

Grasping God's Word

The Role of the Holy Spirit
and Application

Luke 15:8-10

⁸ "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Imposing Meaning on the Bible

- We impose meaning on the Bible when we aren't concerned with what the author intended to say, when we ignore context, when we are trying to find "hidden/spiritual/ deeper" meanings than what the Scriptures clearly state.
- Spiritual meaning is communicated through the ordinary literary conventions of the Bible (e.g., words, grammar, context, genre), not by what our imaginations impose upon the Bible.

Allegory

An allegory is a story that uses an extensive amount of symbolism. It is similar to a parable but generally has a greater degree of correspondence – that is, most or many of the details in the story represent something or carry some specific nuance of meaning.

Allegory

Isaiah 5:1-7

¹ Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
² He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it

Allegory

Isaiah 5:1-7

And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.

³ "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge between Me and My vineyard.

Allegory

Isaiah 5:1-7

⁴ "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?

Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?

⁵ "So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard:

I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed;

Allegory

Isaiah 5:1-7

I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.

6 "I will lay it waste;

It will not be pruned or hoed,

But briars and thorns will come up.

I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it."

Allegory

Isaiah 5:1-7

⁷ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel
And the men of Judah His delightful plant.
Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

Allegory

- Allegory itself is not a bad thing; it is merely another literary device used occasionally in the Bible to convey a message in a colorful way. However, allegorical interpretation as an interpretive method is quite different from allegory, and it can mislead us completely if we use it to interpret a nonallegorical text.

Allegory

- Numerous early Christian scholars felt that the Old Testament would be relevant only if it spoke directly of Christ. Thus, they developed a system of interpretation that acknowledged a "literal" meaning of the text, but then encouraged the interpreter to look for the deeper, fuller, spiritual meaning below the surface of the text.

Allegory

- Some of these writers advocated a two-level system (literal and spiritual), while others expanded it into multileveled systems – either three (corresponding to body, soul, and spirit) or four (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical).

Allegory

- For example, the fourfold system would see four levels of meaning for the city of Jerusalem: (1) literal: the actual Israelite/Jebusite city; (2) allegorical: the church of Christ; (3) moral: the soul of a person; and (4) anagogical: the heavenly city of God.

Allegory

- This style of interpretation remained popular until the Reformation (sixteenth century), when the Reformers led believers away from the allegorical approach and stressed the literary context of the Bible for the determination of meaning.

Allegory

Exodus 27:19

All the utensils of the tabernacle used in all its service, and all its pegs, and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

Symbols

- One of the problems with allegorical interpretation of symbols is that the interpreters tend to use their creative imagination to find deep theological connections to the New Testament without even asking what the symbol might have meant to the biblical audience. In their zeal to find symbolic representations of Christ, they often skip over the real meanings of significant symbols.

Symbols

- The meaning of symbols should be sought against the ancient Near Eastern background in which the people lived. Throughout the Bible God communicated to his people using forms they were familiar with.

Typology

- Numerous passages in the Old Testament describe things that point to or foreshadow what Christ ultimately fulfills.
- For example, the entire sacrificial system of Israel foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ.

Typology

- Much of the foreshadowing of Christ in the Old Testament is identified in the New Testament. Thus, we can rely on the guidance of the New Testament to help us discern how a passage might be foreshadowing of Christ.
- A *type* can be defined as “a biblical event, person or institution which serves as an example or pattern for other events, persons or institutions.”

Typology

- The Old Testament flows into the New Testament as part of a continuous salvation history story. What is promised in the Old is fulfilled in the New.

Typology

- Typology is prophetic – a historical event or person in the Old Testament that serves as a prophetic pattern or example of a New Testament event or person. However, it is critical that this prophetic meaning be the one that was intended by the divine Author. Thus, the identification must be in the Bible and not merely in our imaginations.

Psalm 22

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries
of anguish? ...

⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their
heads:

⁸ "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue
him.

Let him deliver him, since he delights in him "

Psalm 22

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

Psalm 22

¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat
over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for
my garment.

Different Levels of Meaning?

- There is one level of meaning in Scripture – the one tied to the historical-cultural and literary contexts.
- This meaning includes its meaning for the biblical audience and the theological principles behind that meaning that help us understand the meaning for today.

Different Levels of Meaning?

- There can be different applications of a text's meaning, and these always take the entire biblical canon into account. These are always gospel-based and tied to Christ, even when Christ is not explicitly mentioned in the Scripture.

Different Levels of Meaning?

- But there are not deep, "spiritual" meanings hidden in the text that are unrelated to the historical, literary, and canonical context.
- We should seek the meaning of the divine author through the human author instead of the creative fantasies of human speculation.