

Getting the Message

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A Plan for Interpreting
and Applying the Bible

Daniel M. Doriani


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Preface

With this book I hope to equip Christian leaders for the arduous but exhilarating task of interpreting and applying the Scriptures with facility and confidence. Since it seeks to inculcate skills, this book is for doers, for those who teach biblical truth week by week. Whether you read primarily to remind yourself of familiar principles, to organize scattered efforts, or to prepare for a teaching ministry, remember that exegesis is a skill, and we grow in skills by practicing them. To master the art of interpretation, one must practice that art in the hours available to you each week.

Perhaps this book's chief innovation is that it presents the steps of interpretation in the order in which students of Scripture actually use them. In the acronym CAPTOR, each letter stands for a phase of interpretation: C = Context, A = Analysis, P = Problems, T = Themes, O = Obligations, R = Reflection. After two introductory chapters, chapters 3–12 explore the six phases of interpretation. The final chapter then offers concrete suggestions for getting started. By offering models of exegesis, book lists, and more detailed information, the five appendices also seek to make the principles of this book usable.

You need not have unlimited time to follow this plan since you need not follow all the procedures described here for a single study. Rather the book outlines principles you can use over the years for various studies. For example, chapter 8, "Developing Themes," presents the steps necessary for a topical Bible study. Chapter 4, "The

Historical Context,” describes the research one does at the beginning of a book study. Once it is done, you will use it repeatedly for months.

This project was conceived in upper-level biblical studies classes at Geneva College, when I learned that motivated students can acquire substantial exegetical skills even if they have not learned the biblical languages. The success and enthusiasm of those students, and of the people of Faith and Berean Presbyterian Churches, led me to believe that even nontechnical training can give motivated people substantial skill in English Bible interpretation. Since I have taught seminary students and pastors for the last several years, I hope the final form of this book is sophisticated enough to interest them. Yet I have pursued a form that should make it accessible to the college students, Bible study leaders, elders, and deacons whom I kept in mind as I wrote.

A word about my convictions. First, I believe that the Bible is the inspired, true, reliable record of both God’s acts in history and their meaning. Second, while this book essentially follows the grammatical-historical method of exegesis, it also uses analytical techniques from all of life. The Bible is essentially the story of redemption, but the biblical drama is rooted in and touches every sphere of life, and so it is only sensible to use tools from all of life. Because the Bible is a literary work that uses rhetorical methods to gain a response from its readers, it makes sense to use literary and rhetorical tools. There is no need for a general fear of those “critical” methods.¹ If the interpreter has a high view of Scripture, such methods are simply tools we used to understand the various facets of the Bible. From shovels to telephones to the Internet, the effect of most tools depends chiefly on the intentions of the people using them.

In the process of completing this book, I acquired many debts. I am grateful to the board and administration of Covenant Theological Seminary for granting the sabbatical leave in which I completed this book. I thank my colleagues at the seminary for fostering an academic community where each member hopes and acts for the success of the rest. I especially thank Robert Peterson for his detailed editorial comments on the initial drafts of most chapters, and Bob Yarbrough, Bryan Chapell, Phil Long, and Jack Collins for being constant partners in conversation about the enterprise of biblical interpretation. Dozens of students have a fingerprint in this book; among them Daryl Madi stands out for his timely assistance.

I owe the deepest debt to my wife, Debbie, who condensed the possessions of a family of five into a package that fit in the back of two cars, moved to New Haven for several months, and made a small apartment into a home and day school for three bright young girls while I hid in the bowels of Yale's libraries.

I dedicate this book to my parents, Max and Marjorie Doriani, and my brothers Paul and Chris, who taught me to love the life of the mind. Perhaps our best hours as a family came as we sat at table after dinner, testing ideas and learning to use words to good effect.

Notes

¹ Of course, some methods do tend to put the reader in the position of a judge of Scripture. Therefore, I must reject methods that say that we cannot grasp the meaning of a text and that each reader must construct the meaning for himself. I also oppose the "hermeneutic of suspicion," which declares that whatever the surface meaning of a text, at root all authors use texts to take or to legitimate power over others.

1

Introduction

Is There an Interpreter in the House?

Anyone who loves God and believes that he has spoken with unique authority in the Bible has ample reason to learn the methods of effective Bible study. And yet, Bible study takes work, and we all have more than enough work to do, a reality that tests our motivation to learn how to interpret Scripture.

Sometimes God uses troubling situations to kindle our desire for a better understanding of his Word. Imagine that it is Sunday morning and your pastor is away. A guest speaker has read some texts in the Old Testament that feature polygamy, and the sermon begins.

My experiences in Africa and my study of Scripture have convinced me that it is time to reevaluate the church's teaching on polygamy. Like many teachers, I held the traditional line and blustered my way through when students asked me how God could have allowed his leaders to be polygamists during the old covenant if polygamy is a sin. Then, when I began my work in Africa, the Lord granted me some success with village chiefs in Burkina Faso. When they confessed Christ and were baptized, I made them give up all but their chief wife and send the others and their children away. But, instead of preserving the dignity of marriage, it destroyed the

former wives, who were reduced to begging and prostitution, and their children, who became orphans and outcasts. Some chiefs, seeing the shame it brought to their children, refused to become Christians, though they were drawn to Christ. Lesser men, with only one wife, became leaders of the church, but no one in the village respected them, and the church lost its standing. What's more, the women there do not mind polygamy. One told me, "The day my husband took a second wife was the happiest of my life. Now I have someone to share the work, and she is a friend, like a sister."

Then I began to study the question of polygamy. Abraham, Jacob, and David were all polygamists. The Lord rebuked all three men for their sins, but he never condemned them for polygamy. Genesis and Samuel even portray the second marriage of Jacob, to Rachel, and the fourth marriage of David, to Abigail, as positive, even romantic events. Furthermore, even though Jesus condemns oaths, divorce, and other Old Testament practices, he never forbids polygamy, and neither does any of the apostles.

Yes, polygamy has been rare in the history of the church, but that is primarily because the Catholic church hardly even approved of marriage. When the Reformation came and began to present a positive view of marriage, theologians quickly raised the possibility of polygamy. Martin Luther even urged the Lutheran political leader, Philip of Hesse, to take a second wife, since he could not live chastely with but one.

There are many reasons to reconsider the issue of polygamy today. Yes, monogamy is ideal, but we hardly live in an ideal world. What shall we say, for example, to Christian women who long to marry but cannot find a suitable mate because so many men are immature, immoral, unbelievers, or uninterested in women? Many men can support two or more wives, both financially and emotionally. Isn't polygamy better for everyone than a life of loneliness for their potential second wives?¹

Sermons like that can keep people on the church steps for a long time while small bands of children whirl about in ever-more-disheveled clothes, and Sunday dinners threaten to burn. Though

disturbing, the stories about Africa and Luther can seem persuasive. If no one can show biblically where the guest speaker was wrong, that inability can prove more troubling than the sermon itself.

Is it enough to say that the pastor will have an answer when he returns? Or should believers be able to formulate at least a rudimentary response on their own? After all, don't we often hear speakers or read books that claim to disclose forgotten truths or elucidate passages misunderstood by the church for hundreds of years? Their views may sound interesting—almost persuasive. Yet something doesn't seem right. But unless we own a massive library or can call the pastor right away, often we're at a loss. And we can wonder, is it just that our old ideas die hard, or is there something wrong with the message we hear, something we can't quite put our finger on? Though we may never go to seminary, shouldn't we know how to distinguish between true and false teaching?

How often have you wished you could handle the Bible more confidently? Perhaps you have been confused when Bible teachers contradict each other, or when a sermon soars far beyond your simple thoughts on a text. Or you realize that the stock Sunday school material you have will not work for your class, but you have no idea how to prepare your own lesson.

Why are Christians unable to evaluate sermons, or to gain much from devotional reading, or to prepare lessons on their own? It is because they lack a method for studying the Bible. This book presents a straightforward method for effective Bible study. The goal of that study is not simply to understand the Bible better, but also to apply it to life.

Our Need for Training

In many fellowships, Bible study consists of reading a passage of Scripture and asking, "What does this passage say to me?" In other words, "When I read this text, what thoughts or feelings does it stir up in me?" Putting the question in that subjective form allows people to "find" almost any idea they like in a text. Christians are thus encouraged to seize upon a snippet of truth—a moralism or a proof text for a favorite doctrine—while ignoring everything else. When we observe this practice in others (it's hard to catch ourselves at it), we notice that the Bible tends to "say" safe, trendy, or self-serving things.

Yes, believers should expect to hear God's voice through their Bible study. Yes, all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:10) and have direct access to God and his Word without the intervention of priests or experts. Yes, God is the ultimate teacher of everyone who knows him (Jer. 31:33–34). His anointing leads us into the truth (1 John 2:27). But we abuse this privilege if we let our impressions drown out the prophets and apostles. Because we believe in the authority of the Bible, we need an objective method for determining, as best we can, what the Bible originally meant and what it means today.

We need training because we live in a world far removed from the world of the Bible—in time, in language, and in customs. We speak English, Spanish, or German. They spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. We live in a technological society, shaped by cars, refrigerators, telephones, videos, and computer networks, all ruled by elected officials, convertible currencies, and global markets. They lived in an agrarian society shaped by donkeys, wooden plows, clay pots, and dirt roads, all ruled by a Roman emperor and his armies.

Because of the differences between biblical times and our age, we need training in biblical *language* and *customs*. As for language, how many of us know precisely what the terms *atonement*, *justification*, *redemption*, and *propitiation* mean? As for customs, even casual readers of the Gospels can see that, contrary to the habits of “religious” people in his day, Jesus associated with outcasts, sinners, and people of other races; but readers miss Jesus’ violation of some other social customs. For example, in current Western culture, men and women converse freely in nearly every setting, and so we hardly notice it when the Gospels show Jesus talking to women.

In fact, when the disciples found Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman in John 4, the text says that they were surprised, not to find him talking to a despised Samaritan, but to find him talking to a woman (4:27). The disciples were shocked because the rabbis believed that teaching women was a waste of time. One rabbi even said, “It is better that the words of the Law should be burned, than that they should be given to a woman.”² In their opinion, all women were dangerously seductive. Unless we are aware of such attitudes, we cannot appreciate that Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman was bold and risked condemnation.

For reasons such as this, we need to know about Jewish life and religion to get the most from reading the Bible. In fact, the issue of

cultural distance had already arisen by the time the New Testament was written. That is why Mark, Luke, and John, writing for gentile audiences, explained Aramaic terms and Jewish customs that arose in their gospel narratives. For example, Mark interrupted his story of a conflict over ritual cleanness between Jesus and the Pharisees to explain to his gentile readers that the Jews had traditions that called for ceremonial washings (Mark 7:1–5). He also explained Aramaic terms that came up during the crucifixion of Jesus (15:22, 34; for similar asides, see 5:41; 7:19; 9:6; 11:32; 15:16). John interprets even common Jewish terms such as *rabbi*, *Messiah*, and the name Cephas (John 1:38–42). Thus, strange customs and terms already impeded communication to people living perhaps a few hundred miles away and just a few decades after the events. How much more do we need instruction now, two thousand years later and in an alien culture, if we hope to understand the language and culture of the Bible!

Training the mind also helps us apply the Bible to new situations. For example, who stands in the position of the Samaritan woman in our society? In a different vein, Christians who work with medical technology have to wrestle with the morality of such things as artificial insemination or the use of “heroic measures” on the terminally ill. Every disciple has to decide how to use television and radio. Should we watch programs that have quality actors and writers, but regularly feature lewd language and immorality? May we watch such a program if the immorality is occasional and incidental? If it is chronic? In popular music, does vulgarity matter if we cannot make out the words? Or is the whole popular music industry corrupt and unworthy of our support?

The Bible never addresses these or many similar questions *directly*. In a way, it cannot, if it is to speak to all ages and cultures. If God had chosen to dictate instructions about computers or life-support systems to Peter or Ezekiel, they would have been nonsense to all but late-twentieth-century readers. Thus, single proof texts rarely answer questions that stem from new, contemporary situations. “Thou shalt not kill” does not solve every ethical quandary that comes up in a hospital. We need to search the whole Bible to find relevant principles, and training will help the search go faster.

So far, we have been saying that successful interpretation depends on sound methods of interpretation. Yet we must add that it also depends upon sound interpreters. The bulk of this book focuses on

techniques used to interpret or “exegete” the Bible. But we must turn to the interpreters from time to time because the spirit they have as they exegete the Bible is just as important as the skills they possess.

State of the Heart: What About the Interpreter?

Serious inquirers must use proper methods, but the mastery of methods does not, by itself, guarantee that God will bless their labors. At its best, Bible study is an encounter with the personal God, not just with a text. Only when we join skillful methods to a receptive heart can we expect Bible study to bear fruit in the lives of individuals and the church.

Personal receptivity is vital because the proper goal of interpretation is application.³ As the apostle Paul says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). People prove they have understood a concept when they apply it to new situations, especially in their own lives. A disciple demonstrates an understanding of the principle of speaking the truth in love when he or she expresses a difficult truth without hurting anyone. On the other hand, if a man claims to understand the biblical teaching on marriage, yet drives his wife from their home, divorces her, and swiftly marries another woman, we have to question his understanding.⁴

So, we must say, “Beware of method alone!” Believers and unbelievers can both acquire valid techniques of interpretation. Many of them apply to any book, essay, or poem. Skeptics can understand the grammar and terminology of the Bible perfectly well. Investigators can temporarily enter the biblical world to gain information.⁵ But unless God grants a willingness to submit to biblical authority, they can read all day and profit nothing. Unless they are repenting of their sins, they will resist and refuse to apply God’s Word, even as they read it. As a result, they will use inappropriate methods, such as trying to find purely natural explanations for supernatural events, or systematically doubting everything until they establish an unshakable core of reliable facts. Unfortunately, their reliable facts about Jesus may amount to little more than saying that he taught, healed people, and was executed by the Romans.

The half-committed Christian occupies an awkward position, too. He weaves his way through the Bible like a child picking his way through the vegetables while dining with Aunt Alberta, not quite sure if the goal is to eat or avoid eating. So much in the text seems unpalatable: "This can't mean what it appears to say. . . . Surely that no longer applies today," he mutters to himself when biblical statements offend his tastes. The half-committed Christian can hardly have a hunger for Bible study. He is not sure he *wants* to know its message.

What advantage, then, does a believer have over skeptics and waverers? Is it his general spirituality? A sensitivity to spiritual things? A capacity for religious empathy? A belief that supernatural events can occur?⁶ The believer's essential advantage is that he takes the right posture before the Bible. He does not look it in the eye, as if he were an equal who has the right to criticize it at any point.⁷ He does not merely encounter it, expecting to meet new horizons, new worlds of thought that may or may not break in and change him.⁸ He *submits to its authority*, for he holds it to be the very Word of the sovereign Lord whom he loves.

Christians have an advantage because their higher commitment to the Bible may make them work longer and harder on the text. Still, *the Christians' advantage lies less in the work they do on the text than in the work God does in them* as they bow before it.⁹ Again, a skeptic using proper methods can discover the ideas presented in the Bible. Believers have no mystical advantage in grasping the grammar or customs of the Bible. But because God operates on the heart, convicting of sin and of God's greater grace, the Christian is willing to receive the message, even if it stings.

The believer's advantage lies in his willingness to apply the Bible. That is no small advantage, if, as we said, the goal of interpretation is application. Skeptics may misconstrue the Bible for many reasons, but surely their unwillingness to submit to the God who gave Scripture counts most in the end.

The subject of prayer illustrates that we must join heart and method. Some authors emphasize the right methods of prayer—the proper times (early morning) and places (perhaps a secluded corner), and the correct content (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication). Wise as they may be, such instructions do not get to the heart of the matter, for one can establish the proper time, place, and structure of prayer and still have a poor prayer life. For this rea-

son, whenever Jesus taught his disciples *what to pray* (an aspect of method), he also taught them *how to pray*—how to have the right attitude toward God (Matt. 6:5–15; Luke 11:1–13).

With biblical interpretation, as with prayer, three elements are necessary: proper methods, proper heart conditions, and proper goals. Methods without devotion can breed pride or a quest for selfish advantage. “The proper goal of the study of hermeneutics,” says D. A. Carson, is not the accumulation of elite knowledge, but “the better understanding of and obedience to holy Scripture.”¹⁰ Before proceeding, therefore, each reader should ask, “What kind of a reader am I?” To be sure, the Bible is not the sort of book that critics and loafers are likely to read. Still, self-examination has its place. Are you committed to believing and applying whatever you discover as you study the Bible, regardless of the cost?¹¹

Three Forms of Heart Failure

Although the question above invites a simple yes or no, there is more to it. Even if we give a provisional yes, we might still fail because of immaturity or spiritual insensitivity, if not rebellion.

Immaturity. Immaturity impedes one’s ability to interpret Scripture. As people mature and learn fundamental principles, they gain a capacity to learn more. For example, one must have a certain level of maturity to comprehend biblical teaching on love. While little children like to talk about love, it is pointless to discuss much beyond the love of family and friends. Children may gladly give away all their money—but then, they have no concept of the power of money. And how do you talk about selfless love to a child who joyfully shares a favorite food with his parents, but screams when his sister so much as breathes toward his dish?

Similarly, the concept of church discipline boggles the minds of some new converts, because it runs contrary to popular ideas about the tenderness of God and the “right” to keep others from interfering in our lives. So, unless we understand our sin and the holiness of God, biblical teaching on church discipline makes little sense. Thus, immaturity hampers our ability to receive scriptural teachings.

Insensitivity. Insensitivity resembles immaturity, but stems more from laziness or a stubborn trust in false ideas than from pure ig-

norance or rebellion. For example, Jesus' disciples misunderstood his predictions of his crucifixion because of their attachment to false ideas about the Messiah. Although Jesus often told them about his coming death, they never accepted it until after the event. When he foretold his crucifixion, they could not grasp it and were afraid to ask about it (Luke 9:45). Peter even rebuked Jesus for talking about his death (Matt. 16:13–23). The disciples could not hear Jesus because his concept of a suffering Messiah clashed with their hopes for a triumphal Messiah.

We often do the same thing when the Bible says something that seems strange to us. We may feel confused for a while, but in time we either ignore the passage or reinterpret it so that it fits more comfortably into our thinking. For example, during the period of the Crusades, Christians in western Europe believed it was their obligation to conquer or at least stop the Muslims. There is no record of any evangelistic impulse toward them until St. Francis of Assisi and his followers began to move in the thirteen century. Why did no one preach to the Muslims until then? Christians were not ignorant of the biblical basis for missions; they simply believed it did not apply to the Saracens, whom they regarded as subhuman and destined for destruction.¹² Thus, they let preconceptions nullify the biblical message.

Sadly, future Christians will no doubt shudder at our insensitivity, too. What will make them shake their heads? Our materialism and indifference to the poor? Our easy acceptance of denominations? The excesses of the church-growth movement and the marketing of the church? There is no simple cure for spiritual blind spots, but it helps to have a method of Bible study that gives us confidence to declare, "I may not fully understand it yet, but I know and accept what the Bible says."

Rebellion. When Cornelius greets Peter at his door in Acts 10, he manifests the spirit that leads to profitable hearing and study of the Word. He declares, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (Acts 10:33). Sadly, if many supposed Christians told the truth, they would admit, "Now we are all here in the presence of mankind to hear everything that meets a felt need, maintains our comfort zone, and confirms our preexisting opinions."

Rebellion, whether naive or deliberate, breeds many distortions

of Scripture. A woman awakens in a cold sweat one morning, decides her marriage is an icy road with no visible exits, and starts planning a divorce. There is no infidelity, abuse, or desertion; she just wants to escape. She may study the Scripture, change her mind, and work to improve her marriage, or she may proceed with a divorce even though the Bible forbids it. She clutches a single phrase, “God is love,” and reasons to herself, “If God is love, he does not want me to suffer in this miserable marriage for the rest of my life.”

Or perhaps someone in the family embraces Buddhism or enters a homosexual relationship. And suddenly family members are tempted to bend Scripture toward a more tolerant view of other faiths or lifestyles. Before long, the art of twisting the biblical text becomes as sophisticated as advanced origami. In the end, if the Bible does not agree with their goals, so much the worse for the Bible! They have learned to dismiss it whenever it challenges them, and it has slowly become a closed book to their hard hearts.

Ultimately, the Spirit of God is the only remedy for immaturity, insensitivity, and rebellion. But the Spirit is pleased to use his Word to cure souls. For this reason, the church still needs skillful, hardworking teachers of the Word—such as some of you (Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 5:17). But before you can teach others, you need to be teachable yourself.

Why This Book? A Plan of Action

This book is far from the first to present a method of Bible study. What sets it apart from the rest? First, it is a primer in Bible interpretation. It is written for those who are ready to move from casual and devotional reading of Scripture to a more theological and exegetical reading.¹³ There is nothing wrong with reading the Bible devotionally, but the kingdom needs some leaders who have acquired higher skills. This book is a first-level guide for those who want to get serious about exegesis.

Second, as a primer, this book uses an easily remembered plan for interpretation. Many books scatter the basic principles for interpretation through many chapters, arranged according to the “genres” of Scripture, such as law, poetry, prophecy, and letters.¹⁴ This book presents the steps of interpretation in the order in which you will ac-

tually use them. It summarizes the main principles for interpretation in a single word, the acronym CAPTOR:

- C = Context
- A = Analysis
- P = Problems
- T = Themes
- O = Obligations
- R = Reflection

There are two aspects of *context* (chaps. 3 and 4). The historical context is the culture and circumstances in which a book or passage was written. The literary context of a passage is the text before and after it. In *analysis* we study the flow of events in a story or the flow of ideas in a teaching (chaps. 5 and 6). Our *problems* are the words, customs, phrases, or names that we may not understand in the text (chap. 7). *Themes* are the major ideas of a passage—which may run through the whole Bible (chap. 8). *Obligations* are the things our passage requires us to do (chaps. 9 and 10). In *reflections* we attempt to discover the main point and application of our passage (chaps. 11 and 12). Reflection includes a consideration of how our passage presents Jesus and his redemption. Using these six concepts, anyone who is willing to read carefully, think hard, and discipline himself to follow a method can interpret the Bible with substantial accuracy, even if he has limited formal education.

Third, this book is distinct in its emphasis on application. Far too many books assume that application takes care of itself if we just listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and speak honestly to the troubles we see in ourselves and others. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Consistently strong application requires both heart and mind (method).

Fourth, this book has exercises. No one can gain or master skills in exegesis without practice. If you treat a work on interpretation like any other book, it will profit you little. Exegesis is a skill, an art, and we only acquire skills through practice. If we want to learn to fix plumbing, to cook, or to play golf, books help, but genuine progress begins when we have equipment in our hands and a project before us. Remember how you learned to ride a bicycle: not through your father's instructions, but by climbing on and falling off again and again until you mastered it. How do we learn to cook omelets? By

overheating the pan and scorching the eggs once, by adding too many fillings the next time, and so forth, until we know how to get it right, at least for our tastes. Perhaps you like recipe books, but reading cannot compare to cooking and eating. The same is true of biblical interpretation. For this reason, I urge you to do the exercises at the end of each chapter in order to realize lasting profit.

Conclusion

This chapter and the next one are about the conditions that foster good biblical interpretation. First, one must believe in, or at least be open to, the God of the Bible. One must also believe that he has revealed himself to humanity in the Bible. Second, one must desire a direct engagement with the Word and with the Lord who gives it. You must long to be able to evaluate sermons and books and to produce worthwhile studies on your own. That aspiration will motivate you to read and practice the principles in this book. I hope you are reading with a desire to know the living Lord and his truth better, and to share your knowledge with many whose lives you touch. I pray that in some small way this work will help you become a worker who handles the Word of Truth well, and that you will find treasures both new and old to share with God's people.

Notes

¹ The sermon is fictitious, but it is based on reports from Bill Myers, a missionary to Togo, Bishop Francis Ntiruka and Rev. Angolwisye Malumbugi, both of Tanzania, and African missiologist Adrian Hastings. None of them advocated this view.

² The Jerusalem Talmud, cited by James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 72.

³ Many works on interpretation seem to assume that the goal of interpretation is application, but relatively few state it. See Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 57–58, 62; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 1st ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilder, 1950), 88ff.; Jay Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), passim; Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 199–204. In secular hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer took a similar stance in *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, 2d ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), 289–99. Calvin constantly implies the centrality of application without precisely asserting it. See chap. 9, note 17.

⁴ Of course, it is possible to understand what the Bible says and disagree with it, but we are speaking of taking biblical teaching to heart, not simply comprehending it abstractly.

⁵ George Lindbeck, "Scripture, Consensus and Community," *This World* 23 (Fall 1988): 19–24. For an extended discussion of the role of the heart in theological work, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 319–28.

⁶ For a survey of views on this issue, see Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 47–63.

⁷ For a sympathetic description of exegesis that does not flow from religious commitment or special respect for the authority of Scripture, see James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority and Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 110–16, and James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 5–12, 23–34.

⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 236–74.

⁹ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.7.4–5; Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 53–55.

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, "Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends," *Themelios* 5 (January 1980): 20.

¹¹ Calvin briefly addresses this question in his *Institutes*, 1.7.4–5; 1.8.1, 11–13, and assumes the central importance of an affirmative answer to this question in his description of the Christian life as self-denial, in the *Institutes*, 3.6–8.

¹² William Carver, *The Course of Christian Missions: A History and an Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1969), 83–85; Kenneth Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 2: *The Thousand Years of Uncertainty: A.D. 500–A.D. 1500* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), 400.

¹³ For a short analysis of the different ways to read the Bible, see Richard Longenecker, "On Reading the Bible Devotionally, Homiletically, and Exegetically," *Themelios* 20 (October 1994): 4–8.

¹⁴ Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with explaining interpretation genre by genre; appendix D does that very thing. Nonetheless, beginners need a method that will work for every genre before they learn the special steps necessary for more advanced work.