

Toward Doxology and Discipleship: Presuppositions and Principles for a Trinitarian Reading of Scripture

Underlying Presupposition

The goal of biblical interpretation is to know and love the triune God, such that we reflect the glory of his Son in whose image we were made and are being reformed.

The God of the Word: Three Horizons in Communication

1. Author – The God Who Speaks
2. Text – The Word God Writes
- 3. Audience – The People God’s Spirit Creates**

The Word of God: Three Horizons in Scripture

1. Textual – Literal, Grammatical, Historical Interpretation
2. Covenantal – Biblical-Theological Interpretation
3. Canonical – Christotelic (Christ-at-the-end of every) Interpretation

Hearing God’s Voice in God’s Word

1. Old Testament Test Cases
2. New Testament Test Cases

Appendices

- A. Terms
- B. Law-Gospel GPS System

Review

1. Presuppositions

- a. In interpretation there are three elements
 - i. The Author
 - ii. The Text
 - iii. The Reader (and his community)
- b. If any of these three elements are misunderstood, the interpretation will be missed.
 - i. Author: If God is dead, the Bible becomes a human work of fiction.
 - ii. Text: If the Bible is just another book, its transcendent authority is void. If it is not inspired, inerrant, authoritative, the reader becomes the authority.
 - iii. Reader: If the reader “uses” the Bible instead of “receiving” the Bible, it’s meaning will be misapplied.

2. First Two Presuppositions

a. God is the Author

- i. Hence it comes with God’s author-ity. Whatever we believe about the author will impact the importance and meaning of the Bible.
- ii. There is a popular move today to separate God from his book. Someone can affirm God while denying the Bible. ***What’s wrong with this?***

b. The Son’s Book is a Covenant Document

- i. Questions: What does this mean? What significance does it have?
- ii. One Example: The Bible is not just an instruction manual.
 1. The Bible is full of instructions but it is not essentially a manual.
 2. Objection: 2 Timothy 3:16
 - a. “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for instruction . . .”
 - b. AND . . . reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.
 - c. Moreover . . . it makes us wise unto salvation (v. 14–15)
- iii. Second Example: The Bible is not a generic book of religion; it is a book about the Triune God revealed most fully in Christ – Hebrews 1

3. Third Presupposition: The Spirit enables God's people to understand his Word

- + The Faithful Interpreter Requires the Holy Spirit (and His New Creation Community)
- The Faithful Interpreter Rejects all other community ideologies

a. The Holy Spirit is needed to understand the Father's Christ-Centered Word

- i. Inspiration (2 Peter 1:19–21) – that there is even a Bible is from the Spirit
- ii. Illumination (1 Corinthians 2:10–16) – the natural man cannot know
- iii. Gift of Faith (Ephesians 2:8–9) – unbelief is the greatest obstacle to knowing

b. The Community of Faith is needed because disciples need teachers and a place to practice God's Word.

i. 1 Timothy 3:15 – The Household of God

The Spirit created the church and intends it to be the locus where the gospel is protected and proclaimed.

This does not make the church the supreme authority, but the church is the steward of the truth (1 Corinthians 4:2). Hence, disciples are made by the church and taught to obey all God has commanded (Matthew 28:19).

ii. Ephesians 4:10–12 – Gifted Teachers

The Spirit gifts teachers to build up the body for the work of service.

Some, under the pretence of being taught of the Spirit of God, refuse to be instructed by books or by living men. This is no honoring of the Spirit of God. It is disrespect to Him, for if He gives to some of His servants more light than to others—and it is clear He does— then they are bound to give that light to others, and to use it for the good of the church. But if the other part of the church refuse to receive that light, to what end did the Spirit of God give it? This would imply that there is a mistake somewhere in the economy of God's gifts and graces, which is managed by the Holy Spirit ([Charles Spurgeon, quoted by John Piper in *A Hunger for God*, p. 164](#)).

iii. Ephesians 4:13–16 – The Context of Application

The word is given for faith (Romans 10:17). Genuine faith loves (Galatians 5:6; James 2:14–25). And the headwaters of that love is in the church.

Because the Word of God is given for discipleship—obedience is necessarily part of interpretation. Those who know the right thing and do not do it are sinning (James 4:17) and display misunderstanding.

Right interpretation depends on obeying what you have already received. Ps 25:14.

Third Presupposition Restated: The faithful reader is a Spirit-filled, obedient disciple who learns from God's teachers, serves in God's church, and grows with God's peoples.

The Role of Community, Tradition, and the Disciple

1. **Axiom #1** – Community shapes our interpretation

- a. We all live in community and come to the Bible with rose-colored glasses.
- b. Does our community enhance or inhibit our ability to read the Bible?
- c. Examples

- i. **Sporting community** – when I first began to walk with God my girlfriend had a book that on “running the race.” I was interested in it, because it appeared to be a book about sports in the Bible.

I’m not saying God doesn’t use target-audience studies. I’m saying the Bible has its own plotline and if you read the Bible with your own micro-narrative in view, you will miss it’s meaning.

- ii. **Theological / Ministerial Communities** – Calvinism or Arminian; Baptist or Presbyterian; Christian Psychologists or Biblical Counseling

Do we read to affirm our own beliefs? Or do we read to learn what Scripture says? Do we use the Bible or receive the Bible?

While exegesis should determine theology, theology does shape exegesis. And I don’t think this is all bad; but we need to be aware.

- iii. **LGBT community** – there is a very strong bond that LGBT community feels. As Rosaria Butterfield has explained, there is a gift of common grace in the LGBT community that is sometimes missing in the church – the gift of unconditional acceptance. The thought of leaving that acceptance to follow Christ is hard. And thus their community has pulled some to change the text.

- iv. Can you think of other examples?

- d. Who will rule your reading?

- i. If our identity is founded and formed by another community, it will alter our views.
 - ii. Ultimately, faithful interpretation depends on Spirit-given, self-awareness and the wisdom to see how our experiences and communities may mislead us.
 - iii. Discipleship looks like exchanging idols for Christ *and* communities of unbelief for the church of Jesus Christ.

2. **Axiom #2** – Tradition can be a help when properly used.

a. Tradition Properly Defined

- i. Lit. = the *handing over* of something; same root as traitor.
- ii. “The transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation.”

b. Tradition in the Bible – What does the Bible say about “tradition”?

i. Negative

1. Gospels – the tradition of the Jews (Matthew 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13); traditions of my fathers (Galatians 2:8)
2. Colossians 2:8 – See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to **human tradition**, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

ii. Positive

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2 – I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the **traditions** even as I delivered them to you.
2. 1 Corinthians 15:1–2 – Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.
3. 1 Thess 2:15 – So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the **traditions** that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.
4. 1 Thess 3:6 – We command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the **tradition** that you received from us.

c. Three Kinds of Tradition

- i. **Tradition 0** = Bible and Me Christianity = the absolute denial of Tradition creates a vacuum whereby the individual must become his own tradition. Misunderstands *sola Scriptura*. Creates a highly erratic reading of Scripture.
- ii. **Tradition 1** = Bible and tradition (= a traditional way of interpreting the Bible within the community of faith, e.g., *regular fide*)
- iii. **Tradition 2** = Bible and Tradition (= extra-biblical sources seen as sources of revelation); this is present in RCC and in churches like Calvary BC.

d. So how might we benefit from Tradition?

3. **Axiom #3** – The word of God must be “received,” not “used.”

Here’s what I mean: When we come to Scripture there are three options (Kevin Vanhoozer)

1. User – someone who picks up the Bible for his or her own purposes
2. Critic – someone who picks at the Bible with his or her own doubt and unbelief
3. Follower (=disciple) = someone who receives the Bible without picking it apart.

These three approaches follow the basic outline of interpretive history.

The disciples is someone who reads Bible with authority in the Word –
Christian/traditional approach

The critic is someone who reads Bible with himself as supreme authority –
modern/scientific approach

The use is someone who reads Bible denying all authority/truth/meaning and is looking
for something that works – pragmatic / postmodern approach

This obviously simplifies vastly complex ideas, but it is absolutely vital for faithful interpretation that we read as disciples:

The one who follows Jesus to the cross (but no further) is an admirer; the one who takes up the cross is a disciple. The admirer, unlike the disciple, follows Jesus only up to a point. . . . The Emmaus road admirers did not recognize Jesus [at first]; he was a stranger to them. They were incapable of reading the Scripture or the situation rightly. . . . Admirers [users and critics] of Jesus are able to follow the biblical testimony up to a point; they are able neither to recognize what it means for them nor to appropriate its [dynamic] effect. Similarly, for many readers, the text is a ‘stranger,’ to be admired or followed only ‘up to a point.’ Like the Emmaus travelers, the itinerant reader may be familiar with the text without ever having a moment of recognition, without ever coming to a personal knowledge of the ‘strange new world of the Bible,’ without ever deciding whether the stranger [i.e., the triune God] is friend or foe. (*Is There Meaning...*, 370)

This is why we begin with these 3 presuppositions—**God** is the author; **Christ** is the covenant content of the Bible; the **Spirit** is the one who witnesses to God and enables us to know him.

We want to be faithful disciples who receive the word, not critics or users who misperceive it.

1. Disciples receive the word when we stand under the word, not over it. (ibid., 401–07)
2. Disciples receive the word when we **refuse** *inactivity reading* which fixates on simplistic readings, *reactive readings* that read against the text, *hyperactive readings* that create meaning, but instead **reach** for a disciple reading that aims for God’s Word in the authorial intent of human authors.

The H.O.P.E. of Gospel¹

These are not skills or strategies, but postures of the heart necessary to receive the Word.

1. Honesty – I am biased.

We must see that there are habits of heart and mind that will lead me to misread Scripture, or worse “use” Scripture for my own prerogatives.

None of us are unbiased. The perfectly objective reader is a myth. All of us come with skewed views. Discipleship is a life time of subjecting our beliefs to the truth of Scripture and letting Scripture transform our minds and take captive our thoughts.

Matthew 28:18–20 – “teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.”

John 17:17 – “Sanctify them in your truth; thy word is truth.”

Romans 12:1–2 – “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

2 Corinthians 10:5–6 – We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

While this posture of honesty is needed for individuals; it is also needed in the church. A church’s growth depends on their collective honesty and willingness to admit biases and openness to changing.

2. Openness – I am teachable.

This follows the instruction to be followers not users, disciples not critics. And we find biblical support in a number of places.

Isaiah 50:4 – This passage speaks of the servant of the Lord. He has been given the tongue of a “disciple” (NASB), a taught one (v. 4). Open ears (v. 5) are necessary for understanding.

Luke 24:31, 32, 45 – Luke records Jesus opening eyes, the Scriptures, and their minds. Openness is a gift, but it is also a prerequisite to understanding. See Proverbs 2:1–7.

John 6:69 – Once found, the words of life will keep God’s disciples.

Acts 4:13 – Such openness bears its mark in the wisdom and authority of the disciples.

2 Timothy 2:7 – Give yourself to the Word of God, that he may give understanding by his Spirit (1 John 2:27).

¹ Adapted from Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in this Text?*, 376–78.

3. **Priority** – I am second.

There's a great ministry called "I am second." Among other things it records Christians with powerful testimonies recounting how in their profession, celebrity, or influence, they are second.

In reading the Bible, understanding comes as you submit to it.

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant. (Psalm 25:14)

Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word. (Ps 119:67)

For the Lord God does nothing
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7)

4. **Exposition and Empathy** – I am obedient to the content and feel of the text.

Faithful disciples must become good readers. This is what Jesus did during his 40 days post-resurrection / pre-ascension. See Acts 1:3.

George Smeaton makes this point in his magisterial *The Apostle's Doctrine of the Atonement*. From Jesus' teaching in Luke 24, he concludes that the connecting link between Old Testament and New Testament apostles was the instruction of Jesus himself. In other words, the reason why the Apostles have different views than the Jews of their day is because Jesus taught them. We can see this in the Gospels themselves.

Matthew 13:51–52 – “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.”⁵² And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

John 14:26 – But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Two Applications

1. Good readers understand the content of the immediate text and how it fits into the larger storyline of the Bible. Because the Bible is one, unified Word from God, it cannot be understood in isolation from other parts of the Bible, and especially the person and work of Jesus. This is how Jesus read the Bible and how we should too.
2. The Word of God does not give us pure fact; it comes to us as a divine Word meant to instruct, convict, correct, and train (2 Timothy 3:16–17). At the same time, it is given to us to entice, allure, impassion, and satisfy (read Psalm 119). God's Word will not return void and exposition is meant to impact disciples with powerful transformation.

The HOPE of the GOSPEL

The last thing to say is that all our understanding of Scripture depends upon the gospel.

- Only those whom the Spirit grants faith to believe the gospel will be able to understand God's Word.
- Because the gospel is the entry point for salvation and sanctification—which includes obedience to all God commands via studying God's Word—we can never forget the gospel as we read.
- In fact, we might say that every faithful interpretation must show how it relates to Christ and his gospel.

Two Texts

1. 1 Corinthians 2:2 – “I decided to know nothing but Christ and him crucified.”
2. Acts 20:27 – “For I did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God.”

How do we reconcile Paul's specificity (Christ crucified) with Paul's sweeping instruction?

Keeping Christ at the Center of Our Text

1 Thessalonians 1:5–6, 9

1. The people of Thessalonica were idolatrous pagans (v. 9)
2. Paul came proclaiming the Gospel (v. 5a)
3. The Word did not come alone; it was accompanied by the Spirit (v. 5b).
4. The Spirit brought joy and life (v. 6), so that it was received as God's word (2:13)
5. Those who received the word were the elect of God (v. 4)
 - a. The order of knowing – faith precedes (in time) election
 - b. The order of being – election precedes (in eternity) faith
6. Knowledge of God came from preaching, (2), the Gospel, (3) the Spirit
7. Knowledge of God manifested itself in faith, (2) obedience, and (3) greater proclamation

It is vital we keep the gospel in front of us as we consider the Word of God, for we cannot grow up in Christ unless we abide in Christ and his cross and resurrection.

At the same time, because this is the centerpiece of Scripture, every text we study must naturally relate to Christ. And thus we need to let the shape of Scripture point us to Jesus, and then point to our lives for faith, love, hope, and action.