

GRASPING
GOD'S WORD

The Interpretive
Journey

- The process of interpreting and grasping the Bible is similar to embarking on a *journey*.
- Reading the text thoroughly and carefully lies at the beginning of the journey.
- From this careful reading, we become able to determine what the passage meant in the biblical context – that is, what it meant to the biblical audience.

- We are separated from the biblical audience by culture and customs, language, situation, and a vast expanse of time. These differences form barriers that often prohibit us from grasping the meaning of the text for ourselves.
- The Old Testament adds another major interpretive barrier that separates us from the original audience. Between the Old Testament biblical audience and Christian readers today lies a change in *covenant*.

- Leviticus 19:19 – ‘You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.

- Judges 6:37 – behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.”

- Matthew 14:29 – And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

- While often unconscious of their interpretive method, many Christians today nonetheless frequently employ an intuitive or feels-right approach to interpretation.
- If the text looks as if it could be applied directly, then they attempt to apply it directly.
- If not, then they take a spiritualizing approach to the meaning – an approach that borders on allegorizing the biblical text

- Or else they simply shrug their shoulders and move on to another passage, ignoring the meaning of the text altogether.
- We need a consistent approach to the Bible that allows us to dig into any passage with a method to determine the meaning of that text, and then apply it to life today.

- Five Steps on the Interpretive Journey
- 1) What did the text mean to the original audience
- The first part of step 1 is to read the text carefully and observe it. Scrutinize the grammar and analyze all significant words. Likewise, study the historical and literary contexts. How does your passage relate to those passages that precede it and those that follow it?

- 2) What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?
- In this step you look for significant *differences* between our situation today and the situation of the biblical audience.
- In addition, whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, try to identify any unique aspects of the *situation* of your passage.

- 3) What is the theological principle in this text?
- Your task is not to create the meaning but to discover the meaning intended by the author. As God gives specific expressions to specific biblical audiences, he is also giving universal theological teachings for all his people through these same texts.
- After reviewing the differences and identifying the similarities, return to the meaning for the biblical audience that you described in step 1 and try to identify a broader theological principle reflected in the text, but also one that relates to the similarities between us and the biblical audience.

- The principle should be reflected in the text.
- The principle should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation.
- The principle should not be culturally bound.
- The principle should correspond to the teaching of the rest of Scripture.
- The principle should be relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience.

- 4) How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
- If your principle is valid, it ought to "fit" or "correlate" with the rest of the Bible.

- 5) How should individual Christians today live out the theological principles?
- While for each passage there will usually be only a few (and often only one) theological principles relevant for all Christians today, there will be numerous applicational possibilities.
- Each of us will grasp and apply the same theological principle in slightly different ways, depending on our current life situation and where we are in our relationship with God.