

*God, People, and the Bible**Richard E. Averbeck, Ph.D.*

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The goal of this course is to work through Genesis through Kings in the Old Testament from a historical, canonical, and especially from a theological point of view. We'll walk through the Old Testament step by step isolating key theological foundations as we go. When a foundational theological theme or pattern emerges, we will run it through the rest of the Bible for its implications in the church and the Christian life. This will be a general pattern through the course. We will be surveying material, but most of all we'll be going in depth into certain points that are especially foundational to everything else.

We're going to begin first with the basic perspective on the nature of the Bible and how we should read and study it. So this is the introduction God, people, and the Bible. Our starting point is the fact that the Bible offers the only divinely revealed, and therefore reliable foundational guide for life and ministry. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 7 when He talks about "building your house upon the rock, not upon the sand," referring to His Word as He proclaims it there. He intends that we take the study of His Word seriously, including the Old Testament, and keep it central to the way we think about, and respond to Him as well as in our relationships and ministry to people.

So for example, we can look at one Old Testament passage: Ezra 7:6-11. The first part of the chapter talks about this being during the reign of Artaxerxes the king of Persia, and during that time there went up "Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah," and so on (Ezra 7:1). Verse 5: "son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the Chief priest," So he was an Aaronic priest, Ezra was.

*Ezra 7:6-11: "This Ezra went up from Babylon; he was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God had given him. And the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him" (Ezra 7:6).*

Having the hand of the Lord upon him was the reason that he was blessed in what he was attempting to do. “Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests” and so on went with him (Ezra 7:7). They went up there at a certain time.

*And in 7:9: “From the first of the first month they began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him.”*

I repeat repetition of that expression for: Why was the good hand of his God upon him? Because in verse 10, Ezra had set his heart, his mind, all that’s in him “to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel” in that order. And it needs to be done in that order: (1) to study it, look at it carefully; (2) practice it, live it out; and then (3) to proclaim and teach it, and carry it forth to people around us. That’s really what Ezra was about. That was his purpose, and because of that “the good hand of his God was upon him.” He took the Word of the Lord seriously, and we need to take it seriously too.

This comes across also in the New Testament in a central passage about the nature of the Bible: II Timothy 3. We have this passage that begins with verse 15 (we could look back earlier, but it talks about desiring to live Godly in Christ Jesus).

*And verse 15, talking to Timothy, Paul says, “From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

Now of course the Scriptures that Timothy knew from childhood were not the New Testament Scriptures; they were the Old Testament Scriptures. So Paul is putting emphasis upon those Scriptures.

*“All of Scripture,” verse 16, “is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, [equipped] for every good work.”*

So all Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable. And those Scriptures that are being talked about there are the Old Testament Scriptures. It’s important to think of the implications of this. This was probably the last book that the apostle Paul wrote. And he

was still relying upon the Old Testament Scriptures. That was the way he was thinking through what he was doing in ministry. It was through the Old Testament Scriptures.

Really the New Testament part of our Bible is an expansion on the Old Testament based upon the fact that now the Messiah has come, the Holy Spirit has come at Pentecost, and we live in a church community that is made up of Jew and Gentile together. So there's the taking really of the Old Testament by the apostles—those were their Scriptures—and then working through the preaching of the Gospel from the viewpoint of the Old Testament. It's a preaching of Christ from the Old Testament that we have in the New Testament. That's important. That was their base of operation. It was the Old Testament, and it never lost its value according to Paul. Even as the New Testament was being written, he was still meditating and working on the Scriptures from the Old Testament point of view—that's the apostolic point of view. Now we want to walk through the purpose that we should have in teaching the Bible, and this is something that we need to think through at the beginning of a course like this, because sometimes we lose track of why we're doing what we're doing. We want to do our study of the Bible, from an explicitly biblical point of view. We need to know what we're aiming at. And basically the Bible focuses on certain specific goals for our own lives and our ministry to others. There are specific goals that God has in mind. Some of the major boiled down passages can be summed up in this way: If we come away from the Bible without relating well to God and people, we have not read it well. Now what I mean by "boiled down passages" is those passages that come down to a bottom line and basically say, "this is what it's all about," and there are quite a number of these passages, and a significant number of those focus specifically on a particular purpose or goal, relating well to God and people. And if we don't relate well to God and people through our reading of the Bible, then we really haven't read it well and brought it into our lives well.

The Bible is primarily, really, a relational book. God can be God without the Bible and man can be man without the Bible. The issue—the reason for the writing of the Bible—is the relationship between the two. Now one of these boiled down passages that I'm thinking of here is the one that we have in I Timothy 1:5 where Paul is talking about there being one main goal for learning and teaching God's word, namely so that people grow to love better.

*He says in I Timothy 1:5 that “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith.”*

Now love is basically caring about someone and doing what is in their best interest in light of the fact that you care about them. It's caring and doing something in light of the fact that you care. Just a survey of the passages on love in the Bible will show that basic idea. Now what do we mean here—“love from a pure heart”? Well pure heart, good motives, from a good conscience, a clear conscience—everything is straight forward—sincere faith, un-hypocritical, steady, and dependable kind of faith. These really add up to integrity or wholeness in the way that we love. Talking about love is one thing, but understanding that this love comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith is another thing. How hard is it to have a pure heart and a good conscience and an un-hypocritical, steady, dependable faith? Well this takes a lot of the work of God in our lives, and the goal of this course is to teach the Bible and study it in such a way that this is what's worked into our lives—this kind of love for God and love for one another.

That brings us to the second point here, but before I move on I want to say this: The passage here in I Timothy 1:5 actually is in the context of when Paul is deeply concerned about how people are teaching the Old Testament, especially the Old Testament law in the church. It's possible to teach the Old Testament and, for that matter the New Testament as well, in a way that really doesn't move anybody in the direction of loving well from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. So we want to know what we're aiming at. We're aiming at being transformed in such a way that we love well from a wholeness, an integrity, of all our person being devoted to loving God and loving people well.

This comes through in both the Old and the New Testaments—Jesus made that clear in the way He summarized the Old Testament law, of course. Matthew 22: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” someone asked Him (verse 36).

*And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it” (Matthew 22:37-39).*

Notice that He was asked which one is the greatest. He doesn't stop with one; he gives two.

*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).  
“On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).*

Now obviously this is not new in the New Testament. Here He is quoting from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 to get these two great commandments. It’s the central concern of the Old Testament just as much as the New Testament, and the Old Testament is often badly misunderstood. If we haven’t read the Old Testament in a way where we see it this way—the way Jesus is talking about here in these two great commandments—then we really haven’t read it well. We’ve read it wrongly. Jesus says so.

Now there are misunderstandings sometimes when we look at these passages. For example, with regard to the second commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” One of the common misunderstandings is that, somehow, we need to learn to love ourselves, and when we do that then we can love our neighbor. That’s not really what this is about. In Leviticus 19, where this comes from and what Jesus is really talking about here, has to do with how well we love someone else the way we would want to be loved ourselves.

*So for example, starting in Leviticus 19:17: “You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart . . .”*

Well you wouldn’t want someone else to hate you, so don’t hate them.

*“You may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.” Verse 18: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.”*

You wouldn’t want someone to take vengeance against you, or to bear a grudge against you, so don’t bear a grudge against them. It’s really the same as The Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And in that passage as well, Jesus says the whole law and prophets hang upon this idea of loving others the way you would want to be loved—The Golden Rule.

Another misunderstanding is that somehow these can be in competition with one another—the first commandment and the second commandment. But if you look at the way Jesus lived,

He is an example of how to live both fully—not in competition with one another. In fact it's very clear from certain passages that these are bound up with one another.

For example, in I John 4:20-21 we read this:

*“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”*

And there are other passages like this. The point is that if you love God well, you will love people well. And loving people well is a way of showing that you love God well.

One can use these two great commandments to get at basic questions day by day, moment by moment, hour by hour in our lives. When things come up, when we have to live our lives in certain kinds of contexts, we can ask things [like] “If this is true—if I’m following the two great Commandments—what effect will it have on me or you in a particular situation,” and a whole set of subsidiary questions: “Okay if I love God and love my neighbor well, will I be holy? Will I be kind? Will I be willing to forgive?” This is really even part, as you know, of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6, you need to forgive others, because that is key to God forgiving us. Paul says the same thing about the second great commandment in Romans 13:8-10 and on through 14. The idea is that you should owe nothing to anyone except love. The point is that these are basic bottom line passages. This is what the whole thing is about. This is a “boiled down passage.” You can summarize the whole law and the prophets from this set of two great commandments. So this is a “boiled down passage.”

Similarly, we can look at I Corinthians 12 and 13. The point here is that love outweighs any knowledge, giftedness, or abilities we may have. By definition, if we do not love well, we do not serve well no matter how well gifted we may be. He talks at the end of chapter 12 about the spiritual gifts, and talks about “earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way” (I Corinthians 12:31). And then he goes through what love is and what love is like, how important it is. “Now abide,” he says at the end of the chapter, “faith, hope, love these three, but the greatest of these is love” (I Corinthians 13:13). That’s a “boiled down passage”—what quality is most important.



Now how important is faith? Well it's pretty important. Hope is the same thing. But love outweighs them all. That's the point. In other words, it's important that the gifts that we have be used to respond effectively to the love of God and to loving people. That's what they're for. The gifts we have, the spiritual gifts that we have, the abilities that God has given us, are not the basic bottom line in life and ministry. The gifts must be used, must function under the umbrella of the dynamic of love. Gifts are to be used to love. We all know that a person who's very gifted has a lot of power. That power can be used either to serve oneself, or to serve others; to serve God, or not to serve God. The point is that the gifts are not really the bottom line issue. It's what you do with the gifts that you have that makes the difference, and that outweighs everything else. Again, a bottom line boiled-down passage.

Another one: Jesus said that loving one another well is to be the distinguishing mark of the Christian and the church.

*He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).*

And we could go on and talk more about various passages in that same context and elsewhere. The point here is this is boiling down Jesus' intention in terms of how we are with one another in the church, those that believe in Him and trust in Him. It comes down to loving one another well. That's the real goal.

In fact we could probably define how we should be living in terms of dealing with sin and so on in terms of how well we love. Whether we love well or not determines our character, our maturity, who we really are. A person can be smart, for example, even in biblical studies and theology and really not be a mark of the Christian. But a person who studies hard and works hard like Ezra did and tries to understand it and then tries to live it out and then teach it, that person can be used greatly of God. And the goal for this course is to be able to work into the Old Testament in such a way, and bring it on in through to the New Testament and in the church and the Christian life that it has this kind of effect through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And we'll talk more about the Holy Spirit here in just a bit.

Now we want to move on and talk a little bit about hermeneutics and history in the study of the Old Testament. How do we

interpret? How do we read the Bible, specifically here, of course, in the Old Testament, [which] we'll be focusing on? But it includes, really, the study of the whole Bible. We're not leaving behind what we just talked about—the whole purpose of learning to read the Bible well is so that we can love God and love people better. That we can make the Bible—the purpose for studying the Bible—the focus on real transformation in the way we live our lives.

So we're not leaving that behind, but there are certain things to help us read the Bible well. And we talk about grammatical-historical literary hermeneutic; or interpretation, and a normal way of reading the language and literature of the Bible. It's not a code of any sort. It's really straight forward communication. It's about a God, who we cannot completely understand. But it is written by God through the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, so that He communicates it clearly as possible to us in spite of the distance between our understanding and His, which is vast.

We talk about verbal-plenary inerrant inspiration in the original manuscripts by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the implications of these things are not really thought through all that well, and we want to talk through these in terms of four main categories here. And I'll focus the discussion, try to illustrate a little bit from certain things, specifically in the Pentateuch for examples.

First, there was a human author. For the Pentateuch, this was Moses, who wrote under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. But nevertheless he wrote from his own human perspective, and intended to communicate certain truths. His mind did not go in to neutral as he was composing scripture. He was a human author, and he stayed human as an author of Scripture. But he was guided and carried along by the work of the Holy Spirit through him.

So for example, let's think about the book of Genesis. What implications does this have? We have a difference between the time of the event and the time of Moses' life. Moses lived during the time of the Exodus. The events of Genesis were hundreds of years earlier. And so what we want to do is to understand the implications of that. Now when was the book of Genesis written by Moses? Well it's not likely that he wrote it before he was at the burning bush in Exodus 3. The first revelation to Moses seems to have been in Exodus 3 at the burning bush. So at that point, then, he was going to go and deliver the people from Egypt, bring them



out to Sinai, and so on. It's not likely that he wrote the book of Genesis before he received the law at Sinai. He was on the way to Sinai the whole time. The law was given there. Likely, that what happened was, is that Moses wrote Genesis after the fact—after he already had received the law—and that has certain effects on how we read the book of Genesis, for example.

So Genesis 7. Let's look at Genesis 7 for a moment to get an idea of what implications this might have.

*In Genesis 7:2: "You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens a male and his female, and of the animals that are not clean, two, a male and his female."*

Well we haven't been told anything at this point in Genesis about, well, what's a clean versus an unclean animal. But we don't need to be told, because Moses is already assuming that the people who are reading Genesis are people who have the law, because he wrote the law previously. He had already communicated that to the people of Israel. So he didn't have to explain that. He's not writing Genesis 7 to Noah, he's writing it to the people who already have the law, so he doesn't have to explain this. And we don't need therefore to assume that Noah wouldn't have known; we just need to know that he just doesn't tell us how Noah knew what clean or unclean animals were. That's not the issue. It's how we, or really the first readers of the Bible—the ancient Israelites of Moses' day—would've understood that. That's the point.

Also, not only do we have a human author, but [second point] we have human readers. Moses wrote with the background of the ancient world. And with Genesis already, he was writing with the background of Exodus and probably Leviticus. Moses wrote with that background, and the people read from that background. This also includes the Ancient Near Eastern world in which people lived. For the Pentateuch, they were hearing the things that were being written in and read to them from the law and from Genesis from this Ancient Near Eastern, historical and cultural background in their own day. Their culture was different. So therefore certain points that we have in the text may have hit them differently than they would come across to us, sometimes very differently.

For example, going back to Genesis 1. As you walk through Genesis 1, you come to verse 14, the third day.

*Genesis 1:14-16: “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons, for days, and years. And let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light to the earth.’ And it was so. God made the two great lights. So God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He made the stars also.”*

Now for us this just is referring to the making of the sun and the moon and the stars. But for them in their day, they’ve just come out of Egypt, where the chief god is Ra, the sun god, and this would be a polemic against an understanding that many had in their day of the sun being an actual god. Well that would read very differently for them, and it would have a certain impact on how they understood. Now there is really no god. In fact, the sun and the moon in Genesis 1 are not called the sun and the moon; they’re just called the “big light” and the “little light.” They’ve really been demoted. They’re name isn’t even used. In Hebrew it would be shemesh and yarehach. The point is that these particular terms are not used. They’re just big light and little light. The idea is that they are not really gods at all. And that would speak volumes to an ancient Israelite. There is only one God. “In the beginning God” (Genesis 1:1), and there’s only God. He created the heavens and the earth. So this is an important part.

*On the other hand, in Genesis 1:2, “The earth was formless and voided, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”*

We have a beginning of the creation account that’s like a deep dark watery abyss. Well in that sense, that’s a normal place to start in describing creation in the Ancient Near East, and most of the Ancient Near Eastern stories start with a deep dark watery abyss. So God is speaking against their world—the notion that some of the elements are gods. There’s only one God; the God who created it all, but also he’s beginning at a place that they could understand. They could understand the deep dark watery abyss and then describing that as we work on through Genesis 1 and basically eliminating those conditions of verse 2 as we go [through] Genesis 1. We’ll come back to that later.

The third point about reading the text is the text, as it now stands, is a literary composition. We have a human author and we have human readers. And it’s a literary composition that needs to be read as literature. This means we need to consider certain things

when we read the Bible. One of the common issues that gets raised is the context in which a particular passage is in the Bible. We can talk about its near context or its far context. So for example, Genesis 1–11, what is it really there for in the Bible? How does it lead into Genesis 12 and following? Well it lays the foundation for “the Abrahamic Call,” because all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. And that’s the families of Genesis 1–11, especially the Table of Nations of Genesis 10.

Genesis 1–11 levels the ground of our human experience, and it leads us into Genesis 12, which is the historical beginning of the redemptive program of God funneled through Abraham, “the Father of Faith.” But you can also look at the early chapters of Genesis in relation to the whole Bible, because, for example, if you compare Genesis 1–3 with Revelation 21–22. In Genesis 1–3, we have the creation of the heaven and the Earth; Revelation 21 and 22, we have the recreation of new heaven and new earth. And you have, in Genesis 3, the curses; in Revelation 21 and 22, we have the fact that there is no more curse in the new heaven and new earth. We have the tree of life in Genesis 2 in the Garden; in Revelation 22, we have the tree of life again in the paradise of the new heaven and new earth. Really what we have here in Genesis 1–3 and Revelation 21–22 is an envelope around the Bible. And although there was a fall in Genesis 3, God is taking us eventually through a process through history that’s going to bring us back to the beginning where we have a paradise again, “no more tears” (Revelation 21:4). All these sorts of references are made there specifically in relation to the early chapters of Genesis, so it’s an envelope around the Bible. We’re going back to the beginning, something even better. This is biblical context near and far.

Then you have the kind of literature that it is. You read, for example, narrative differently than you read law. They’re meant to be read differently. Law is focused on just commanding one’s volition—you must do this, or you must not do that—whereas narrative is really quite different kind of material. Here in narrative you’re getting involved in a story. It’s like today; we have movies, and we can get lost in a movie (at least some of us can) in terms of the plot, and we can be drawn into the emotions of it, and that sort of a thing. Well their form of that was narratives. They were to be absorbed into the characters and read them in light of that. And therefore it instructs, it’s torah—it’s instruction, it’s law. The word torah really means more instruction than law. But narrative instructs and affects us differently and through a different means than law does, and so we need to understand how these different

forms of literature actually work.

Then we also have to keep in mind that the language in which this was originally written is the Hebrew language, and that's important. It is a particular language. It's helpful to know Hebrew—we have wonderful translations. And it's the Word of God in English too. But the point is that if you know Hebrew, you have another tool that can get you closer to the meaning of the text if you study well and dig deep. The point is it gives you more tools in your toolbox for the study of Scripture. And one of the things that we do in teaching the Bible and in teaching how to study the Bible is give us tools for coming at the Word of God. One of them that would be a natural good tool to have would be Hebrew. Now that's just part of the issue with reading the Scriptures. The English is a translation of the Hebrew text. So again, that's part of the fact that it's a literary composition in that particular language.

Ultimately, God Himself intends that we be impacted by the divinely intended message of the text in its parts, and as a whole, its theology. What it's really teaching us about is who we are, who God is, the situation that we're in, what's going on in the world, various things like that. Now any interpreter's theology is only as good as his or her ability to engage the three dimensions of the text that we talked about: reckoning with the fact that there's a human author, there are human readers, and it's a literary composition. Dealing with that, engaging with those three dimensions of the text and then the degree of illumination, the Holy Spirit grants the interpreter along the way. So we have these three dimensions of the text, but along the way God intends for the Holy Spirit—who inspired the writing of the text—to also, through His indwelling of us and His work in our hearts and minds, to bring that Scripture that He Himself inspired to bear upon our lives. That's what illumination is really all about. Understanding it, yes, but understanding it in a way that brings it to impact in a transforming way. After all, that is the goal of our instruction:

*“Love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith”  
(1 Timothy 1:5).*

Now that brings me down, then, to a bit of a discussion about illumination and our approach to studying and applying the Bible in our personal lives. Studying the Bible cannot really be done in a simplistic or mechanical sort of way. The Bible talks about meditating on the Word of God “day and night”—Joshua 1, Psalm

1, and various places. It talks about cogitating on it, mulling it over. There's a certain kind of thinking deeply and implicationally about God, people, and the Bible in relation to our own lives as we're in the Bible—our devotions, our study. In our study of the Bible, and in our lives, first we need to take God Himself seriously in terms of making our study an encounter with Him. The most personally transforming activity that we can engage in is worship, I believe. It's practicing His presence in our lives as we study the Bible—making it truly an encounter with Him. This is how we should be reading the Bible.

Worship, I think, is the most transforming experience for the Christian, because it's the main way that we get our heart going in a different direction.

*Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the issues of life."*

Now worship is really (and I'm going to put this in a certain way) is really about getting impressed with God in the midst of life. Too often we're impressed with the wrong things in life. We can learn about a lot of things in the Bible without being transformed by them, without really being changed.

Transformation takes place when we're deeply impressed with God and His purposes in our life in the ways that get our will engaged for change and for transformation. When we want changes, when we get impressed with something other than what we've already been impressed with, deep change takes place when the things that matter to us change. We can sometimes get real good at talking. But we are not necessarily so good at walking just because we're good at talking. It doesn't mean that someone who teaches well walks well with the Lord. And we need to first of all walk well with the Lord. We need to study it and then live it and then teach it.

So the first point is we need to take God Himself seriously in terms of making our study an encounter with Him. We need to make it an experience of encountering God [with] real worship with Him as we are in the Word. This is part of [an] approach to the Bible that really calls and invites the Holy Spirit to impact us, to illumine our lives, and change us through the study of his Word.

Second, we need to take our human nature and experience, our humanness in this world seriously by being fully engaged as a

fully human person—our mind, our will, our emotions, attitudes, perspectives on life, personality, background, all these various things are part of who we are—and we need to be fully engaged in them while we study. I would suggest that our most important exegetical and theological tool is our own heart, the Hebrew word *lev*. We have all sorts of tools that we can use: Bible study tools like Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, word study tools, [there are] kinds of study Bibles, cross reference tools, various things like this. But the most important tool we have is our own *lev*, our own heart. We're not just a brain to be filled with data. God did not write the Bible to computers. It's written to impact people as they are fully engaged as we encounter Him.

We're not talking therefore in the reading of the Bible that you read the Bible cognitively first and then you come to what it means and that sort of a thing for you [and] so on. You're engaged in it fully along the way. And that, therefore, enables God to work in us. You're inviting Him to change whatever is there to work and to transform you as you study the Scripture. As we encounter Him in all our humanness, we are offering ourselves to Him for real change, because what is real and deep in us is what is encountering Him. That's what this is all about—coming into full human contact with the divine God of the Bible.

Now the third main point here is that we need to take the Bible seriously by giving the text the top priority empowered to guide, direct, and change our understanding of God and people and the relationship between the two. The text needs to be in the driver's seat, so to speak, not our own subjectivity. Now it's true that by nature we are subjective, and that's good, that's fine. But we need to be well informed in our subjectivity. That's why we study the way we do. We try to understand better the Word of God than we do now. We need to be assuming that when we come to Scripture that we're wrong; that God is right. God is wanting to change us. And there are all sorts of levels of this, and it keeps on going. Nobody ever gets beyond this where they've got it all figured out.

The point is that we need to understand that exegesis is not a closed system. It is not a pure system. We're influenced by all sorts of things as we study and interpret the Bible. One person will read the text and get one thing, something will impress him; and then another person will get impressed with something else, and we cannot eliminate that in our humanness. And we really shouldn't try because, again, God wrote it to you and me so that we can be impacted where we are as fully human people and be



transformed. Cold objectivity in the study of the Bible isn't even the ideal. The issue is a well informed subjectivity—a person who's well informed even though they're subjective. We are by definition subjective people, and that's fine. We can't get passed that. That's why equally good scholars can come to different views on the same scriptures and so on. We struggle with this, but the point is that along the way, as we struggle well, what we find is that the Holy Spirit can take what He brings to bear upon us and really work us in such a way that we are transformed.

This is what illumination is really all about. It's being transformed by being fully engaged with God, people, and Bible as the triangle on the page shows—being fully engaged. Then out of that shines the light in our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. We engage in that way that invites Him to work. Well that's how we should be studying the Bible—fully engaged with God and with our humanness and also with the Bible itself—because we don't want to impose our understanding on the Bible. We want the Bible to guide us and direct us.

The same is true in the way we teach and apply the Bible to others. We need to understand that personal change in transformation in the lives of the people to whom we minister is worship-centered and empowered. We need to take God seriously as we approach people. I can't reach inside of someone's body and turn their heart in a "different direction," so to speak. But the Holy Spirit can do this, and He often does it in a context where people really get impressed with God through the Word and through contact with people who know the Word, and live like Christ wants us to live.

This can change how life looks. What is important changes. It gets the will engaged in the change process, really seeing God in the midst of life. That's important; people need to come to the Word with that. We need to recognize that, just like us, people to whom we minister are not made up [of] just a brain to be filled with information whether it's biblical or other kinds of information. We need to take people seriously—the human capacities and the fact that they're plagued with fallenness and experiences that have not necessarily been good—and all sorts of things that are going on there. We are dependent upon God to take and bring the truth that we're talking about to bear. And what we're really after is a transformed life—people who love well from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. We can't make that happen, but God can. And then as we bring them to the Bible, we help them to take the Bible seriously, and that can then continue to work in

them as they engage with the Word of God. And they can learn to love God well—godliness—love people well—genuineness—and apply the Word well in their lives.

Finally then, let me just outline a basic approach that has come to me as I've looked at the Bible for years in the kind of way we've been talking about. There's a certain pattern that has shown up to me that I'd like to just set up, and then we can move on in the rest of the lectures to working through the text very directly.

First, although the world was created to be a place of rest, peace, and purpose for us, it's now a mess and so are we. We have lost our rest, and this loss manifests itself in the way we handle life. Now you'll notice I've used a lot of big theological words here, right? Rest and mess and so on. The point is that it's really very simple. God has kept things simple. We're the ones that complicate the matter. What basically, we need to understand is that God created the World perfectly for us. We messed it up. So therefore we have lost this rest—this peace and purpose— that we were meant to have from the beginning in it.

Genesis 1–11 really tells about this. [It] lays the foundation for our understanding it, and how it shows up in the rest of the Bible. We were created for paradise, we're not there anymore, and we don't like it. That's basically the situation.

*In Matthew 11, Jesus boiled it down this way: “Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).*

And He talks there about a rest for your soul. There's a yolk that comes with it, but it's a yolk that's “easy and light” (Matthew 11:30). There's rest for those who come to Jesus. That's what happens in that pivotal point in Matthew 11:28-30 when Jesus is focusing on what He really is calling us to, those who will come to Him. See, “Creation and Corruption Theology” in Genesis 1–11 lays the foundation for understanding our situation within the world.

Second, even though we are in this disastrous situation and continue to make it worse because of the many ways we reject God and His design for us and our world, still He has stayed involved, and there's a redemptive rest to be found amid the mess that we live in. And that's really what Genesis 12 through Revelation 22 is really all about. The rest of the Bible—from Genesis 12 through the

end—focuses on this: that there’s a redemptive rest to be found. There’s “Redemption Theology.” The first point is about Creation Corruption Theology. The second point is about Redemption Theology. And we talked already about the envelope around the Bible from Genesis 1–3 to Revelation 21 and 22. And the energy of biblical theology comes from the dynamic of interplay between Creation Corruption Theology and Redemption Theology.

Finally, in ministry, the goal is to work the rest that God has offered in redemption down into the hearts and lives of people so that they love God and love people well in spite of the mess which we are and in which we live. Salvation and sanctification, that’s what it’s all about.

There are two sides to this. First, we need to be able to meet people where they are—understand them biblically. That’s creation corruption theology. Second, we need to take people where they need to go from where they are. We need to be able to help them biblically—that’s Redemption Theology. We are all in the middle of this groaning world, and in the middle of that, what we have is a supply of redemption in the middle of the mess in which we live. And that’s really the foundation of understanding what it means to bring the Bible to bear upon what’s really going on in people’s lives. The foundation for all this is starting in Genesis 1–11.