Exegesis & Hermeneutics

Saturday 11th October 2025

Teaching by Ralph Cunnington

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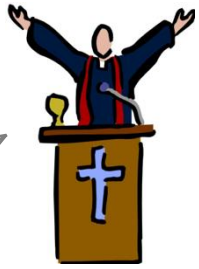
Exegesis: Context Is Crucial



CHRIST CHURCH MANCHESTER

Key Definitions

Exegesis:

Hermeneutics

God has spoken his unchanging Word into a particular historical, cultural and literary context – which is very different from our own.

(i) If we are to rightly understand God's Word we must understand the context into which it was written.

(ii) If we are to rightly preach God's Word we must apply a right understanding of the Bible into our own context.

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"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways"

(Hebrews 1:1)

Many Times = *Historical eras not our own*

Many Ways = *Culture and forms of literature that are not necessarily ours*

Examples:

"Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." (Rev 5:5-6)

"Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." (1Ti 5:23)

Two Traps to Avoid:

- Giving the impression that the Bible can only be understood by those with great expertise in ancient history, cultures and languages. This denies the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture.
- Giving the impression that the Bible can be applied into our own situation with little thought about the original context into which it was given.

All communication has a historical reference and context – the Bible included!

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Exegesis: Biblical Context – Literary Genre

Write a sentence describing each of these Biblical genres.

Narrative	
Law	
Prophecy	
Poetry	
Wisdom	
Epistle	
Apocalyptic	

Example:

“Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own. Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I was only joking!"” (Pro 26:17-19)

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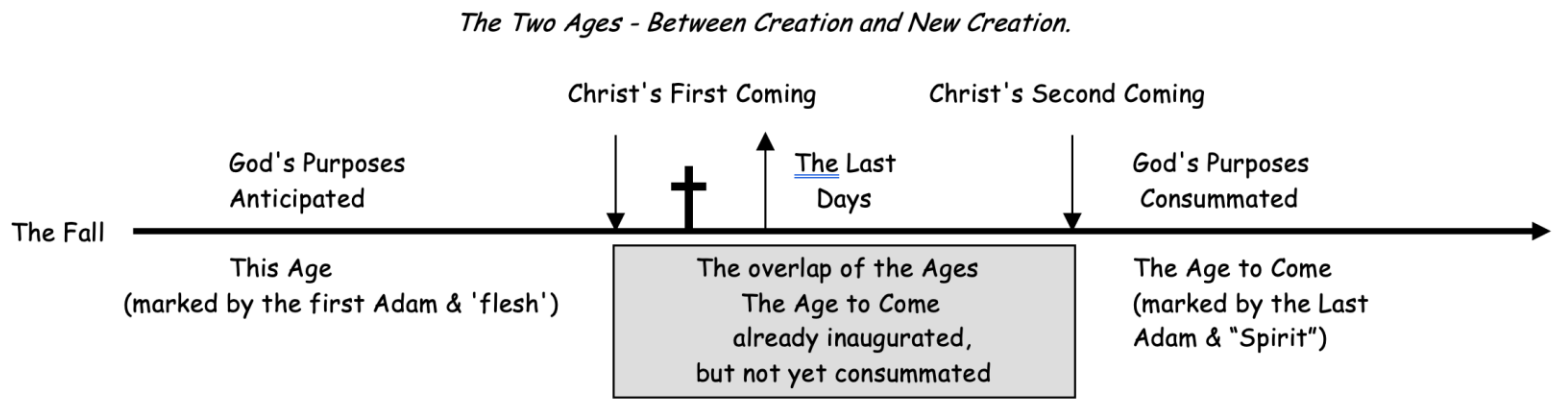
Exegesis: Biblical Context – Place In Redemptive History

Whenever we turn to any book of the Bible, we need to ask this question:

What Time Is It?



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Exegesis: Biblical Context – Biblical Theology and Bible Themes

"From the evangelical preacher's point of view, biblical theology involves the quest for the big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation. It is of the nature of biblical revelation that it tells a story rather than sets out timeless principles in abstract. It does contain many timeless principles, but not in abstract. They are given in an historical context of progressive revelation. If we allow the Bible to tell its own story, we find a coherent and meaningful whole. To understand this meaningful whole we have to allow the Bible to stand as it is: a remarkable complexity yet a brilliant unity, which tells the story of the creation and saving plan of God. Preaching, to be true to God's plan and purpose, should constantly call people back to this perspective. If God has given us a single picture of reality, albeit full of texture and variety, a picture spanning the ages, then our preaching must reflect the reality that is thus presented."

Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture (IVP, 2000)

The Kingdom of God

Covenant

Temple

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Exegesis: Content and Context

Consider the following example:

"I like my bicycle better than my brother."

Always look at the context of the passage you are preaching:

- Why does the writer say this here?
- Why does he say it now?
- What does it add to the overall message?
- How does it fit into the Bible Book as a whole?
- What is its place in the overall structure and flow of biblical revelation?

Read Mark 10:21. Is this a command to everyone who wants to be a disciple of Jesus to give up all material possessions to gain "treasure in heaven"?

Read Phil.2:6-11

What is Paul's theme here?

Now read Phil.2:1-5

What difference does the context make?

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Exegesis: Bible Words and Bible Meanings

"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

Westminster Confession of Faith I.IX

Dangers to avoid:

(1) Overemphasising the history of a word.

(2) Ignoring the history in the use of words. A famous example of this is the treatment of the Greek word for "power" – dynamis.

(3)Assuming every occurrence of a word has an identical meaning.

(4) Unnecessarily distinguishing words. John 21:15-17.

1. What do you first think of when you read the words "knowledge of good and evil"?

2. How are they used in their first biblical occurrences (Gen 3:5, 22)

3. How do the following occurrences help determine the meaning: Deut 1:39; 2 Sam 14:17; 2 Sam 19:35; 1 Kings 3:9.

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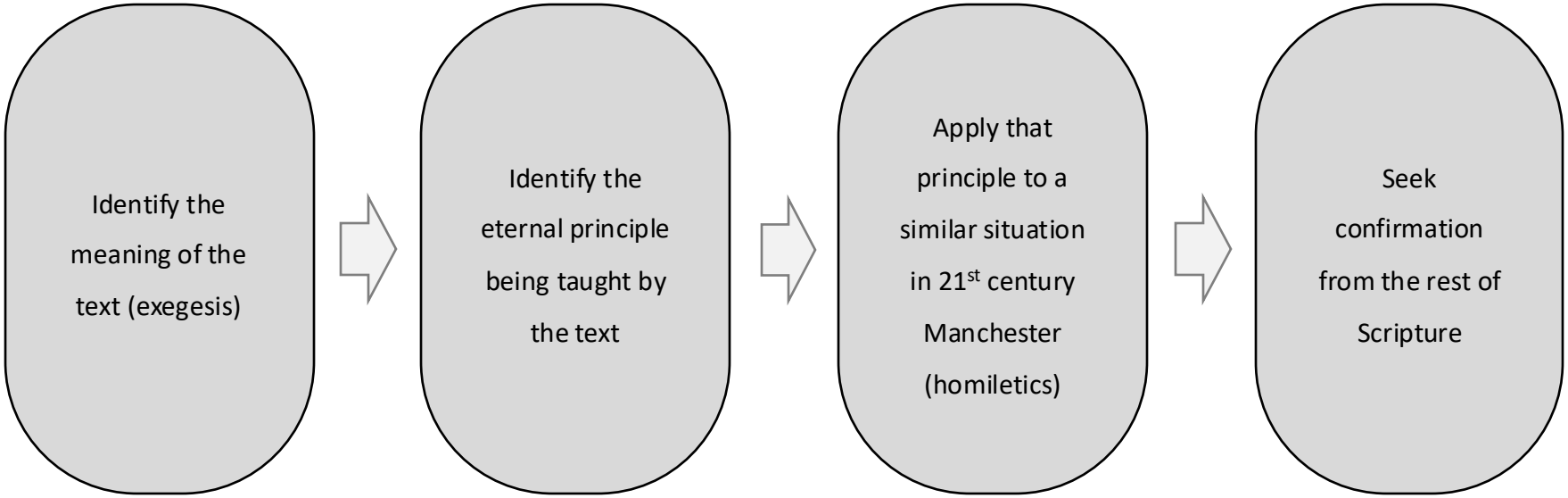
Application: A Four-Step Process



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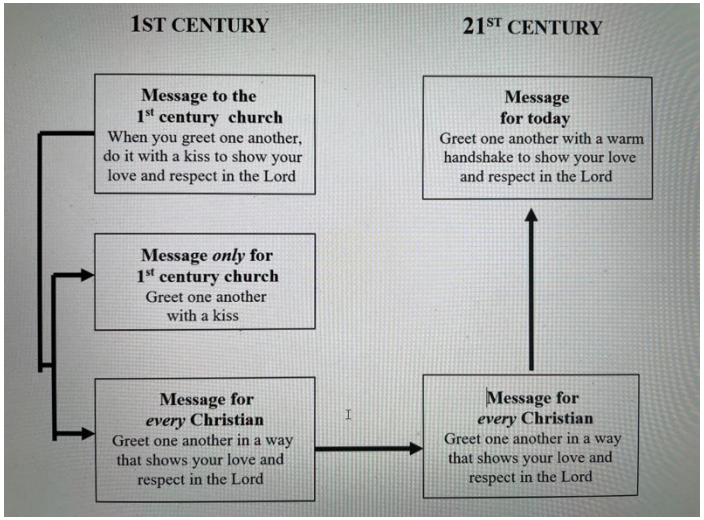
Application: A Four-Step Process

Worked Example: Read Rom.16:16 – "Greet one another with a holy kiss."

Ask:

- What is cultural? (belongs only in 1st century Greco-Roman culture)
- What is permanent? (for every culture in every century)



a) The original message

b) The principle

c) The application for us

d) Confirmation in scripture

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Application: A Four-Step Process

Apply these four steps to 2 Thess.3:10 – "When we were with you we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'"

a) The original message

b) The principle

c) The application for us

d) Confirmation in scripture

2 Tim. 4:13 - Do we go to Troas to get Paul's cloak? Why? / Why not?

Gal. 5:2 - Do we tell men who are circumcised that their salvation is in doubt? Why? / Why not?

Eph. 4:25 - Do we speak only the truth? Why? / Why not?

1 Tim. 5:23 - Do we encourage Christians to drink alcohol for medicinal purposes? Why / Why not?

"In thinking about the application of Scripture, it is important to realise that Scripture is more than just information to be understood or followed, vital as this is. It addresses us as full-orbed human beings. In it we find commands, questions, exclamations, stories, jokes, promises, vows, threats and curses. To stand under the authority of Scripture is not only to say that its statements are true; it is also to say that its commands are binding, its questions demand answers of us, its stories should entertain & edify us, its humour should make us laugh, its laments should cause us to weep, its promises should be relied on, its warnings should cause us to tremble, its praises should become the shouts of our hearts!"

John Frame

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Application: Who Am I?

Read 1 Samuel 17

Where is the Christian in the text?

Read 1 Samuel 51

How much of this can/should be said by Christians? Why?

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Application: Gospel-Driven Application

[he] explained to them [the disciples] what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

(Luke 24:27).

Applications classically fall into one of two categories:

1. Do something
2. Stop doing something

How do you keep the gospel engine?

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Romans 6:1-7