

REVIEW:

Exegetical Objectivity

Robert L. Thomas: “Our quest for _____ in interpretation resembles our quest for Christian sanctification. Rather than expending all our energies explaining why we cannot attain absolute holiness, let us set our sights on the target of being holy as he is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). The fact that we cannot attain unblemished holiness does not excuse us from continuing to pursue it without becoming preoccupied with reasons why we must fail. So it is in hermeneutics and _____. Our goal is the objective meaning of Scripture. Let us not become distracted from pursuing it. It is within the capability of the Spirit-illuminated believer to arrive at objective meaning—that is, the meaning God intended to transmit through his human authors.”

Section 2: BIBLE INTERPRETATION FALLACIES

I. Introduction: Three Ways to Mishandle God’s Word:

- A. Mis-interpretation:** ascribing the _____ meaning to a passage (the true meaning is A, but we come up with B)
- B. Sub-interpretation:** failing to ascertain the _____ meaning of a passage (the true meaning is A,B,C, but we come up with A)
- C. Super-interpretation:** attributing _____ to a passage than actually exists (the true meaning is A, but we come up with A,B,C)

The purpose of this section is to spell out more clearly some of the common fallacies to avoid in sound Bible interpretation. Most of them consist of some form of *eisegesis* (i.e., reading meaning into a text that is not inherent in the text itself).

II. Common Fallacies in Bible Interpretation

A. Ignoring the Context of the Passage

- To overlook the _____ of the particular passage or verse with the result that the text is interpreted in an isolated manner which the author did not intend.

E.g. Context such as:

- The passage, chapter, book of the Bible, and Bible as a whole.
- Historical, political, social, and geographical.

¹ Notes compiled from The Master’s Seminary and The Expositor’s Seminary, Matt Waymeyer Hermeneutics course, *Grasping God’s Word* (Duvall and Hays), and *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Roy Zuck).

Perhaps the most common fallacy in Bible interpretation is that of simply ignoring the context of a given verse. Examples:

1. Ruth 1:16b: “Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”

- This verse is often quoted at weddings as the expression of the new _____ to her husband.
- What is the problem with this use of Ruth 1:16?

Daniel Wallace: “It’s a great sentiment, and one that every husband would be happy for his wife to utter. But Ruth didn’t say these words to Boaz. She said them to Naomi, her mother-in-law! To read these verses at a wedding is to wrench them from their context. To do so may be for a good cause, expressing a romantic sentiment, but it is Scripture twisting nonetheless.”

And it is a violation of God’s command in 2 Timothy 2:15 to do so.

2. Psalm 2:8: “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.”

- Missionaries often use this verse to speak of anticipated conversions on their mission fields.
- What is the problem with this use of Psalm 2:8? Who is being addressed in this verse?

3. Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”

- This verse is commonly read at the beginning of small _____ meetings as a way to assure people of Jesus’ presence among them.
- What is the problem with this use of Matthew 18:20?
- What does the context indicate about the meaning of this verse?

B. Personalizing the Passage

- Similar to removing a text from its context, the individual pulls the verse out of its _____ setting and makes itself the central focus of the text.

Waymeyer: “Many people read the Bible devotionally and skip over the author’s original intent to look for something in the text that has some kind of direct connection to _____ and/or their present circumstances.”

McQuilkin: “[They] feel blessed only when they find a surprising thought suggested to them by the text, a thought that bears no direct relationship to the intent of the author.” The result is that they read their own circumstances back into the text and distort its true meaning.

1. Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’”

- Some people read this verse as if they themselves are the “you” who have been promised welfare in the future.
- What is the problem with this? What in the original context should steer the interpreter away from this approach?
- Why do people do this with verses like Jeremiah 29:11, but not with verses like Gen 6:14a (“Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood”)?

2. Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Robertson McQuilkin: “[A] young couple may be seeking the _____ of the Lord concerning their present employment in a mountainous area in the United States and their desire to go overseas for missionary service in an island nation. In their Bible reading they discover the injunction, ‘Ye have compassed this mountain long enough’ (Deut. 2:3, KJV). Subsequently, they discover another biblical prophecy, ‘The isles shall wait for his law’ (Isa. 42:4, KJV). What could be clearer direction for their own lives than those words having the authority of the Bible? [Not to mention the fact that they turned RIGHT TO those passages!] It does not matter that the message they received has nothing in common with the message the author intended to communicate.”

THE PROBLEM WITH “PERSONALIZING”:

McQuilkin: “The chief danger of relying on subjective impressions stimulated by Scripture is not to contradict Scripture. Rather it is to go _____ Scripture, finding meanings never intended by the author, especially in regard to personal guidance, and then to invest that impression with divine authority as if it were an infallible word from God.”

Matt Waymeyer: “When the text has some kind of coincidental relationship to present personal circumstances and a decision is based on such a ‘revelation,’ the reader has no justification for claiming the authority of God’s Word.”

C. Reading the Meaning of One Passage into Another Passage

- Imposing the sense of one _____ upon another.

An over emphasis on cross-referencing when studying a particular passage can inadvertently read the meaning of one passage into another.

1. Mark 8:34: “And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’”

- One hermeneutics book exhorts its readers to interpret this verse in light of Romans 6:1-13 and answer the question, “To what does the cross refer?”
- What is the problem with interpreting Mark 8:34 in light of Romans 6:1-13? What is the key to a correct interpretation of Mark 8:34?

2. Revelation 20:1-10 “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ² And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³ and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. ⁷ When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. ⁹ And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

- According to amillennialist William Cox, “Since the passage itself gives no explanation of John’s meaning, its meaning must be garnered elsewhere in the Bible.”
- Why might this approach be a problem?

D. Reading a Theological System into the Passage

- Beginning with a certain theological _____, the individual determines an interpretation of the passage which fits their position such that the authorial intent is overridden.

Waymeyer: “One of the most common pitfalls is to read one’s theology into a given passage. This can happen in one of two ways. First, when an interpreter finds a discrepancy between his theological beliefs and a given passage of Scripture, he may be tempted to twist that passage to fit his _____ rather than let his theology be corrected—or at least refined—by Scripture. Secondly, sometimes an interpreter will simply read more into a given passage than is actually there in the text itself. In this case, his theology may be true and biblical, but it is not taught in the passage under consideration. Both are examples of eisegesis.”

1. The Prosperity Gospel in Matthew 21:1-9 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied *there* and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. ³ “If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ “SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, ‘BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.’ ” ⁶ The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, ⁷ and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. ⁹ The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!”

- The so-called prosperity gospel teaches that God’s desire for every Christian is that he or she be healthy and wealthy.
- One contemporary preacher supported his belief in the prosperity gospel by saying that Christ riding on a donkey in Matthew 21 was the cultural equivalent of driving a luxurious automobile today.

2. Justification by Faith Alone in Matthew 25:37

- In Matthew 25:37, Jesus says: “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink?’”
- According to commentator R.C.H. Lenski, the “entire doctrine of justification by faith through the atoning merits of Christ” is contained in the words “the righteous” in this verse.
- The doctrine of justification is certainly biblical, but does the _____ support the view that forensic justification is being taught in this verse? Which kind of righteousness is in view—positional righteousness or practical righteousness?

3. Covenant Theology in Ephesians 2:12

- The centerpiece of Covenant Theology is the so-called “Covenant of Grace,” a single covenant which is said to extend throughout redemptive history.
- In contrast to this idea of a single covenant, Ephesians 2:12 refers to “the *covenants* of promise” (emphasis added).
- In his commentary on this verse, Covenant Theologian William Hendriksen writes: “Paul speaks about *covenants*, plural. He has reference, no doubt, to *the many reaffirmations of the one and only covenant of grace*” (emphasis original).
- Hendriksen appears to have read his Covenant Theology into Ephesians 2:12 and turned *covenants* (plural) into a *covenant* (singular).

NOTE: For a critique of an example of this pitfall, see Appendix 1: “Free Grace Theology and Matthew 7:21-23,” at the end of this lesson.

AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE:

Bernard Ramm: “The danger of having a set theological _____ is that in the interpretation of Scripture the system tends to govern the interpretation rather than the interpretation correcting the system.”

Walt Kaiser: “Simply to impose a theological _____ on a text must be condemned as the mark of a foolish and lazy exegete.”

SOLUTION: Let your _____ determine your _____ (and not vice versa)!

John MacArthur: “Before a man can be a theologian, he must be an _____.”

E. Interpreting Scripture through the Lens of Experience

- To impose one’s experience upon the meaning of the _____ in order to confirm that experience by an improperly interpreted text.

Waymeyer: “Every interpreter has a host of experiences in life. The problem arises when the Bible is interpreted in light of those experiences, rather than vice versa. When personal experience is the final court of appeals instead of Scripture, God’s Word is inevitably silenced in favor of that experience when the two seem to conflict with one another.”

1. 1 Corinthians 13:1 “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

- Some have claimed to experience the ability in prayer to speak an ecstatic, heavenly prayer language, which they believe to be the tongue of angels, as said in this verse.
- What is the problem with this interpretation?

Other examples:

SCRIPTURE VS. EXPERIENCE:

Waymeyer: “When an individual’s experience contradicts the teaching of God’s Word, the solution is not to _____ that this experience occurred. The solution is to *reinterpret* that experience in light of the Bible instead of interpreting the Bible in light of one’s experience. In doing so, the interpreter upholds and reveres the authority of God’s Word and is open to letting Scripture correct and refine his current understanding of his experience.”

The issue comes down to _____. I am willing to subject my experience, even the most amazing and meaningful, to the authority of Scripture? Or will I insist upon my experience, though it does not line up with the proper meaning of Scripture?

F. Interpreting Scripture through the Lens of Continuity or Discontinuity

Waymeyer: “Covenant theologians and dispensationalists differ on how much continuity and discontinuity exists throughout the progress of revelation. Simply stated, covenant theologians tend to see more continuity in Scripture, whereas dispensationalists tend to see more discontinuity. The problem comes when continuity or discontinuity begins to function as the lens through which Scripture is interpreted. Put another way, the problem comes when covenant theology or dispensationalism begins to function as a system of *hermeneutics*.

For example, covenant theologian Robert Booth refers to *continuity* as “a principle of biblical interpretation” which should guide the interpreter in his handling of the Scriptures. According to Booth: ‘Our interpretive starting point will determine how we understand the Bible. Most people do not consistently apply any interpretive principle, yet we should all strive for interpretive consistency. The...covenantal principle of interpretation holds that we must...assume continuity and unity in God’s revelation.’”

This approach could be referred to as ‘a hermeneutic of continuity,’ because it comes to Scripture with the assumption that one will *consistently* find continuity in the Bible rather than discontinuity. The problem with this approach is that the unity of Scripture does not demand continuity over discontinuity in a given area. Otherwise, the unity of the Bible would preclude the possibility of *any* discontinuity throughout redemptive history.

Rather than using a hermeneutic which consistently assumes either continuity or discontinuity, it is better for the interpreter to set aside his assumptions and make an objective comparison between A and B in a given area to determine how much continuity or discontinuity may exist. Otherwise, the one who looks at Scripture through the lens of continuity will tend to deny legitimate points of discontinuity, and the one who looks through the lens of discontinuity will tend to deny legitimate points of continuity.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

- Continuity and discontinuity in a given area should be a post-exegetical conclusion, not a pre-exegetical assumption.
- Covenant theology and dispensationalism are theological systems and should not function as hermeneutical approaches to Scripture.

G. Allegorizing the Text

Waymeyer: “To allegorize the Scriptures is to _____ for a hidden or secret meaning that underlies the actual words of a given text—a meaning that is unrelated to the more obvious meaning of the text.”

Zuck: According to this approach, “the literal meaning is a sort of _____ which needs to be deciphered to determine the more significant and hidden meaning. In this approach the literal is superficial; the allegorical is the true meaning.”

This approach was especially popular in the early years of the church, though it still has some practitioners today.

EXAMPLES:

- Irenaeus (130-202) claimed that the three spies hidden by Rahab in Joshua 2 were types of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (cf. Josh 2:1).
- Gregory the Great (540-604) taught that Job’s seven sons represent the twelve apostles, his 7,000 sheep are innocent thoughts, his 3,000 camels are vain

notions, his 500 pair of oxen are virtues, and his 500 donkeys are lustful inclinations.

- Stephen Langton (1155-1228) taught that the field in the Book of Ruth is the Bible, Ruth represents students, and the reapers are the teachers.
- A.W. Pink (1886-1952) saw the events of Joshua 6 as allegorical: “Israel’s capture of Jericho unmistakably pre-figured the victories achieved, under God, by the Gospel. The priests blowing with the trumpets of rams’ horns pictured the servants of God preaching his Word. The forbidding of ‘the people’ to open their mouths signified that the rank and file of Christians are to have no part in the oral proclamation of the Truth—they are neither qualified for nor called to the ministration of the Word.”

PROBLEMS WITH THE ALLEGORICAL APPROACH:

- It is completely _____ and _____.

Roy Zuck: “Allegorizing becomes arbitrary. It has no objectivity or controls on one’s imagination.”

Bernard Ramm: “The Bible treated allegorically becomes _____ in the hand of the exegete.”

Robertson McQuilkin: “The ingenuity of the Bible student is the only limitation to the exciting ‘interpretations’ of Scripture in such an approach.”

- It _____ the _____ of God’s Word.

Roy Zuck: “[The allegorical approach gives] no authoritative message, for one person may say a passage teaches a certain truth allegorically, whereas another may see an entirely different teaching. It is a way of wresting the Scriptures from having any certain authority.”

Robertson McQuilkin: “In such an approach, the Bible is not its own _____, free to make its own point and to demand obedience to its own teaching. Rather, it is used to make some other point the [interpreter] has in mind through the process of spiritualizing—finding a hidden meaning in the text.”

Robertson McQuilkin: “To ascribe hidden meanings to Scripture, a person assumes an authority equivalent to or superseding that of the author. The interpreter...actually purports to be the authority standing above Scripture. But Scripture is to be the independent, final authority on what God says to His people.”

H. Christologizing the Old Testament

- To see the Person of Christ in every _____ of Scripture.

Waymeyer: “Christologizing is a subset of the allegorical method of Bible interpretation in which the interpreter looks for pictures of Jesus hidden throughout the Old Testament.”

EXAMPLES:

- Barnabas (1st century) wrote that the 318 servants in Genesis 14:14 represent Jesus on the cross. According to Barnabas, three Greek letters represent the number 318 and each has a meaning.” Regarding this interpretation, Barnabas wrote: “God knows that I never taught to anyone a more certain truth.”
- Justin Martyr (100-164) taught that Leah represents the Jews, Rachel is the church, and Jacob is Jesus who serves both of them. He also taught that when Aaron and Hur held up Moses’ hands, that act represented the cross of Christ.
- Origen (185-254) taught that _____ ark pictured the church and that Noah represented Jesus. He also taught that Rebekah’s drawing water at the well for Abraham’s servant means believers must come daily to the Scriptures to meet Christ. In addition, he taught that Noah’s drunkenness in Genesis 9:20-23 represents Christ in His suffering and death.
- One well-known, contemporary evangelical pastor taught that the point of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) is as follows: “God was communicating to us and to Israel that a Savior was going to come and was going to _____ the giant of sin and death once and for all.”
 - What are the problems with this interpretation?

Often 1 Samuel 17 is taken to mean things like God will help us slay the giants (e.g. bullies, debt, sins) in our lives. Is this any different than “Jesus slays the giant of sin”? This kind of interpretation is a symptom of a growing movement in popular evangelicalism. In an attempt to be Christ-centered, gospel-centered, or “Christocentric,” it is becoming popular to christologize, or read Christ into, Old Testament texts where he simply is not.

Point of David and Goliath? “This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hands” (_____).

Mike Riccardi: “The idea that ‘Jesus is everywhere’ really presents the same problem as ‘Jesus is nowhere’: it ignores authorial intent and

context, and ultimately takes the authority out of the ‘hands’ of the text and into the hands of the creativity of the interpreter.”

Though the work and kingdom of Christ are the central theme of Scripture, that is not to say that they are the precise theme of every text.

Objection: But doesn’t the fact that Jesus “explained...the things concerning Himself *in all the Scriptures*” (Luke 24:27) imply that Jesus can be found in every passage of the OT?

Mike Pizzi: “Consider the example of a man going through a photo album and showing his sister all the pictures that he himself was in. The proponent of the Christological Hermeneutic would want to affirm that the man was *in every picture*. But the natural reading of the account would be that the man was *in some of the pictures*, and those are the ones he showed his sister from the whole album. In similar manner, Luke 24:25-27 definitely affirms that Jesus Christ may be found in the OT, but it cannot be made to say that Jesus is hidden in every OT text, waiting to be uncovered by employing a Christological Hermeneutic.”

NOTE: For a fuller discussion of this issue, see: <http://thecripplegate.com/luke-24-and-the-christological-hermeneutic> OR Appendix 2: “Luke 24 and the Christological Hermeneutic” (end of this lesson).

I. Interpreting Scripture through the Lens of Sentiment

- Imposing one’s various emotional demeanor or attachments on the meaning of a _____ so as to violate the authorial intent.

General example: A relative, influential person, or friend to whom the individual is emotionally attached believed or taught them an erroneous interpretation of a text. Upon learning the correct interpretation, the individual clings to the erroneous interpretation out of sentiment.

III. Summary

- A. In one way or another, the various fallacies in Bible interpretation consist of reading into the text meaning that is foreign to the text itself (*eisegesis*) and thereby distorting its true meaning.
- B. The most effective way to avoid these fallacies is to pursue the divinely intended meaning of the author who wrote the text by letting the text of Scripture speak for itself.

Appendix 1

“FREE GRACE” THEOLOGY AND MATTHEW 7:21-23

By Matt Waymeyer

In case you haven't heard of it, “Free Grace” is the name given to a theological system founded by Zane Hodges and currently promoted by Bob Wilkin and The Grace Evangelical Society. According to “Free-Grace” theology (hereafter FG), genuine conversion does not necessarily result in a spiritually transformed life. In other words, FG advocates affirm that an individual can believe in Christ and yet show forth absolutely no fruit whatsoever in terms of obedience to God or love for Christ. Put another way, they believe in a regeneration which may or may not result in progressive sanctification. Most times, they say, it does not.

FG teachers would go so far as to say that if an individual were to believe in Christ for a fleeting moment—even as brief as 10 seconds—and then recant of that belief and live out the rest of his life as a Christ-rejecting atheist who never obeys God, that individual is a true child of God and will some day be in heaven. In other words, rather than recognizing that such an individual did not truly believe in Christ to begin with (1 John 2:19), Free-Gracers would affirm that person's faith and conversion as genuine, for regeneration is no guarantee that one will persevere in the faith.

Among the many passages of Scripture which contradict FG on this point is Matthew 7:21-23, where Jesus says:

(21) “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ (23) And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

The obvious problem that this presents for the FG position is Jesus' assertion that only those who “do the will of my Father” will enter the kingdom. This runs contrary to the FG gospel which says that most of those who end up in heaven will not have lived a life of obedience to God during their lives on earth.

One of the primary ways that FG teachers try to solve this dilemma is by using John 6:40 to interpret “the will of My Father” in Matthew 7:21 (e.g., see Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 199; Bob Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 216). According to this approach, doing the will of the Father in John 6:40 (and therefore in Matthew 7:21) refers to believing in Christ. Therefore, Matthew 7:21 simply says that only those who do the Father's will (which is to believe in Christ) will enter the kingdom of heaven. And with that, the tension between Matthew 7:21-23 and FG theology suddenly vanishes. Or does it?

To get right to the point, I believe that this approach to Matthew 7:21-23 suffers from at least three significant difficulties: (1) a neglect of the original context; (2) a misguided hermeneutical approach; and (3) a complete misunderstanding of John 6:40.

A Neglect of the Original Context

The first problem is that the FG explanation of Matthew 7:21-23 ignores key details in the text itself. The most obvious one is the clear contrast that Jesus establishes between those “who [do] the will of the Father” in verse 21 and those “who practice lawlessness” in verse 23 (both present participles in the Greek). Those who do the will of the Father (i.e., live lives of obedience) will enter the kingdom (v. 21), but those who practice lawlessness (i.e., live lives of disobedience) will not enter the kingdom (v. 23). In this context, “doing the will of the Father” most naturally refers to obeying God, and the way it is set in contrast to living a life of disobedience only confirms this interpretation.

In addition, there is an irony in Jesus’ description in which those who *call* Jesus “Lord” do not *obey* Him as Lord. In other words, they profess to be followers of Christ who live in submission to God’s authority, and yet they do not live in obedience to the will of the Father. Their lives of disobedience betray the hypocrisy of their confession. As it is often said, they *profess*, but they do not *possess*.

FG theologians respond to this interpretation with two objections. First, they insist that it amounts to a person trusting in his own obedience as the basis for his salvation. In response to this objection, Jesus is not saying that obedience to the Father is the *basis* of the believer’s salvation, but rather the *inevitable result* of it. Only those who obey the will of the Father will enter the kingdom because everyone who truly believes in Christ will demonstrate their faith in the way that they live. Genuine conversion will not fail to result in works of obedience.

This truth is taught throughout the New Testament, but one example will suffice. 1 John 2:3 says: “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” We do not come to know Christ *by* obeying His commandments—rather, the evidence that we have *already* come to know Christ (through faith) is that we obey His commandments. In this way, obedience to God is not a *prerequisite* for conversion—it is an *inevitable result* of conversion. FG advocates seem to have a difficult time understanding the difference between the two (and therefore often reject the latter because they mistake it for the former).

The second objection involves the passage itself. FG teachers point out that the very individuals who are rejected by Christ in verse 23 are described in verse 22 as those who trust in their obedience as the basis for their salvation. (Verse 22: “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’”) Therefore, the objection goes, whatever Jesus means by “the will of the Father” in verse 21, it couldn’t refer to a life of obedience to God.

In response to this objection, the works that Jesus describes in Matthew 7:22 are not acts of obedience to the will of the Father. Nowhere does God command the common man to prophesy, cast out demons, and perform miracles. The individuals rejected by Christ claimed to be engaged in these activities in the name of Jesus—and they may have been—and yet, at the same time, they had not lived lives of obedience to the Father. In fact, just the opposite—they had lived lives of lawlessness. In contrast, only those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom.

A Misguided Hermeneutical Approach

The second problem is that the FG view apparently sees John 6:40 as the interpretative key which unlocks the otherwise hidden meaning of Matthew 7:21. There is nothing in the immediate context which leads the interpreter to understand “the will of the Father” as faith in Christ, and only when this meaning is imported from John 6:40 does this interpretation emerge. But where does that leave the original hearers’ of the Sermon on the Mount? Without a copy of the Gospel of John in their hip pockets, they would be left completely in the dark, with the true meaning of Matthew 7:21 hidden from their eyes.

In addition, even if the original hearers *had* possessed the Gospel of John, what would compel them to look to John 6:40 to discover the meaning of Matthew 7:21? FG teachers confidently state that the meaning of “the will of the Father” in Matthew 7:21 can be found in John 6:40, but how do they know that? The whole approach seems to betray a desire to preserve FG theology. Unfortunately, it does so at the expense of the clear meaning of Matthew 7:21-23.

A Complete Misunderstanding of John 6:40

Thirdly, the FG explanation completely misinterprets John 6:40. In other words, this interpretation not only ignores key details in the immediate context of passage under consideration, but it also uses John 6:40 to import into Matthew 7:21-23 meaning which is not even found in John 6:40! Put simply, *the will of the Father in John 6:40 is not God’s will for mankind, but rather God’s will for His Son Jesus.*

Consider the verse in its context. In John 6:38-40, Jesus says:

(38) For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (39) This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (40) For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

Verse 38 is simple enough: Jesus says He has come to do with the will of the Father. He follows this up in verse 39 by explaining what this will is: that He (Jesus) would lose none of those whom the Father has given to Him, but rather that He would raise up all of these believers on the last day. In verse 40, Jesus elaborates further on what He has said in verse 39 (indicated by the explanatory *gar* [“for”] at the beginning of v. 40) by again explaining the will of the Father for Jesus. The will of the Father, He says, is that all believers will have eternal life (the emphasis being not on the present possession of eternal life but on the future culmination of it). And who is going to make sure they have eternal life? Who is going to accomplish the Father’s will and guarantee this eternal life by raising believers up on the last day? Jesus! As He says at the end of verse 40: “I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” Jesus will indeed accomplish the will of Him who sent Him, and therein is the hope of the believer.

To summarize, the will of the Father in John 6:38-40 is not that people would believe—it is that those who do believe would have eternal life and that Jesus would guarantee this by raising them up on the last day. None whom the Father has given to the Son shall perish, because Jesus shall do the will of the Father. Therefore, to use John 6:40 to interpret Matthew 7:21 may seem to get FG off the hook, but it amounts to a careless handling of the Word of God. If FG teachers are determined to relieve the tension that exists between Matthew 7:21-23 and their theology, they will need to seek some other way to do it. My hope is that they would jettison their theological system altogether.

Appendix 2

LUKE 24 AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC

By Matt Waymeyer

In Luke 24, Jesus has a fascinating conversation with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. During this conversation, “beginning with Moses, and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Later, Jesus told the Eleven that “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

For many today who believe that the Old Testament must be read in light of the New to be understood properly, Luke 24 justifies a “Christological Hermeneutic” for the Old Testament. For some, this means a full-blown allegorical method of interpretation which sees pictures of Jesus and His work of redemption hidden throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, one well-known reformed theologian insists that “the entire Scripture deals only with Christ everywhere, if it is looked at inwardly, even though on the face of it may sound differently, by the use of shadows and figures.” Another applies this very method to Exodus 25-30, insisting that the various details of the tabernacle of Moses prefigure New Testament truths about the person and work of Christ. Although other interpreters apply the Christological Hermeneutic more responsibly, they still point to Luke 24 as proof that references to Christ can be found on every page of the Old Testament. In this way, truths revealed about the Messiah in the New Testament are seen as the key to discovering the real meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The argument here is that today’s interpreter of Scripture must employ the hermeneutic of Jesus Himself. After all, didn’t Jesus rebuke His two traveling companions for being foolish not to recognize that everything in the Old Testament somehow referred to Christ and His work of redemption (Luke 24:25)? Aren’t we being foolish if we refuse to recognize the same thing? Aren’t we failing to heed His warning if we neglect to use a Christological Hermeneutic?

Put simply, no, we are not. This is true for a number of reasons, but I will limit myself to two. First of all, because there is no record of which specific texts Jesus referred to in Luke 24, advocates of the Christological Hermeneutic must come to this passage with the presupposition that Christ pointed to Old Testament texts which do not explicitly mention Him. Put another way, they must assume that He jettisoned the grammatical-historical hermeneutic to find references to Himself which could not be found with that hermeneutic alone.

According to Jesus, the primary problem with the two men was foolishness and a slowness of heart which prevented them from *believing* what was plainly revealed about Christ in the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:25). The point is this: Many people today are saying that the Old Testament cannot be properly understood apart from the light of the New Testament, but Luke 24 suggests the exact opposite. Because Jesus rebuked these two disciples for not *believing* all that the prophets had written about Him (Luke 24:25; cf. John 5:39-47), He must have expected them to be able to read, understand, and believe what the Old Testament taught about Himself apart from the light of New Testament revelation (since the NT had not yet been written). If the Old Testament cannot be understood apart from the New, these disciples could have legitimately responded to Jesus' rebuke by saying: "How can you say that we are foolish and slow to believe the Old Testament since we are not even able to understand it apart from light which has not yet been provided?" This is not to deny that Christ is the pinnacle of redemptive history, but rather to say that Old Testament revelation could be understood by its original audience.

Second, the christologizer erroneously claims that because Jesus taught the two men from "all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27), then every passage in the Old Testament can be understood to refer to Him in some kind of direct (although subtle) way. A seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24:13) simply would not have permitted that type of exposition. More importantly, Luke 24 states that Jesus explained Old Testament passages which contained "things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). This does not mean that every Old Testament passage contains things concerning Christ, but rather that He explained those passages which actually *do*. Likewise, when Jesus said that "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44), this does not mean that everything in the Old Testament is about Him. Instead, it simply means that all those things which *are* written about Him will be fulfilled.

Consider the example of a man going through a photo album and showing his sister all the pictures that he himself was in. The proponent of the Christological Hermeneutic would want to affirm that the man was *in every picture*. But the natural reading of the account would be that the man was in *some of the pictures*, and those are the ones he showed his sister from the whole album. In similar manner, Luke 24:25-27 definitely affirms that Jesus Christ may be found in the OT, but it cannot be made to say that Jesus is hidden in every OT text, waiting to be uncovered by employing a Christological Hermeneutic (Mike Pizzi, "Luke 24:25-27: Source of an OT Hermeneutic?," 10).

Put another way, suppose that Luke 24:27 had said, "And beginning with Moses, and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning *the Holy Spirit* in all the Scriptures." Would this mean that the Holy Spirit could be found in every passage in the Old Testament? Would this mean that we should adopt a "Pneumatological Hermeneutic" in which we look for hidden pictures of the third person of the Trinity? Certainly not, and in the same way Luke 24 fails to support a Christological Hermeneutic in which New Testament revelation is the key to unlocking the meaning of the Old Testament. If this type of approach to Scripture is to be justified, it will have to be done in some other way.