular teaching of this particular passage were not here in the canon, my life would be poorer as I try to live in this situation that I am facing.

That, again, is kind of a difficult target. But it is, I think, a worthy target to aim at in terms of specificity of appropriation. Just one final word with regard to appropriation.

This may not be true so much in other parts of the world, but at least where I live, in the Western world, our culture has been very much influenced by a kind of

pragmatism. A kind of emphasis upon action, upon behavior. And it's important to remember that appropriation doesn't have to do only with behavior.

It also has to do with thinking. The New Testament is very concerned with how we think, with processes of thought, and the direction of thought. And so appropriation should not be limited to what we do, but also to how we think.

That also is important. It needs to be kept in mind. I might say, too, that with regard to preaching and teaching, there is both direct application and indirect application.

Grant Osborne, in his book *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, talks about direct application and indirect application. He points out that whenever preaching is performed, people will in the pews will make an application. They will apply what the preacher says to their lives.

If they're really listening or paying attention, they will apply it. Insofar as they take it and they do the work of application, on the basis of the preaching or teaching, that is indirect application. Now, there is such a thing as direct application, and you have this when the preacher or teacher actually makes clear what ought to be the applicatory significance of this.

Preach on a passage in the process. You say, this is what this will look like in your life and mine this week as we live it out. I have a friend who pastored churches of various sizes, from very small churches to the largest church in my denomination, who said to me on one occasion a few years back that at the end of a sermon, people should be able to leave that sermon saying, next week, within the next week, I can tell whether I have applied this sermon or not. That's to say, be able to make very clear decisions as to whether I've applied this or not.

His point is that it's the obligation of the preacher to engage, to make an application in the process of preaching, to tell the people that this is what that application will look like so that as they leave that service, they will be able to say seven days from now whether in fact they've applied it or not because the preacher has told them what application looks like. That's a direct application. Grant Osborne suggests that indirect application actually is more effective, because it involves really the ownership of the person, the involvement of the hearer, him or herself, that that's more effective than direct application.

But on the other hand, of course, one might argue that a preacher or teacher has the obligation to make suggestions or to point out what are possible applications from the teaching that is the basis of the teaching of the passage that is being preached or that is being taught. This, I think, is probably a good place to pause here as we move into a move really from discussion of Method itself into observation and interpretation of the book of James from beginning to end.

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