

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 28, Summary

Conclusion

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What I want to do now is attempt to bring everything together that we've talked about in all the previous sessions. And we've discussed hermeneutics and biblical interpretation. Looking at hermeneutics as sort of asking or raising the question, how it is we understand or know something?

What do we do when we interpret a text? What do we do when we try to understand a text? In our case, a text from the Old or New Testaments. And what are the various theories that explain what we do when we read and interpret something and try to understand something. And then perhaps seeing interpretation more broadly as the application of principles and methods to the biblical text in order to understand it and make sense of them.

And so we've looked at, number one, we have looked at various theories of interpretation and hermeneutical theories. Beginning all the way back with the biblical text, but also moving through historically, logically, through author-centered approaches to interpretation. Text-centered approaches that focus on the text as the primary locus of meaning and the primary object of interpretation.

Then reader-centered approaches that locate meaning in the reader and the reader's ability to make sense of the text. And also more post-modern approaches and even deconstructive approaches that just spare of any meaning at all in the text. But we've also looked at various interpretive methods ranging from historical approaches and source form and redaction criticism.

And looking at traditional approaches of grammar and context and lexical analysis. The use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. Theological analysis of the biblical text.

And asking how those affect the way we read the text and how they can be implemented into an effective hermeneutical practice or interpretive practice in understanding the biblical text. In one sense, what we're doing with the different hermeneutical theories and interpretive approaches is simply recognizing the multi-dimension of the text. That is, we're probing the text from different dimensions.

As we'll see in just a moment as we discuss or try to integrate all these things into a coherent interpretive approach. Is the various methods I think are necessary because they allow us to probe the various dimensions of the text, the biblical text. Realizing that as God's word, the text comes down to us in its historical and cultural rootedness.

It's also a literary composition that requires that we use various techniques to understand it. It comes to us in a specific language and also as God's word, it has a theological dimension. So the various interpretive approaches that we have been discussing are necessary because they help us to probe or come to grips with the different dimensions of the biblical text.

So having discussed all these various methods and approaches, what I want to do is try to integrate these various approaches and methods and insights and interpretive theories into an evangelical approach to interpreting scripture. That is an approach that takes seriously the Bible as God's word for his people and takes seriously the Bible as both the words of God but also the words of human authors as well. It will have two parts.

Number one, we will look at how some of the different theories, especially the historical, tech, more author-centered approaches, then more tech-centered approaches and also even more reader-centered and post-modern, even deconstructive, those post-structuralist approaches, how those might all be integrated into an evangelical approach to interpreting scripture. Again, one that takes seriously the Bible as God's word while at the same time recognizing its historical rootedness as the words of human beings and human authors. But then the second session, asking the question of what might an interpretive methodology look like, what might an approach that gathers up some of these various methods we have been discussing and describing and illustrating, what might an interpretive approach look like, what might an interpretive method look like.

So how do we integrate these various approaches and interpretive theories into an evangelical approach to interpreting the Bible? First of all, I'll make simply seven or eight observations or comments that are an attempt to reflect the different theories and approaches that we've looked at. First of all, since the Bible is the word of God, since as Christians we confess that the Bible is inspired scripture, it's nothing less than the very word of God to His people, Because of that, there must be some meaning that I can get at. There must be an other in the text.

There must be something outside of myself, a meaning outside of myself that I can get at to some extent and that I can understand. As I read the Bible, the Bible clearly intends to indicate that God has communicated to His people in a way that He expects His people not only to understand that revelation, but also to obey it and put it into practice. If the Bible is something that God expects His people to put into practice and conform their lives to, then there must be some meaning in the text that I can get at.

So that complete relativism that denies any kind of stable meaning, however difficult it may be to get at that meaning, however provisional or however much we realize that we cannot achieve it perfectly or exhaustively, there must be some kind of meaning that I can get at substantially and to some degree. So it seems that complete relativism is inconsistent with the Bible as the word of God. So therefore, author's intention is still a valid goal, again, however imperfectly it will be arrived at, however much we cannot achieve absolute certainty regarding the author's intent, however elusive it might appear to be at times, at the same time it appears that it still is a worthy goal and a necessary goal.

That we pursue the author's at least probable intention, that is, our interpretation of the text must be justified in light of what the author could have intended and what the author probably intended. Again, although we cannot perhaps uncover it perfectly or exhaustively, that substantially and adequately we can. This does not mean that we uncover the author's thought process or the author's mind, especially when we're dealing with texts written by authors that are no longer around to consult.

And we've already looked at even the problematic nature sometimes of consulting authors that are still living. But nevertheless, the author's intention appears to be a worthy goal. And not uncovering the author's mind, but uncovering the author's probable intention and likely intention based on the text that we have, the author's intention as revealed in the text.

So, it seems that the corollary of understanding the Bible as God's word is that there must be some meaning that God intended to communicate to his people, that he expects them to observe and obey, that at some level we can get at. Again, however imperfectly or exhaustively, that it is a worthy goal to pursue the meaning of the text and the meaning that the author intended to some degree. Second, in relationship to

understanding the Bible as inspired, going back to one of our earlier sessions, the Bible as inspired, we saw that when we confess that the Bible is inspired, we're primarily focusing on the text itself, the finished product, as nothing less than the very word of God.

That whatever human processes that authors went through to write scripture, that the end product was nothing less than what God wanted to communicate to his readers. And it could be, to some extent, in some way, identified as the very word of God. Since the Bible is the word of God in the written text, the final product is nothing less than the word of God, those methods that focus on the text are valid and, to some degree, necessary.

That is, methods that focus on, for example, the grammatical dimension of the text, we talked a little bit about grammatical analysis, lexical analysis that deals with the wording of the text and the lexical inventory, the vocabulary of the text and what that means. Other approaches such as redaction criticism that asks how the author has brought the different forms and sources together and put them together into a coherent whole. Contextual analysis, literary approaches that, again, look at the details of the text and the workings of the text.

Genre criticism that asks what kind of text is this, what is the literary form of this text. Those methods that put one in contact with the text. Those approaches that deal with the text itself as it stands and deal with the details of the text are both valid and necessary.

Structuralism, a lot of the text-centered approaches. They all put us in contact with the biblical text itself. The Bible as a text, which we claim as the Word of God, is therefore consistent with approaches that deal with the text itself and look at the details of the text.

As opposed to approaches that merely look at the origins of the text and the different sources and the history that produced it. Approaches that deal with the text itself and put us in contact with the text as it stands seem to me to be both valid and necessary and consistent with the Bible as the Word of God. The text of the Old and New Testament self as the very Word of God to his people.

A third implication of what we discussed, and a third principle in integrating these various approaches into an evangelical approach to scripture that takes seriously the Bible as God's Word. Is since the Bible claims to be a record of God's acts in history, historical approaches are then also both valid and necessary. That is, approaches that are ahistorical, some literary approaches that are not interested in or even reject the history behind the text or the historical world outside of the text that the text might refer to.

Ahistorical approaches that only are interested, especially we looked at a lot of literary approaches that are either not interested in or sometimes even reject, especially some approaches that might treat the Bible as purely fictional literature or something like that, are to be rejected since the Bible itself claims to be a record of God's revelatory acts in history or God's redemptive acts in history on behalf of his people. Because of that, historical approaches I think are both indeed necessary and valid. So, approaches related to historical criticism that reconstruct the historical background and circumstances, the historical cultural background, asking questions of the historicity of the text, doing things like harmonizing the Gospels, asking about the validity and the nature of the historical events that are referred to in the biblical text, are necessary because the Bible claims to be a record of God acting in history for and on behalf of his people.

However, we've also seen historical approaches need to be tempered by an approach that allows for and is open to divine intervention in history, that therefore allows for such things as resurrections and miracles and God becoming incarnate as a human being and God's divine intervention into history. Historical critical approaches that operate with a cause and effect assumption that do not allow divine intervention and simply see valid historicity as that which is analogous to my own modern day situation, those approaches that simply rule out a supernatural divine intervention are to be rejected and are inconsistent with the biblical text which again claims to be a witness to and record of God's revelation of himself in history. So, historical criticism must be tempered by an approach that allows for the supernatural, but on the other hand, as I've already said, historical approaches also remind us then that any hermeneutical or interpretive approaches that are entirely ahistorical, that is, they deny any historical referentiality, that is, referring to a world outside of the text.

Or approaches that are not interested in the historical dimension of a text or whether certain individuals actually existed or certain events took place are to be rejected as well. So certain literary critical or certain narrative approaches would fall under this category. So as a text that claims to record God acting in history requires and demands and validates historical approaches to the biblical text.

Fourth, since the Bible is a human document as well, the various criticisms and some of the other approaches are also valuable and necessary, those approaches that focus on the human author and the process of composition. So many of the criticisms such as form criticism, even source and redaction criticism, again historical approaches that try to reconstruct the historical background of the text, again the different critical methodologies, when stripped of their destructive and negative assumptions, are valuable tools in that once again they put us in touch with the

historical author, with the author of the biblical text. So again, for example, genre criticism, which focuses on common literary types that the author would have used.

We've already said redaction criticism that explores the way the author takes up sources and forms and edits and arranges them to communicate his theological intention. Those approaches that focus on the author as the one who puts the text together seems likewise therefore to be valid because the Bible claims to be a human document. Again, when stripped of their destructive tendencies or presuppositions, these approaches can be helpful in helping us to deal with the human author and the activity of the author in producing the text.

So we don't need to fear critical approaches to the biblical text. Again, they seem to be justified because the biblical text is the words of God but also the words of human beings. So various critical approaches are valid and necessary.

But again, when removed from and divorced from the destructive and negative assumptions that sometimes accompany their usage. Fifth, also because the Bible is God's people claim, it is the word of God, because it is the scriptures of the church, we must also explore the theological dimensions of the text. And likewise, be cautious of approaches that ignore the theological dimensions of the text.

Again, purely historical approaches or purely literary approaches that do not take into consideration the theological nature of the biblical text are to be avoided. Instead, we must ask what the text says theologically. We also, as we've seen, must take the older New Testament text and place it within the broader overarching theological story of the Bible, of God's redemptive activity in behalf of his people and in behalf of all of creation.

So the Old and New Testament have a theological dimension as the scripture of the church, as the word of God to his people that require to be explored. And so a theological analysis must be part of the interpretive enterprise. Sixth, even more radical approaches, even more radical reader response approaches, where meaning is in a sense solely in the eyes of the reader, and even more postmodern and deconstructive approaches to the biblical text might still have something to say to Christian interpreters in that they function to chasten the pride and arrogance of the interpreter.

In that they function, I think primarily they can function to foster humility, to recognize that no one arrives at an interpretation that has a pure and perfect and pristine connection with the meaning in the text. It functions to remind us that no one comes to the text void of any presuppositions and any theological understandings, that no one comes to the text with a blank slate just waiting to be written on. We all come from our own perspectives.

And these different reader-centered approaches and even deconstructive approaches can function to remind us that we all come to the text with our predispositions that affect the way we read it. We all see the text through a certain perspective. Now, I would argue that that does not mean, therefore, that we're doomed to failure, that we're doomed to simply find in the text what we bring to it, but instead using some of the other approaches that we're allowed, or that that perspective can be challenged and changed, that texts can transform, that we can discover a meaning outside of ourselves, something that is other.

But at the same time, these types of approaches serve to remind us that, again, interpretation is sometimes a messy process, that author's intention, that the meaning of the text at times can elude us and reminding us of the need for humility

in interpreting the Word of God. There's no place for arrogance and pride. And also reminding us of the need to be aware of using interpretations in oppressive ways.

But instead, we come to the text with our own perspectives, but hopefully we allow the text to transform and challenge those perspectives likewise in the interpretive process. So even more reader-centered and even deconstructive approaches can function in a helpful way in reminding us of the provisional nature of our interpretations at times, reminding us of the need for humility, reminding us of the fact that we approach the text with different assumptions and predispositions. And again, I think the person who comes to the text aware of that is probably in a much better position to interpret the text and not to allow those perspectives to override the text than someone who simply says, I simply come to the text in an objective way without any presuppositions or biases.

That person is probably in more danger of allowing those to affect and influence the way he or she reads the text. Seventh is probably the best approach is an eclectic one. That is, all these different methods, even the way I've described them, we can see sometimes certain approaches have value, but for example, historical critical approaches have value, but there are also inherent weaknesses if they are applied exclusively to the text, ignoring other interpretive methodologies and other dimensions of the text.

So an eclectic approach allows us, as I've said, to probe the different dimensions of the text. All these different approaches allow us to get at different facets of the text, and so an eclectic approach allows the different methods to balance each other out. For example, literary approaches are extremely valuable in that they deal with the text as it stands, they deal with the structure of the text and how the text is put together, the inner workings of the text, but literary approaches at the same time

can have inherent weaknesses when they are applied exclusively, and exclusive of historical and theological approaches to the text as well.

So what we're calling for is an approach that is eclectic, that allows the different interpretive methods to balance each other out and hopefully come up with the most plausible and fullest interaction with the text possible. This might also be the place to say as well that an approach that is as eclectic as possible is it's important to also listen to the interpretations of others and listen to what others have said about the text, especially those who come to the text from a very different perspective than us, particularly those who are marginalized or come from certain situations. Situations that in fact may indeed be closer to the situation that the biblical text itself is addressing, and sometimes by listening to others who have interpreted the text from a very different perspective, sometimes that can function to help us see blind spots in our own interpretation.

It can help to challenge, back up to number six, more reader response and deconstructive approaches. Sometimes it's listening to interpretations of others that can help challenge our own, where our interpretations might be colored by our own perspective. There's actually an offshoot now of more liberation approaches, liberation theology, and liberation exegesis.

One of the offshoots of that recently that we didn't spend a lot of time talking about is what is called cultural interpretation, that again interprets the text and reads it from various cultures and situations. Again, that can often be valuable in at least exposing, perhaps exposing our own narrow sidedness and how our own perspectives might influence the way we read the text. Again, with the goal not being to simply value plurality for the sake of having as many interpretations as possible, but to have perspectives that might be closer to the actual perspective of the biblical text that helps us to get closer to what the author was actually intending.

So all that again is just to say, be aware of and listen to different, how others have read the biblical text and how that might perhaps be more in line with the intention of the text itself in its original historical context. And then finally the eighth observation to make regarding all these methods is since the Bible is the word of God, and since as God's people we confess it is the word of God, it must ultimately function to transform us. That is, we must respond in obedience.

We must respond to it in the very way called forth by scripture as God's word. As sometimes it is put, it's not enough to understand the Bible, but we must also stand under the Bible. So it's not enough to simply conform to orthodoxy, again as some have said, but it's important to advocate orthopraxy.

In other words, to me it seems to be inconsistent for someone to claim that the Bible is the inspired word of God, yet they betray, they actually betray their disbelief in that when they fail to do what it says. So application is the ultimate goal of interpretation. So these eight principles I think are, seem to me to be some of the more broader general insights derived from looking at all these previous methodologies and theories, hermeneutical theories relating to how we approach the biblical text.

And I've simply tried to integrate them into what I see as an evangelical approach to interpreting scripture that takes seriously the word of God as God's very revelation, but at the same time the words of human beings in God's revelation in all its historical and cultural rootedness. Now, what might the process then of interpretation look like? And again my purpose isn't to establish a detailed methodology, but to simply again try to put this information together in a format that might be useful for actually approaching a biblical text. But two things I want to say, number one is, kind of two sides of the same coin, number one is we should

avoid looking at this as simply a checklist of things to do, that is, or even a series of steps as if one can move through them mechanically like one does a recipe and the end result then is the meaning of the text as the author intended it.

Or to see it as a series of stages that you do one stage and then you're done and you move on to the next stage and then you're finished and you move on to the next stage and you're finished with that and you just work through all the steps and the final product is your interpretation of the text. So I want to avoid on the one hand a mechanical approach that would simply see this as a series of steps as in a recipe that mechanically performs or that you arrive at the end product. Instead, on the other hand, the second thing I want to say is, on the other hand, the interpretive process is probably best envisioned as many interpreters in discussions of hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics have seemed to gravitate towards and that is to understand the interpretive process more as a spiral, using the metaphor of a spiral.

That is the interpretive process can be seen more as an interaction with the text, kind of a back and forth. We come to the text, we enter its world, we try to make sense of it, but we do so with our assumptions and our presuppositions and our baggage and our theological background and we try to make sense of the text. We allow the text as we continue to explore it in its original context, we allow it to challenge those assumptions and to transform those perspectives and bring them in line with the text.

It's kind of an interaction back and forth that allows us to get closer and closer to the biblical text and to the meaning of the text as most likely intended by the author in its historical context. Also that means too that these different interpretive methods or stages in the interpretive process are not ones that we complete and then we're done with them, but they continue to interact with each other, they continue to

affect the way we do the others. They continually impinge upon the interpretive process.

So again I think a spiral might be at least one of the better metaphors that we can come up with that would describe the interpretive process of this back and forth continuing to probe the text and allow it to speak and challenge our assumptions with the hopes that we get closer and closer to a plausible reading of the biblical text that conforms to what the author most likely intended and his readers would have understood in the historical context. Those that advocate such a method are clear that this is not a vicious circle, but by using the metaphor of a spiral, the spiral gets tighter and tighter as it gets closer to the meaning of the text itself. So having said that, what might an interpretive approach look like? First of all, what I want to do is discuss again eight and one could develop these in more detail, there could even be, some might even arrange this a little bit differently.

I've simply tried to follow what I found to be a standard, almost logical way of putting these different approaches together. So one might arrange these slightly differently, but what I want to do is simply spell out what I think is a fairly common, that reflects common interpretive methodology, but seems to be a fairly logical approach as well to applying these methods to the biblical text. Number one is, and hopefully you'll be able to identify these with and draw connections back to the different methods and approaches that we've studied.

Number one is one needs to, first of all, when one comes to a biblical text, one needs to identify and be aware of your presuppositions and your beliefs that might influence the way you read the text. So ask yourself, what theological commitments do you bring to the understanding of the text? What specific background or what specific cultural background do you bring to understanding the text? What understanding of this text do you have already that you bring to it? What prior

understanding of this text might you have that could influence the way you read it? What in the text is unfamiliar to you? Is there anything else that might influence the way you read this text? So this is simply part of being aware of our own assumptions, our own background, our own beliefs, and laying that out on the table because this will help us to understand the text, but at the same time we need to be aware that these do influence the way we read it, and we need to be open to allowing the text to challenge those, and being aware of how those might be influencing the way we read the text. Before we start, look at the next one, kind of an aside, this could be another step, but more of an assumption behind the rest of these approaches and these methods is that the assumption is that you will consult several good English translations throughout the interpretive process, throughout the entire process.

I'm assuming no knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, if one knows Greek and Hebrew, one will obviously want to work with those texts, but for those that don't, mainly this interpretive method is primarily geared to those that have no knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. So the second step in the interpretive process is to study then the social and historical world of the text, that is one wants to enter the world of the text and try to understand historically, socially, religiously, politically, the context that produced or lies behind the biblical text. And there are two things that I think make up this part of the interpretive process, number one you need to study the history behind the text, that is studying things like the author, everything you can know about the author, everything you can know about the readers, what you can know about things like dates, when that's important, the apparent purpose of the book, the problems that are being addressed, or the problem being addressed.

Some of this information can be found in the text itself, by reading the biblical text, the Old or New Testament text, one can sometimes infer the situation or find specific references to the author or reader or the purpose of writing. But otherwise one must also consider any other extra biblical resources that will help you put together a

plausible reconstruction of the history behind the text, what were the historical, cultural factors that the text appears to be addressing, what was the broader historical, cultural context of the biblical text. And then second, and we'll return to this one, but be aware of the history in the text, that is specific references to historical or cultural or social, religious issues or references in the text itself.

And beginning to be alert as to how that might make a difference in the way you read the text. Third, the third stage of the interpretive process is to identify the literary genre or the form of the text you're dealing with. What type of literature, we talked about various types in the Old and New Testament, is this narrative, is this poetry, is this wisdom literature, is this prophetic, is it law and legal literature, is it epistolary, is it apocalyptic.

Be able to identify the literary genre or the form of the text you're studying. And then second, be able to identify what principles grow out, what interpretive principles grow out of that literary form. As we've seen, every literary form demands that you treat it differently.

So that you need to ask what methods particularly will be necessary based on this literary form. What questions, what unique questions should I ask, what principles need to be applied given the literary form. Fourth is then to study the broader literary context of your passage.

We spent some time talking about and giving examples of asking the question, how does your passage fit within the overall structure and argument of the entire book. At this point some people find it helpful to outline the book. I'm all for outlines as long as they are interpretive and as long as they help reveal the structure of the text and what's going on.

It's important to understand where your text fits within the broader plan and structure of the book. How does it fit within the author's main argument in the book. And as I've said before, this is where it is important to ignore chapter and verse divisions when you're dealing with a biblical text.

As I've said numerous times, they're there simply to help us get to the same place, especially in longer books. But they are not necessarily indicative of divisions in the Bible itself. So you largely have to ignore chapter and verse divisions when it comes to understanding the structure.

But attempt to understand how does your passage fit within the overall structure and plan of the book. But second, how does it relate more specifically to what comes before it and what comes after it. How does your text grow out of the section that comes right before it? How does it prepare and fit with what comes after it? What would be missing if your text were not there? How does it fit within the argument of the larger section in which it occurs? In my opinion, you are not prepared to go on to the other stages of exegesis and interpretation until you can answer this question.

Because any meaning of the text must be coherent with and consistent with the broader literary context of the work in which it appears. The next stage in interpretation is to begin to analyze the details of the text. In a sense, you can see logically that interpretation begins broadly, providing a framework and understanding of the text.

And then narrows down to begin to examine the details of the text. As I've said, as we're working through these stages, it's important to realize that you don't just complete literary context and drop it and go on to the next stage. But that provides a framework for interpreting the details.

Sometimes the details will cause you to go back and revise your understanding of the context and even the historical context. That's part of this hermeneutical spiral of moving back and forth between the details and the whole of the text that other interpreters have recognized. But with this fifth stage, now we begin to analyze the details of the text itself.

Applying the appropriate methods for the literary genre. So, for example, identify key terms or keywords for study. We talked about lexical analysis and examining the vocabulary, the words of the text, and how that can make a difference in meaning.

And some of the pitfalls to avoid. Identify key grammatical issues and their function. Here, unless you know Greek and Hebrew, you'll probably want to rely on a very literal wooden translation, a formally equivalent translation, but also on commentaries and any other tool that helps expose you to the grammatical features of the text.

Analyzing important connectors, the ands and buts and therefore, and those things that function to show how different sentences or different paragraphs, how they're connected to each other. And to identify any other issues and interpretive problems in the text that you need to deal with. What problems or issues do you need to solve before you can arrive at an understanding of the text? But, as we said also, it's important to understand how the literary genre affects the way you examine the details.

For example, if I'm dealing with narrative, I will focus more on the relationship of paragraphs. Outside of speech and narratives, I probably won't be quite as concerned with the detailed logical flow and the tight argument from sentence to sentence or clause to clause. Although that can be important, I'll probably focus more on the paragraph level and on much larger units of text.

Poetry, we said you'll focus more on things like parallelism and metaphorical speech. Letters, you'll ask the question of the occasion, what was the occasion that evoked the writing of the letter. Here with letters, you'll more carefully trace the argument from sentence to sentence and clause to clause.

With apocalyptic type literature, you'll focus more on the symbol, the symbolism in the text and what the symbolism meant, what it might have referred to. With gospels, you'll utilize tools such as form and redaction criticism. Other tools of narrative analysis such as plot and the characters and those things that you would apply with literary and narrative type approaches.

With the Old Testament, you'll also ask questions of the use of the Old Testament in the New. Whether that's by direct quotation or more by way of allusion and ask what the Old Testament text, what the understanding of that text contributes and how the author has used it. Finally, within number five, within the stage of analyzing the details of the text, you will also want to consult any commentaries or other helps to help you identify any other details or any other issues in the text that you might have missed.

By the way, it's important when examining the details of the text to always be asking the question, what difference does this make in reading the text? It's not enough to simply unearth the details so that they simply lie there flat on the page. As you're looking at the vocabulary and the grammar and the connectors and the different features of the genres in the text, and when you're asking the questions of the Old Testament use in the New, at every stage you must continually raise the question, what difference does this make in interpreting the text? What does this contribute to my understanding of the text? It tells me nothing to simply move through and just

label certain parts of the text or isolate words and their meanings. You must continually strive to relate this to the meaning of the text itself.

What does this contribute to my understanding of the text? Number six, then, is to analyze the theology of your text. What key themes, what key theological terms or themes are evident in the text? How are they developed in the text? How does your passage contribute to that theme and its understanding? But also to ask, how does your text fit within the broader overarching theological story of the Bible?

Recognizing, again, that the ultimate context for your text is the broader biblical theological canon consisting of the Old and New Testament that now stand in an organic relationship to each other. So this stage is simply analyzing the theology of the text, is simply to recognize the ultimate and final context being the theological, broader canonical context of your passage.

So ultimately you need to ask the question of how your text fits within that story. Where does it fit? How does it relate and contribute to that ongoing story? Reading the New Testament in light of the Old Testament, especially when there are clear allusions or quotations. But also reading the Old Testament ultimately in light of the New Testament to see how it finally gets fulfilled in the climax of God's redemptive activity in the person of Jesus Christ.

Seventh. The seventh stage then is to summarize the main idea in one or two complete sentences. Be able to summarize, simply now synthesizing everything you've done up until this point based on the broader context, the historical background, examining the details of the text, the theological dimension of the text.

Now see if you can summarize your passage, the main thrust or the main idea of your text. What exactly is it saying? In one or two complete sentences, not abstract thoughts, but in one or two complete sentences, what do you perceive as the

meaning of the text? These sentences should focus on the meaning and function of the text, not the content merely, but should reveal what the text means and how it functions, what its purpose is. It should also account for all the details.

All the details in the text should be subsumed under and summarized under your main summary. It must be specific to the text and not just general. To come up with a general statement that we should obey Jesus or God wants his people to obey him, that could fit virtually every text in the Old and New Testament.

So it needs to be specific to that text as it is functioning in its context, as it is consistent with the purpose of that passage. And again, as I've said, it must be interpretive. It must focus on the meaning of the text, not merely just repeat and summarize the content.

So again, until you can do this, you have not yet sufficiently wrestled with the text itself until you can summarize its meaning in one or two sentences. Then finally, number eight is you should then reflect on valid application. Maybe I should say you should reflect further on valid application because number eight is not a step to be tacked on at the end, but in a sense, as we've said, is the very goal of interpretation, something that one is probably already drawing possible correlators and correspondences between the world of the biblical text and our own world.

But ultimately, in light of one's understanding and interpretation of the text, you need to sit down and reflect on valid application. What analogies emerge between the ancient text and the world of the biblical text and our own modern day world? What principles seem to emerge from the text that might be applied cross-culturally? And to ask, are these analogies, are these principles, are these applications consistent with the broader context of the biblical text? Are they consistent with the purpose of the text, the purpose and intention of the text? And then to state specific

application for the people of God today, not just individually what one should do, but how one lives out life within God's people, the church. So in concluding the discussion of these interpretive principles in this list, as I've said, it's important to realize that this is not simply a series of eight steps that one works through mechanically, that one simply performs each stage and then leaves it aside and moves on to the next one.

But instead, it's more of a dynamic process. Yes, these stages should be distinct and one moves through them, but at the same time you recognize that at times the other stages affect the way you do one stage. And having performed one stage might require you to go back and review another one.

So again, it's a constant interaction with the text, like a spiral as we attempt to come closer and closer to the meaning of the text as most likely intended by the author in its original historical and literary context. At the same time too, I think it's important to add that when we interpret the text, we do so in a way that demands creativity. Again, the other side of merely treating this like doing a recipe, moving through eight stages, is that interpretation requires to some extent the creativity of the interpreter.

Much depends on your ability and your creativity, not so much in coming up with wild or different meanings, but your ability to creatively and insightfully apply these methods to the biblical text. So that at the end of the day, the goal then is to arrive at a plausible interpretation. One that is consistent with what the author most likely intended.

One that is consistent with the historical, cultural context of the biblical text. One that is consistent with the literary context of the biblical text. One that reflects the theology of the text.

And one that equips the church to live out its life in the world. One that equips the interpreter to live out his or her life in the world and in the church. So I'm convinced an interpretive process such as the one just outlined at least provides us with a starting point, a beginning methodology that will help us to engage the biblical text in a way that will help us to understand it in the way that God intended through his human authors to communicate his revelation to his people.

Whether it was in the first century or earlier or whether it is God's people today.