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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

R O N A L D  D .  W O R D E N

R E N E W E D F A S C I N A T I O N W I T H R E L I G I O U S M A T T E R S late in this century, remarkable in its own way, includes special interest in the Bible. It appears in many forms of voluntary Bible study, over business lunches, in homes both day and evening, and in many kinds of groups—often apart from official church promotion. The multiplication of versions and translations is an old story, but a new explosion of media forms making the Bible available documents this interest, whether through audiovisual presentation or computerized text, concordance and annotation programs. One doesn’t use a computer program for casual reading of the Bible; the point is rather to manipulate smaller or larger portions of the text in a search for significant patterns of meaning, or perhaps for compiling and presenting a topical arrangement of biblical data. In any event, the multiplication of such programs at many price levels since the introduction of the personal computer is a significant index both of general interest in the Bible and especially of the desire to understand and use it. Some are rather expensive with multiple supplemental programs, but others are distributed at little or no cost to the user, thanks to the lack of copyright restrictions on the Authorized (King James) Version.¹ The present availability of the Bible in new media and forms invites comparison with the effect of the introduction of printing in early modern Europe and the availability and popularity of the Authorized and Geneva Bibles in the seventeenth century.

Ways of understanding and interpreting the Bible, sometimes called the discipline of biblical hermeneutics,² have attracted concurrent attention. In any event, renewed interest in the Bible has brought renewed interest in questions of meaning and questions about how to understand and apply the teaching of the Bible to modern life.

MEETING GOD IN THE BIBLE

People turn to the Bible to find God. Some have other interests, of course. There are flourishing departments of religious studies in supposedly “secular” state universities across America where one might assume a variety of literary, historical, antiquarian, sociological, or other motivations for Bible study. But the object of such disciplines, one step
removed from interest in the Bible for its own sake, usually remains the earnest religious seeker or believer of ancient or modern times and what the Bible meant or means to him or her. The direct religious use of the Bible represents its primary level of meaning, and various related academic disciplines, including even various forms of academic or biblical theology, represent secondary perspectives on the Bible with bases in the primary religious usage within the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition. As a general rule, then, seekers and believers come to the Bible to learn about, and to encounter, God, and to gain wisdom, insight, and perhaps direction for living their lives. More than that, they seek for meaning and significance through a relationship to God, a sense of God’s living presence in their individual and corporate lives.

Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
(Ps. 73:25-26 NRSV)

It is fair to say that a sincere person who turns to the Bible seeking God need not be disappointed.

However, the diversity of religious opinions, beliefs, and practices attributed to the Bible is remarkable. The need for appropriate interpretation of the Bible, especially if it is to be put to the best religious use, is widely acknowledged. The first consideration in a proper approach to understanding the Bible is to maintain awareness of its religious dimension. More than that, it is necessary to understand its divine origins, that is, the inspiration and authority of the Bible. On the other hand—and some problems of understanding arise at this point—it is equally necessary to maintain appropriate awareness of the human factors at work in the writing of the Bible. In the time-honored phrase, “men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:21), it is necessary to take due account of both aspects, (1) men and women…spoke, and (2) men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Remembering the Divine Origins of Scripture

It has been the author’s privilege to teach a variety of Bible courses at the graduate seminary level for several years at a location within the Texas Medical Center (Houston, Texas). At this center some physicians do heart transplants or seek cures for AIDS. Others consider the mer-
The answer is a resounding yes! The marvels of modern medicine are not to be depreciated. One applauds heroic struggles against death and disease, whether by physician or patient. But the Bible is full of reminders that there are things of more significance and worth than length of days. In the end, it is God with whom we have to do.

The use of the Bible in the worship of the Christian community from the earliest times, patterned on the use of the Hebrew Bible in the worship of the synagogue and supplemented by the reading of epistles such as Paul’s, demonstrates its religious significance for Christian believers. In the final analysis, it was this use of the Bible that determined the shape and extent of the canon of scripture as accepted by the Christian church. It is fair to say that the works finally included within the New Testament are those that won the hearts of Christian believers through proven effectiveness in bringing worshiping Christian individuals and communities into God’s presence. Bruce M. Metzger has stated the matter thus:

Neither religious nor artistic works really gain anything by having an official stamp put on them. If, for example, all the academies of music in the world were to unite in declaring Bach and Beethoven to be great musicians, we should reply, “Thank you for nothing; we knew that already.” And what the musical public can recognize unaided, those with spiritual discernment in the early Church were able to recognize in the case of their sacred writings through what Calvin called the interior witness of the Holy Spirit.  

George Fox certainly gave primary attention to the scriptures as God’s Word. He laments the fact that many “say, ‘The scripture is the rule of their faith, life, manners and doctrine’; and yet are found serving the world’s god.” He adds that they

cannot endure to hear talk of the grace of God for unholy men give meanings with their unclean spirit to the scriptures, which
holy men of God spoke forth as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [and they] have not the same Holy Ghost that they had which gave forth the scriptures which no man can interpret in his will but by the same Holy Ghost that gave them forth, which leads into all truth and good manners, and conversation; and the same Holy Ghost gave forth the true doctrine of the scriptures.  

There is perhaps merit in the occasional charge that some Christians are so spiritually and heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use. On the other hand, people do turn to the Bible to find God. Many are able to identify with Abraham, who “looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).

Understanding the Bible as the Product of Human Authors

Inasmuch as the Bible is inspired by God, it is necessary—as George Fox noted in the passage cited above—to be guided by the Holy Spirit in a proper understanding of it. However, the Bible was written in specific human languages within particular historical and cultural settings, and related in the first instance to the specific faith situations of the writers and their associates. So it is necessary to take these cultural and historical situations into account when reading the Bible. Furthermore, since the Bible appears in the form of literature, it is necessary to apply various canons appropriate for understanding literary works.

The Bible is a form of communication, written, for the most part, as prose or poetry. One sentence follows upon another, and one paragraph (in prose) or stanza (in poetry) adds to the point made by the previous unit. The elements of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax must be understood in terms of the original language, whether Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, in order to receive what is communicated by the Bible. Fortunately, there is a long and honored tradition of linguistic scholarship behind the best translations of the Bible, so that it may be said that the intelligent English reader will not be seriously misled by careful and detailed study of the Bible in the best modern translations. This must include attention to the form of the Bible’s major units, that is, books composed of various literary, stylistic, and rhetorical components.

Specialists in biblical studies will give attention to questions about the wording of the text, using the science of textual criticism, which compares the various ancient manuscripts. Translation from the biblical
languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) is an essential factor. Knowledge of the original languages is certainly very helpful but the better English translations provide an adequate basis for much fruitful study of the Bible. The historical and cultural background and setting for the biblical passages in question are often crucial to understanding the text. The importance of context, whether literary and historical, or social and cultural, for understanding a biblical statement or passage can hardly be overstated. But, in spite of cultural differences, we share much of the same human condition as that known by biblical people. In any case, an understanding of the context is essential. Apart from their context, biblical words and phrases have no meaning. Narratives, parables, laws, admonitions, and the like bring with them the story context or an implicit context, that is, the religious and social setting that would require such laws or admonitions. Nevertheless, all biblical passages need to be understood within the various levels of context, or as existing within such multiple contexts as, say, a Jewish setting profoundly influenced by the biblical tradition but having to cope with various requirements of the Roman empire and the Herodian rulers whom the Romans had authorized. The literary context, both immediate to a passage (i.e., the surrounding paragraphs or sections) and within the larger biblical framework such as books or groups of books (e.g., the Pentateuch) also helps to define the meaning of given passages. The patriarchal narratives of Genesis, for example, are not merely interesting in their own right. The question must be asked, why and/or to what extent do they serve as the preface to the Mosaic legislation of Exodus through Deuteronomy?

**Critical Approaches to Scripture**

It is with reference to context that one must understand the significance of many issues and questions raised by various forms of biblical criticism during especially the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When source criticism suggests that various sources from different authors and time periods were combined to produce the present form of, say, the Pentateuch or the Synoptic Gospels, this implies to a greater or lesser extent, a redefinition of the context out of which the biblical materials came.
or through which it passed. Various forms of historical criticism, form criticism and the like, have similar effect. Often, these critical perspectives are presented or developed by serious and committed students of the biblical tradition, and their work must be taken seriously. However, it is sometimes the case that such work appears to seek novelty at the expense of effective control. When one theory becomes the basis for another, and eventually for a chain of theories, the possibilities for error multiply geometrically. The present author believes that one must deal with biblical material in the context of interpretation produced by the presence of the various critical approaches, if for no other reason than the ability to discuss issues of faith and defend a traditional and biblically based faith. However, he also believes that the average noncritical reader is not misled by reading the Bible and accepting it at face value, as the witness of the prophets to the promises and grace of the God of Abraham, and the witness of the apostles to the redemption and transformation of the world brought by Jesus Christ. While the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Library, various Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, and the like provides vital background information, the canon of scripture itself (i.e., the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New) provides the principal guide for Christian faith and practice. The Bible is entitled to the presumption that it provides reliable information and is not misleading in what it represents, properly understood.

Hermeneutics, or biblical interpretation, thus appears in many forms and at different levels of simplicity or complexity. Although many significant factors and a multitude and variety of appropriate considerations are relevant to a proper understanding and interpretation of the Bible, there is much to be said for a straightforward, commonsense approach to scripture.

**Emphasizing Major Themes and Values**

In study and interpretation of the Bible, the major emphasis should fall on its major themes and values, in particular, on the character of the God whose promises were remembered, especially in times of oppression and difficulty, whose redeeming grace was proclaimed, and whose living presence was desired and/or enjoyed by his people. For Christians, of course, the fulfillment of these promises and the operations of God’s grace are seen especially in the New Testament’s proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. How sad it would be...
if, in preaching and teaching or their own study, the God of the Bible were lost in the trivial or peripheral detail of the interpretation, however erudite or laborious!

Emphasizing Significant Issues

As indicated above, most people who read the Bible do so for religious reasons. They may have questions about the major issues of life. Who am I? Why am I here? What values do I hold? How will (or should) I spend my time? What will become of me? What makes life worth living? At one time or another, most people consider such questions. Some who do find significant answers for themselves in philosophy, whether at a rather sophisticated, academic level, or in popular books, media talk shows, and informal conversations. But for centuries many have relied on the Bible for guidance in such matters, even when in earlier times the expense and availability of Bibles prohibited personal ownership, and one had to rely on the teaching ministries of the church.

Study and interpretation of the Bible ought to focus on the significant issues of life and the related major themes of the Bible. When the major issues of life and value, the character of God, and the character he demands of his people, are at stake, then no laborious effort to analyze and classify biblical passages and teaching is too great. Some manuals for what is called “inductive Bible study” seem to imply as much.7 And the readers of various modern annotated or cross-referenced Bibles today certainly owe much to the laborious efforts of those who have provided this information. Yet there needs to be a conscious effort to maintain balance and perspective by focusing on the major biblical themes and issues related to God and his redemptive relationship to his people.

In a recent textbook for courses in hermeneutics, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., has called for special emphasis on what he calls the “chair” passages of scripture. The term, based on the Latin sedes doctrinae (“a seat/chair of doctrine”), refers to “one of several large blocks of biblical text that give sustained presentations of specific doctrines.”8 The notion of a predetermined list of passages which “represent a self-policing function of Scripture” (p. 202) seems inappropriate to an inductive approach, or at best premature. One would rather determine major themes from a study of the Bible as a whole and in its major parts, confirming their importance by detailed analysis and recognition of meaningful passages
on these themes. But the reminder that biblical interpretation should focus on major themes and ultimate issues is certainly helpful.

**DISTINGUISHING GENERAL PRINCIPLES FROM CONTEXT-BOUND PHENOMENA**

There is a need to distinguish between general and timeless principles and situationally or culturally determined statements. An important criterion in this regard is usage throughout the Bible, tempered by the Christian understanding that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise of the Old Testament and that key figures (prophets and apostles) were in a special position to provide guidance.

**Generally Valid Principles**

An example of a general and timeless principle would be the overriding importance of love as a determining factor in God’s relation to human beings and in their relationships with him and with one another. Jesus was presented with a question that called for stating such a principle: “Which commandment is the first of all?” (Mk. 12:28 NRSV; cf. Mt. 22:36; Lk. 10:25), to which he responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18, emphasizing love for God and for one’s neighbor. Luke’s version of this discussion includes, as an explanation of the term neighbor, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-37). The principle that love should transcend racial and ethnic boundaries emerges from this passage in Luke, developing what was already implicit in Leviticus. In Leviticus 19:18, the term neighbor clearly refers to one’s own family or to fellow Israelites, as one can see in the full text of verses 17-18 (emphasis added):

> You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

It may be that the limitation here to one’s own relatives or people is a cultural or context-bound element, but the fact is that this instruction was directed to the Israelite people themselves rather than, say, the Philistines. The directive to love one’s neighbor is already moved in the direction of a universal principle not bound by race or ethnicity by its repetition at the end of the chapter:
When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:33-34).

When Moses (i.e., Leviticus, Deuteronomy), Jesus, Paul (Rom. 13:8-10), and James (Jas. 2:8-13) can all be cited in support of the same general principle, then it appears beyond doubt that one has identified a major and general principle of the teaching of scripture. The emphasis on God’s steadfast love in much of the Old Testament, for example, in the refrain repeated in each verse of Psalm 136, suggests that love as required of human beings is grounded in the character of God and his prior love for us.

Directives Relevant Within the Cultural and Historical Context

There are times, however, when one must consider whether an aspect of the biblical passage, especially in the case of ethical injunctions or directives regarding behavior or church order, represents a permanent and timeless value, or rather an aspect of the society and culture of biblical times with no permanent validity for modern people. Robin Nixon lists examples such as the apostolic decree of Acts 15 (“the evidence of the New Testament writings as a whole is that its effect was decidedly limited”), the specific instructions to the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:17-22), and the question of church order (1 Cor. 11:16; 14:33-36). Of Paul’s injunctions about headdress, Nixon says, “Most twentieth century Christians do not find excessive difficulty in understanding that the principle underlying this can be applied to dress today, in whatever way is appropriate to the national or local conditions.”

The examples of context-bound issues cited by Nixon (above) have their own importance, but are not likely to cause heated debates in the contemporary world. One is likely, however, to encounter lively discussion among Christians about the understanding of a verse such as Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.” There are modern Christians, serious and committed, who have questions about how such a text should be understood and applied in a time such as ours when roles of men and women are being redefined. They may echo the words of Peter, “There are some things in them [i.e., Paul’s letters] hard to understand, which the ignorant and
unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:16). In any event, the text illustrates the need to distinguish between general principles and that which is adapted to the historical and cultural context. It further illustrates the need to observe the relation of such an injunction to its larger context. Properly understood within the context set by the demand of Ephesians 5:21 for mutual and reciprocal submission, and in relation to such general principles as the words of Jesus from Mark 10:42-45 and of Paul from Galatians 3:28-29, Ephesians 5:22, 25, 28, and 33 do present general principles. But an adequate understanding calls for consideration of some context-bound historical and cultural factors.

Richard Foster points out that the “disciplinary of submission has been terribly misconstrued and abused from failure to see [the] wider context,”10 a context which includes “Jesus’ example and call to follow the way of the cross in all human relationships.” Citing John Howard Yoder, Foster calls this “revolutionary subordination” as taught by Jesus. He notes that Paul’s demands really require much more of the first-century husband, father, and slavemaster, than of the wife, child, and slave, who would not have to change any aspect of their behavior in order to be in compliance. “The revolutionary thing about this teaching is that these people [wives, children, slaves], to whom first-century culture afforded no choice at all are addressed as free moral agents” (p. 103). Foster also notes the contrast between such moral teaching in the New Testament and that of the Stoics, who “addressed only the person on the top side of the social order, encouraging him to do a good job in the super-ordinate position he already saw as his place.” He notes further that the New Testament never calls for submission because that was the way the gods had created things, which is the constant rationale used in other first-century writings. “The only compelling reason is the example of Jesus” (p. 102). All, husbands and wives, parents and children alike, are called to “in humility regard others as better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). Thus Ephesians 5:22 must be understood within its immediate and larger context. In the broader sense, the context includes the historical, religious, and social, as well as literary, setting. But it is important to begin with the immediate literary context. Another major consideration is the need to exercise spiritual discernment—judgment guided by the Holy Spirit, if you will, and by the informed consensus of mature Christian elders and believers—in distinguishing scriptural statements of fundamental principle from statements that have been adapted to special culturally determined
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circumstances, or to purposes and conditions of the moment. The use of such texts as Ephesians 5:22 to “justify” the domination of women by men, even the abuse of women and children, apparently emerging as a terrible but widespread problem of modern life, is clearly incompatible with the teaching of scripture about the fundamental importance of the principle of love.11

The Literary Context of Ephesians 5:22

It is a remarkable fact, little noted, I believe, that the Greek word for “submit” or “be subject” (hypotasesthai) is not found in Ephesians 5:22. The translations “be subject” (NRSV) or “submit yourselves” (AV) render what is implicit, continuing the thought of verse 21, where the words “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” are explicit and represent the Greek wording. The admonition is to be subject to one another, which implies mutuality, reciprocity, and equality. The translation, “be subject,” in verse 22 is, of course, helpful in English, and is made explicit in verse 24 where the Greek word hypotasesthai (“be subject”) is used. But even in verse 24 the word is used in reference to Christ, “just as the Church is subject to Christ,” and again only inferred in the second clause in reference to the wife. The point is that the context sets up a hierarchy of ideas that may be outlined as follows:12

1. Be subject to one another ( Eph. 5:21)
   a. Wives to husbands (5:22)
   b. Husbands love your wives (5:25)
2. [Children and Parents]
   a. Children obey your parents (6:1)
   b. Fathers, do not provoke…but bring them up…. (6:4)

A similar statement on wives and husbands from 1 Peter illustrates, for example, how an injunction may be based not upon a fundamental principle, but rather upon a strategic purpose:

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

The stated reason for the wife to accept the authority of the husband in this passage is the missionary purpose of converting the pagan
husband to Christian faith. Accepting the husband’s authority is not presented as good in and of itself, but rather as a means to the conversion of the husband (which would provide a basis for the equality suggested by Gal. 3:28 and Eph. 5:21). Within the larger context of 1 Peter, the passage quoted above is one of a series of injunctions introduced by the statement, “For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right” (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Here, too, the stated reason does not point to a timeless principle valid in and of itself, but rather to a strategic purpose. The Christians are told to accept the authority of the Roman government because “it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish” (v. 15). In other words, they are to counter mounting criticisms of the Christian way of life by their submission to the Roman authorities.

**Being Conformed to the Image of Christ**

When husbands and wives come to God together through Christ, who “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7), there is no place for the sort of domination practiced by the Gentiles,

> You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mk. 10:42-44).

**Conclusion**

In relationship with other persons, as in other matters, the sincere Christian will seek to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed” (Rom. 12:2), and so to “be conformed to the image of [Christ]” (Rom. 8:29). If we really come to the Bible earnestly seeking to find God, we shall not be disappointed. And we shall want to be like him, to have that image of the divine that has been marred by sin and self-centeredness restored within us by God’s redeeming grace.

**Notes**

1. The Online Bible is available from Online Bible Ministries, c/o Larry Pierce, R. R. 2, West Montrose, Ont., Canada N0B 2V0. It is copyrighted by the Brethren assembly, “Woodside
Bible Fellowship.” The manual, an included computer file, says the following (p. 1): 1. You may use the Online Bible for any purpose you wish, as long as you use it for the glory of God. 2. You may not sell the Online Bible, but may distribute it freely to anyone you wish. You do not need our permission to distribute it—just do so. All commercial and retail rights reserved by the author. Those distributing the Online Bible may request a charge not exceeding $5 a disk, to cover costs. There are further stipulations, but it is clear that free distribution is intended as a form of Christian service.


5. There are judicious treatments of various biblical “criticisms” in I. Howard Marshall, ed., New Testament Interpretation (see note 2, above). For example, chapter 7, by I. Howard Marshall, is on “Historical Criticism” (pp. 126-138); chapter 9, by Stephen H. Travis, is on “Form Criticism” (pp. 153-164); and chapter 11, by Stephen S. Smalley, is on “Redaction Criticism” (pp. 181-195). Similar information is usually presented in standard introductions to the New Testament (or the Old Testament), for example, Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, rev. ed. (4th British ed.); Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990, which presents a very conservative and traditional point of view, and Werner Georg, Kuemmel, Introduction to the New Testament, rev. ed., trans., Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), which presents a more critical perspective. The volume edited by Marshall is unusual in including material such as chapter 4, by Anthony C. Thielson, on “Semantics and New Testament Interpretation” (pp. 75-104), which discusses the nature of meanings and certain linguistic perspectives on New Testament interpretation, and chapter 6, by John W. Drane, on “The Religious Background” (pp. 117-125).

6. Bruce M. Metzger notes that,

By way of conclusion, and in comparison with the dozens of gospels, acts, letters, and apocalypses that have recently come to the Church’s attention in the Nag Hammadi library, one can say with even greater assurance than before that no books or collection of books from the ancient Church may be compared with the New Testament in importance for Christian history or doctrine. The knowledge that our New Testament contains the best sources for the history of Jesus is the most valuable knowledge that can be obtained from study of the early history of the canon. In fact, whatever judgement we may form of the Christianity of the earliest times, it is certain that those who discerned the limits of the canon had a clear and balanced perception of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Metzger, loc. cit.)


7. Robert A. Traina’s Methodical Bible Study (Wilmore, Ky: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1952) proposes a fairly simple general outline of the process of “methodical bible study”: Observa-
tion (chap. 1), Interpretation (chap. 2), Evaluation and Application (chap. 3), and Correlation (chap. 4), but chapter 1 lists about fifty different kinds of phenomena to observe, including terms, kinds of terms, numerous kinds of relations between terms (i.e. structure), and general literary forms. A somewhat simpler (i.e. less forbidding) approach to “inductive Bible study” is offered by Oletta Wald, The Joy of Discovery in Bible Study (rev. ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975) and the companion volume, The Joy of Teaching Discovery Bible Study (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976). David L. Thompson’s Bible Study That Works (Wilmington, Ky: Francis Asbury Press, 1982) is comparable.

8. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Moisés Silva, An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics; the Search for Meaning (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), pp. 201, 287. The present writer had access to uncorrected page proofs. The book is thorough and helpful, with a conservative standpoint, but perspectives on modern critical approaches to scripture and issues of meaning raised by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. A chapter (chap. 14) entitled “The Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics” (by Silva), indicates something of the book’s perspective: “an appreciation for the Calvinist or Augustinian (indeed Pauline!) doctrine of divine sovereignty and election affects one’s understanding of biblical interpretation as such” (p. 268). The “chair” passages listed by Kaiser are:

- Genesis 1-2: The creation
- Isaiah 40: The incomparability of God
- Isaiah 53: The nature of the Atonement
- 1 Corinthians 15: The Resurrection
- 2 Corinthians 5: The nature of the intermediate state
- Philippians 2: The nature of the Incarnation.

“These passages…can well function as boundary setters for interpreters as they seek guidance about the correct interpretation of texts…textually or topically parallel.” The theme of vicarious suffering from Isaiah, chapter 53, is, of course, most significant, as are other themes listed. It is odd, however, that such a list would contain nothing from the four Gospels.


11. Jesus cited Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18 (cf. v. 34), love of God and of neighbor, as the “first” and “second” commandments (Mk. 12:28-31). Paul said that “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8).

12. The words “be subject to one another” in 5:21, under which the following injunctions to various household members are subordinated, are themselves subordinated to the previous paragraph. The imperative verb of 5:15, “Be careful then how you live,” continues with a participle in v. 16, “making the most of the time….” New imperatives in v. 17-18, “So do not be foolish, but understand…Do not get drunk…but be filled with the Spirit,” are continued with a series of participles extending through v. 21 and the completion in v. 22, “speaking to yourselves in psalms…singing and making melody…giving thanks…being subject to one another in the fear of Christ, wives to husbands…[and by implication, husbands to wives].”