

A Reformation Day Disputation

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-10-31

Why we need to remember “the old paths” of Reformation Day

It was popular in some circles to preach a disputation on Reformation Day. A disputation was basically a topical sermon that dealt with red-hot controversies of the day and that called people back to what Jeremiah 6 calls the old paths. So we are going to be engaging in a Reformation disputation today - focusing on hermeneutics, but I will start by summarizing all kinds of other areas where the modern church has abandoned the Reformation. And as Protestants we need to protest this downward drift.

Before he passed away, R.C. Sproul Senior said that the Protestant church of today is in as much need of Reformation as the church of Luther's day was. I don't think that is an exaggeration. We have seen in past Reformation Day sermons that each of the five solas of the Reformation have been hugely eroded in the evangelical church - Sola Scriptura (which means Scripture alone is the ultimate authority for any area of life - not science, not Dr. Fauci, not the woke movement), Sola Fide (which means Justification by faith alone - not faith plus something else), Sola Gratia (which means salvation by grace alone - not us building the bridge part way), Solus Christus (which means salvation by Christ alone - and Christ being the only Mediator - not Mary and the saints or the church), and Sole Deo Gloria (which means to God's glory alone - not building our own little private kingdoms). I think I have dealt with those five solas adequately in previous sermons, so I won't summarize them today.

But many other things that were at the heart of the Reformation have also been forgotten or lost. For example, we have lost our passion for the small c “catholic” church. We recite it in the Apostles Creed, but the modern church either doesn't understand what it means or doesn't believe in it. And many Evangelicals won't recite that part of the Apostles Creed. They think that is affirming the)*Roman* Catholic Church, but in reality it is affirming the exact opposite. Many evangelicals don't realize that Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy have long ago abandoned the true catholic faith and it was Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers who were seeking to bring the church back to this catholic or historic faith. Here's the point at issue - the church did not die for 1000 years only to be resurrected at the Reformation - as many evangelicals seem to think. No. Jesus promised, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” The gates of hell did not prevail against the church for 1000 years.

Sadly, many Evangelicals have no realization that God has indeed preserved the truth within the church in every age. This speaks to the importance of Historical Theology. Yes there is growth in doctrine; yes there is development. Ephesians 4 anticipates a time when there will be a mature church that is no longer tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. But the cardinal doctrines have always been there and have never been completely lost. 1 Timothy 3:15 calls the church, “the pillar and ground of the truth,” and God *has* preserved His truth inside the church despite constant Satanic attacks against it. But this lack of

appreciation for the true catholic faith has made evangelicals come up with all kinds of novel and ridiculous ideas thinking that new is better. And it was for that reason that I preached the sermon some years ago, "Why I am a Catholic and why the Roman Church is Not." The Reformers refused to call the Romanists "Catholics." They called Rome the whore, Babylon, a synagogue of Satan, the Papacy, and Romanism - anything but a true church. It is a demonic cult to the core and does not even remotely resemble the church of the first 12 centuries. Many Reformers proved beyond any shadow of a doubt that the church of the first twelve centuries was a thorough-going Protestant Church - with errors, yes, but still upholding the cardinal doctrines that Rome had started to oppose.

By the way, this is why Reformation Day is not popular anymore - people are too nice to Protest against error anymore. But Jude 3 *commands* us to fight earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. He has never rescinded that command to contend, fight, or protest. Reformation Day is a call to be a Protest-ant.

But there are many other ways in which evangelicals have abandoned the Reformation. I can't get into it in detail today, but they have abandoned the Reformation on how to defend the canon of Scripture (in other words, which books belong in the Bible) - and thus the embarrassing losses they have repeatedly sustained in debates with Rome. I have listened to dozens of debates between top Evangelical leaders and Romanist apologists on this issue of Sola Scriptura and the sufficiency of Scripture, and the Romanists win simply because the Evangelicals have inconsistently adopted the Romanist strategy of making the church the determiner of the canon, which means they don't believe in the sufficiency of the Scripture for the canon - our most fundamental doctrine. These Protestants argue like Romanists in how the Canon was developed. It's for that reason that I wrote this 500 page book on a defense of the 66 books of the Bible without abandoning the Reformation principle of Sola Scriptura. It can be done, and it is the only way of defending the faith against Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy. This was the biblicist position of the Reformers.

Well, let's move on to another point of disputation. Evangelicals have also abandoned the Reformation teaching on textual criticism. What's textual criticism? Well, since all Bibles were hand-copied for the first 1500 years, it was easy for mistakes to be copied into the text *if the scribes were not careful*. I believe the official scribes of the church were ultra careful when copying the true church copies of the Bible (what I call the ecclesiastical text). And that is why it is so unified; it is not a conspiracy. God preserved it. Even the critics of the Majority Text agree that it is a remarkably coherent and unified and grammatically correct form of the New Testament. Every letter has been preserved. That was the Reformation view. But in the last couple hundred years a new view has emerged that adopts Egyptian manuscripts recently discovered and especially two manuscripts that they call the "oldest and the best." Here's the thing, those two supposedly oldest and best manuscripts (Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) disagree with each other more than 3000 times in the Gospels alone and are full of grammatical errors. The reason they survived is that they weren't trusted and used by the church. They weren't worn out by use. There were too many errors. In contrast to those thousands of disagreements between the two main Egyptian texts, I can show you actual manuscripts from all around the Roman world that are letter for letter identical in entire books of the New Testament - contrary to the slander of some who claim that no two manuscripts of the Majority Text agree. They do agree. The

same cannot be said for the text that modern versions are built on. There is no *chapter* of the critical New Testaments that you can find even one Greek manuscript that is identical to that chapter. It is a purely theoretical text. This means that 4% of the New Testament is up for grabs in the opinion of these modern textual critics. This deviation from the Reformation is not a minor issue.

Here's the key point. Rather than looking presuppositionally to what *God* says He would do in the preservation of His word (and He says a lot about that subject), most evangelicals have looked to liberal presuppositions (and yes they are liberal, not biblical), and they blindly trust a committee of five liberals to decide what the wording of each book of the New Testament is. It's liberals who put the United Bible Society Greek Text and the Nestle Aland Greek text together - the text that most modern versions are built upon. This is a scandalous deviation from every Reformation creed out there. I'll just read from one - the Helvetic Consensus Formula. It says,

God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have His word, which is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, *but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man.* Therefore the Church justly ascribes it to *His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a "sure word of prophecy" and "Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass" (Matt. 5:18)*¹

That's the position of the Reformation. And the London Confession, Philadelphia Confession, Savoy Declaration, Westminster Confession, and others all upheld the Majority Text. And yes, I know, this is not popular, but it is the truth. Unless you embrace the principle that God has preserved every jot and tittle of His Word in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the Majority Text of the Greek, you have abandoned the Reformation creeds. But more importantly, you don't have a text that conforms to the eleven solidly Biblical presuppositions that I have outlined in this book, *Has God Indeed Said?* And you can pick up a free copy after the service.

This issue of textual criticism was the one weak area in Greg Bahnsen's apologetic when he argued with the Romanists. He did a fairly good job of defending the canon, but could not consistently defend the text of the canon because he used the critical text. Bahnsen is a hero of mine and I love him, but this was a weak chink in his armor that you need to be aware of. The question that the Romanists rightly asked is, "Who determines the text (the actual wording of certain passages)?" That's a great question. Rome says that the Church does. Of course Roman scholars disagree on what the Church has determined since there are tens of thousands of variants in their Latin Bible manuscripts. Modern non-reformational evangelicals say it is this committee of liberal experts who determine it. We say that it is God alone who determines it, and He does so by giving principles in the Bible related to its transmission that will enable anyone who believes those Bible verses to recognize the text. We don't determine the text. We simply recognize the text based on what God has said. We

¹ John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Richmond: John Knox Pres, revised edition, 1973), pp. 309, 310.

cannot deviate from Sola Scriptura on even textual criticism. Am I being disputatious? Yes. This is Reformation Day, and this *is* Reformation doctrine.

Another rallying cry of the Reformation was the repeated Biblical phrase that God is “Lord of all the earth.” That’s the essence of Calvinism - that God is Lord over everything, including your salvation, and including your will. Luke applied that phrase to Jesus in Acts 10:36 and declared that Jesus is Lord of all. But Pietism, Principled Pluralism, and the Radical Two Kingdom theory, and other groups have abandoned the Reformation’s insistence on the Lordship of Jesus over the state, over science, and over everything. Meredith Kline said that he wrote his theory of origins to remove this Lordship from science. Am I misrepresenting him? No. You can read the essay for your self. In the first paragraph of his upper register theory essay he said that he wrote this so that “the scientist is left free of biblical constraints in hypothesizing about cosmic origins.”² If the scientist is left free of Biblical constraints he is left free of the Lordship of Christ in his sphere.

In contrast, Abraham Kuyper agreed with the Reformation and rightly said, “There is not a single square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord of all, does not cry out, ‘Mine!’” It’s not a theoretical Lordship. There is no Lordship without authoritative guidance, and there is no kingdom without authoritative guidance, and Jesus has an authoritative guide that applies to all of life - the Bible. I have written out the axioms of even math from the Bible. And I have done so because the woke movement is denying that math axioms can be known. If you read Oregon’s most recent math curriculum guidelines, they have inserted Critical Race Theory throughout that curriculum- even saying you are a racist if you insist that $2 + 2$ always has to equal 4. Well, we know it always has to equal 4 because all the axioms of math are used by God in the Bible. I have also written out the axioms of probability, statistics, science, logic, hermeneutics, and other areas. Lord willing, we will have these all up on the Biblical Blueprints website within two or three years. Those axioms enable all of life to stand on the authority of God’s Word and in a concrete way to acknowledge Christ’s Lordship. Does your math stand under the Lordship of Christ? It should.

But the primary area for today’s disputation will be on the subject of Reformation hermeneutics. Hermeneutics simply means the rules for the proper interpretation of the Bible. And the question between the Reformation and everyone else is similar to the questions for every other controversy we have looked at: “Does God *alone* decide those rules for interpretation by revealing the rules in the Bible (which is the Reformation view) or does something outside the Bible decide those rules of interpreting the Bible (every other view of hermeneutics).” Because evangelicals have abandoned a Sola Scriptura approach to hermeneutics (in other words they don’t think it is academically respectable to derive our hermeneutics from the Bible itself - they scoff at that as circular reasoning, failing to realize that there can be no higher appeal than to God), they are all over the map on so many issues - including issues related to feminism, medical mandates, socialism, and in more recent years, the LGBTQ movement. In my library I have books by famous

² <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF3-96Kline.html>

evangelicals that have adopted many divergent rules of hermeneutics from outside the Bible and have imposed them upon the Bible. I'll just list a few:

Dispensationalism is a foreign hermeneutic that you won't find Jesus or the apostles *ever* using. It has artificial rules of interpretation that actually *contradict* Jesus and the apostles. I was once a Dispensationalist (and I love Dispensationalists - they are brothers in Christ), but when I saw Jesus and the apostles interpreting the Old Testament in an entirely different way than what Dispensationalism mandated, I fell on my knees and confessed my arrogance to God. I wept. I had not intentionally abandoned the Lordship of Jesus in my hermeneutics, but I had unintentionally done so. Well, that started me studying how the prophets of the Bible interpreted the Bible. And I discovered that the Old Testament prophets interpret older prophets so many times that you can develop a comprehensive Biblical hermeneutics from the Old Testament alone. How often does such interpretation of earlier prophets happen by later prophets? A lot. I noticed that William Collen recently added to the church library Gary Edward Schnittjer's 1000 page book, *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament* - a book that returns us to the Reformation principle. Beale and Carson also wrote a massive book on how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. It's a real thing, not just a theory. But Dispensationalism violates this rule of Sola Scriptura by imposing foreign ideas that the Bible has to conform to.

So does so-called Evangelical Feminism, which is anything but evangelical in its hermeneutics. So does the Revoice Movement, which has gone soft on what the Bible says about sexuality and identity. So does the Apocalypticism of the Hyper Preterist movement, which uses ancient Jewish Gnostic hermeneutics as the glasses through which to read the Bible rather than using Biblical hermeneutics. Hyper-Preterism is absolutely wrong. So does Michael Heiser's ANE hermeneutic, which insists that you can't understand the Bible until you are immersed in Ancient Near Eastern literature and until you read the Bible through the lens of ancient Near Eastern Literature - the very literature that (ironically) *the Bible prophets told believers to avoid, ignore, and abandon*. Those Old Testament prophets didn't want them immersed in that literature. They wanted them immersed in the Bible. And yet Michael Heiser's hermeneutics have had a huge influence (a very negative influence) upon Reformed circles.

I have books by evangelicals that show the negative influence of the hermeneutical ideas of Liberation Theology (yes, that's a real thing in evangelical circles - applying Marxism to the Bible), Deconstructionism (that is becoming a real thing - especially with the Woke movement), Source Criticism, the Talmudic hermeneutics of the Jewish Messianic movement, and Black Evangelical Theology. When you look at the opposing hermeneutics of even more orthodox people like Meredith Kline on the one side and James Jordan on the other, you realize that both have been imposing ideas on the Bible rather than deriving them from the Bible. This is why Bahnsen called both of those hermeneutics very dangerous. We must return to the Reformation, which is another way of saying we must return to the Bible.

Why all of us must improve our hermeneutics (Deut. 6:6-9)

Now, I realize that your head may be swimming by this time and you may be thinking, this is waaaaayyy beyond me. I'll leave it up to my pastor to figure these things out! No! You can't say that. You too are responsible for understanding the Bible and applying it. When you give your sons and daughters guidance on whether their clothing is modest or not, if you are applying the Bible at all (which you should be), you are engaging in some kind of hermeneutic - automatically. Deuteronomy 6 commands fathers,

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

That passage expects fathers to understand and apply the Bible to every area of life. This means that is possible to do so. This means that you don't have to have a PhD and some sophisticated system to be able to understand and apply the Bible. Deuteronomy says that any father can do it. Yay! That passage implies that hermeneutics is achievable. Which is super encouraging, because the last 100 years have seen a bewildering array of competing views on very difficult forms of hermeneutics. Each of these systems has rejected the Biblical hermeneutics as being too simplistic and they have substituted very sophisticated systems of hermeneutics that take years of study to master. (Or as I prefer to say it, it takes years of academic study to become so stupid that you actually think that Genesis 1 doesn't really mean what it seems to say - that God created the universe in six days. Our children can understand Genesis 1 better than those hyper-trained (or brainwashed) PhDs. Don't read it now, but on the back of your outlines I have a humorous satire on hermeneutics using all of these various hermeneutical systems that are out there to interpret what a Stop Sign says.)

A brief summary of the “old paths” of Reformation Hermeneutics

In any case, the Reformers preferred to be Biblical rather than to be wise in the eyes of the world. Reformation Hermeneutics was simply an attempt to return to the hermeneutics used by the Biblical authors themselves. It is a sola Scriptura hermeneutics. Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets of the Old Testament showed us the way. And in one sermon I can't cover all the rules of hermeneutics that the Bible supplies, but let me give you seven of the most important ones so that you can see that this really is a doable thing. It's really not that hard.

Rule one - treat every word of the Bible as true (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17; Ps. 119:43; 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18)

OK, rule number one from the Bible - treat every word of the Bible as true. That's pretty easy, right? Jesus said to the Father, “Your Word is truth.” Psalm 119:160 says, “the entirety of Your Word is truth.” This is quite different than saying, “Your word is true.” Wayne

Grudem explains the difference. Let me read from him at length because this is super super important. He says,

The difference [between your word is truth and your word is true] is significant, for this statement encourages us to think of the Bible not simply as being “true” in the sense that it conforms to some higher standard of truth, but rather to think of the Bible as itself the final standard of truth. The Bible is God’s Word, and God’s Word is the ultimate definition of what is true and what is not true: God’s Word is itself truth. Thus, we are to think of the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth, the reference point by which every other claim to truthfulness is to be measured. Those assertions that conform with Scripture are “true” while those that do not conform with Scripture are not true.

What then is truth? Truth is what God says, and we have what God says ...in the Bible.

This doctrine of the absolute truthfulness of Scripture stands in clear contrast to a common viewpoint in modern society that is often called pluralism. Pluralism is the view that every person has a perspective on truth that is just as valid as everyone else’s perspective—therefore, we should not say that anyone else’s religion or ethical standard is wrong. According to pluralism, we cannot know any absolute truth; we can only have our own views and perspectives...

Pluralism is one aspect of an entire contemporary view of the world called postmodernism. Postmodernism would not simply hold that we can never find absolute truth; it would say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. All attempts to claim truth for one idea or another are just the result of our own background, culture, biases, and personal agendas (especially our desire for power). Such a view of the world is of course directly opposed to a biblical view, which sees the Bible as truth that has been given to us from God.³

You can see this exact same kind of postmodernism when people interpret novels. My major in College was English literature, and it frustrated me to see that every classic novel out there has a Marxist interpretation, as well as a Freudian, Feminist, LGBTQ, and a few other interpretations of it. And it doesn’t matter that the author (if he or she was a contemporary author) explicitly rejected the meaning those critics had imposed upon the novel (and says, “No, that’s not what I meant when I wrote the novel” - it doesn’t matter), those critics believe their interpretation is just as valid as the novelists. But they are imposing a certain viewpoint on the novel, not deriving one from the novel.

Well, the same thing happens in the interpretation of the bible. People say, “This is what it means to me.” Well, I could care less what it means to you. I want to know what it means to God. It is, after all, God who is speaking - not you.

Anyway, if you embrace this first rule, then you can instantly spot and reject many false interpretations in the church today. If a person says (like one famous radio teacher did) that Deuteronomy 21:18-21 is outdated and no one believes that juvenile delinquents should be put to death, and that is a ridiculous law, we can say, “No. You have a bad hermeneutic. Jesus upheld not only that law but even the law against a child cursing his parent.” If a person says that Jesus’s statement about the creation of Adam and Eve was just adopting a mythology of the ancient world in order to communicate a point (as I heard one pastor say) you know he has a bad hermeneutic because every one of Christ’s words is true

³ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1999), 41.

and every word of Genesis 1 is true. I'll give you another example: one pastor here in Omaha told me, "When Paul said that women can't teach or have authority over a man in 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul's chauvinism was keeping him from accurately communicating what God intended. But he got it right in Galatians when he said that in Christ there is neither male nor female." Well, rule number one that was given to us by Jesus Himself says that this pastor's feminist hermeneutics is wrong. A lot of errors that throw out the Old Testament would be recognized as errors if this rule was in place. Every word of the Bible is true. This was the Reformation doctrine. For example, Martin Luther said, "I have learned to ascribe honor only to those books that are called canonical, such that I strongly believe that none of their authors has erred."⁴ Amen.

Rule two - Christ wants us to "live by... every word" of the Bible (Matt. 4:4; cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-17), meaning that every word is applicable and practical

Rule two is that Christ wants us to *live* by every word of the Bible. It's not just true but irrelevant. He wants us to live by every word. He wants it applied with wisdom. That means that the whole bible is applicable and practical; it's livable. That rule is given in Matthew 4:4, which states, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." That rule was not just for Israel, but for man; for mankind. So here is the question that immediately comes to people's minds: "How do we live by the ceremonial law when we are not morally bound by it?" Easy. The ceremonial law is chalk full of the foundations for mathematics and geometry. You need mathematics and geometry to live in this world. It is also full of rich teachings on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And in my sermon on Matthew 4:4 I showed how the Bible gives us the axioms for over 60 disciplines of life. As Peter told us, it gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness. It is practical. It is applicable. It is livable. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 tells us that every word of the Old Testament Scriptures that Timothy grew up with are sufficient to thoroughly equip the man of God for every good work. They give us doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, and everything we need to be able to serve God and take dominion. This ought to make you completely reject any hermeneutic that says the Old Testament is the canon for Israel and not intended for the church. Easy rule, right? This rule was highlighted by Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, and all the Reformers.

Rule three - approach the Bible with humility (Prov. 11:2; John 7:17)

The third rule restored by the Reformers is that we must approach the text with humility rather than pride. The text is the Lord of us rather than vice versa. I think this is the broken rule that gets so many PhDs into trouble. But it's not just PhDs who fail to approach the text

⁴ Martin Luther, *Contra malignum Iohannis Eccii iudicium* (Against the Malignant Indictment of John Eck, 1519), WA 2. translation from the Latin by Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Baylor University Press. Kindle Edition), p. 626.

with humility. We sometimes try to weasel out of conviction that the Word brings to us with our own rationalizations. Too many people have a system that they are defending when they read the Bible, and they are constantly trying to explain away “problem texts” that don’t fit their system. Well, they don’t fit their system because their system is wrong. That is not approaching the text with a humility and submission that says, “Speak Lord, for your servant hears.” Proverbs 11:2 says, “with the humble is wisdom.” I don’t trust the writings of proud, arrogant theologians. God does not honor the proud with wisdom from His Word. In fact, James says that God resists the proud but gives more grace to the humble. So if we want the Holy Spirit’s illumination, we must be prepared to change our minds, even if that is embarrassing. And we must be prepared to obey the Bible as soon as we understand it, even if that would be tough. In John 7:17 Jesus said, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” Jesus indicates that God will not open the Bible up to those who really don’t want to obey it. That’s not a position of humility.

And I am encouraged by this rule because it means that *any* father can approach the text of Scripture humbly. And that father will be miles ahead of a prideful PhD expert who is trying to force the Scripture to fit into his grid. John Calvin’s comments on the Psalms are to the point. He says, “The Holy Spirit [was] proposing instruction meant to be common to the simplest and most uneducated persons... [He used] popular language... the Holy Spirit would rather speak childishly than unintelligibly to the humble...”⁵

Now, I will grant you that it is impossible to approach the Bible without some preconceptions and some wrong ideas. But those can easily be corrected *if we have humility*. Graham Stanton worded it this way:

Once exegesis is seen as an on-going dialogue between the interpreter and the text, the interpreter’s starting point becomes less important than his willingness and readiness to run the risk that the pre-understanding with which he comes to the text may well be refined or completely renewed: *he must be prepared to be interpreted by the text. That is the necessary presupposition with which he must attempt to operate.*

*The exegete cannot allow either his own personal bias or prejudice or his pre-understanding to dominate the text. They cannot be avoided completely, but they must be no more than a door through which the text is approached. The text is prior: the interpreter stands before it humbly and prays that through the scholarly methods and the questions with which he comes to the text, God’s Word will be heard afresh. This is the exciting task to which the interpreter is called. But it is also a dangerous task: God’s Word sweeps away my comfortably secure presuppositions; it is a Word of judgment as well as of grace.*⁶

⁵ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, vol. 5* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 184–185.

⁶ Graham Stanton, “Presuppositions and New Testament Criticism,” in I. Howard Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 69-70, emphasis mine.

This is such an important rule of interpretation - approach the text with submission and humility.

Rule four - the Bible must be interpreted to be understood (Deut. 6:20; 2 Chron. 30:22; Neh. 8:8; Luke 24:25,27,32,45; Acts 8:30-35; 17:2-3; 28:23; etc.)

The next rule that the Reformers gave was that hermeneutics involves more than simply reading the text. It involves interpretation, which takes at least some training in Scripture. Peter complained about individuals who were unstable and untaught in hermeneutics twisting the Scriptures written by Paul. He said,

as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

The Pharisees were one of those who refused to get their hermeneutics from Scripture and who therefore twisted the Scriptures. So Jesus reinterpreted the Old Testament passages very simply and straightforwardly and in doing so contradicted their oral teachings. He was teaching them how to interpret the Old Testament properly. The Sermon on the Mount is a case in point. Over and over He opposed what they orally taught and properly interpreted those Old Testament passages. He did the same for the apostles. Jesus said in Luke 24,

Luke 24:25 ... "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Because of their bad preconceptions, Jesus had to interpret the Scripture properly for them. In Nehemiah 8 it says that the teachers didn't just read the Bible to the people. It says that they "gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). So you really do need to try to understand the principles of hermeneutics if you are to properly read it and apply it to yourself and to your family. The Protestant Reformation took hermeneutics away from the exclusive realm of the academic and restored Biblical hermeneutics to the church and to the family. Granted, those principles of interpretation did need to be studied and applied (like everything else good in the Christian life). But the Reformers wanted *every* person to understand at least the basics of hermeneutics. This book here is a super easy introduction to some of these principles. It is Louis Berkhof's book, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. I highly recommend it as a beginning guide to Reformation hermeneutics.

Rule five - don't take verses out of context (cf. Satan taking Ps 91:11 out of context of vv. 1-2,9,12-14 in Matt. 4:5-7)

The fifth rule that was hammered home by the Reformers was the Biblical rule of context.⁷ This rule states that the meaning of a phrase must be gathered from the context and cannot violate the meaning of the context. Jesus and the apostles were very good at correcting bad teaching by going to the context. For example, Jesus used this rule in opposing Satan's false interpretation of Psalm 91 when Satan was tempting Him in Matthew 4. Here's what Satan said,

"If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: "He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' "

Satan quoted the passage in Psalm 91 correctly, but he yanked it out of context. The context made clear that this promise of protection was only made to those who walked in God's will, and God had not told Jesus to throw Himself off the temple - only Satan did. In fact, the context contradicted Satan's applications in *several* ways. God had promised special protection for those who stayed closed to Him (vv. 1,9), submitted to His Lordship (vv. 1-2,4,9), trusted Him (v. 2), loved Him (v. 14a), called on His name (v. 14b), and who opposed Satan in spiritual warfare (v. 13). Ahhhh!!! Satan conveniently left that next verse out. Satan completely abstracted verse 12 from its context and encouraged Jesus to tempt God with a foolhardy act of jumping off the temple. Jesus also appealed to the *broader* context of the rest of Scripture by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 - a verse that summarized everything that I said from the immediate context of Psalm 91:11. He was using Scripture to interpret Scripture. So Jesus modeled how going to the context can help to correct error.

And just as a side note, you may not have realized that Satan interprets the Scripture. He does. He is very motivated to deceive believers through bad hermeneutics, and I believe that there are demons behind all those crazy types of hermeneutics that I mentioned earlier that keep people from interpreting the bible the way Jesus did. In 1 Timothy 4:1 Paul talks about doctrines of demons. Demons develop doctrine. Demons interpret the Scripture - wrongly. Demons are very interested in hermeneutics and they will do everything in their power to keep you from using a radically Biblical hermeneutics.

I'll use an example of Mormons who take a phrase out of context in 1 Corinthians 8:5 to teach polytheism. That phrase says, "there are many gods and many lords." There you go (they say) - proof positive that the Mormons are right and that there are many gods and all of us can become gods - well, until you read the context of the whole verse, which makes it

⁷ For example, Lawson summarizes Calvin's perspective on this. He says, "Calvin can neither uproot a text from its immediate literary context nor neglect the environment in which the document was originally produced. The exegete may not neglect the audience to whom the writer was originally addressed." Steven J. Lawson, "The Expository Pulpit of John Calvin," in *John Calvin: For a New Reformation*, ed. Derek W. H. Thomas and John W. Tweeddale (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 181.

clear that “so-called gods” are not truly what they claim to be because Paul says right in context (and let me quote verses 4-7),

there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), *yet for us there is one God*, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. (vv. 4-7).

At the time of the Reformation, the Romanists were notorious for taking things out of context in their debates. They even quoted church fathers out of context, and the Reformers (who had memorized vast portions of Scripture and vast portions of the church fathers) were able to embarrass the Papists by quoting from memory the whole context of both the church fathers and the Scripture in question so that even the onlookers who weren't educated could see the truth clearly. Context is so important.

Rule six - The Bible must be interpreted literally (i.e., as 'literature' read according to its normal grammatical sense and the genre in which it is written) (Matt. 4:4; 6:18; Gal. 3:16; etc.)

The sixth rule the Reformers found in the Bible is that the Bible must be interpreted literally, by which they meant that we must treat it as literature read according to the normal grammatical sense of language and according to the kind of genre in which it was written - whether poetry, law, history, or prophecy. For example, Luther told Erasmus in his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, “we must everywhere stick to the simple, pure, and natural sense of the words that accords with the rules of grammar and the normal use of language as God has created it in man.”⁸ Where did the Reformers get this rule? From many passages in the Bible.

In Matthew 4:4 Jesus wasn't just telling you to get the general idea of a passage. If we are to live by every word, then every word of every sentence counts and we need to understand the relationship of those words to each other. We call that grammar. In Matthew 5:18 Jesus not only said that God would preserve every yod (the smallest Hebrew consonant) and every tittle (an even smaller mark), but He insisted that we need to obey every letter of the Bible. Such obedience to jots and tittles require some grammatical understanding. In Galatians 3:16 Paul bases a major doctrine upon determining whether an Old Testament noun was plural or singular - seeds or seed. I'm giving all these examples of grammar because you kids need to diligently study grammar. Jesus appealed to the present tense in a verse in the Old Testament to prove that souls continue to live after the body dies - something that the Sadducees did not believe.

These constant references to grammar means that the words, sentences, paragraphs, and other divisions should be understood in the normal grammatical sense in which they were used. Obviously the Bible has metaphors, similes, and other figurative language, but even

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 33: *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 162.

those are still interpreted literally in that the images picture a true objective reality, not just some idea that we insert into the text. The bible isn't a mystical code book that only the super-intelligent elite can understand because they have a decoding ring. Deuteronomy 6 says that God intended it to be able to be understood by every father.

Now, here's where it gets controversial. The Reformers said that people who allegorize are violating this rule and are inserting their own ideas into the text and making it impossible for the average person to do the same. They believed that the allegorists were twisting the Scripture to make it into a launching pad for their own creative ideas. That's really a kind of postmodern thinking before there was postmodernism. But the Reformers said that the Bible itself will identify all types and symbols. So the sixth rule laid down by Christ and the apostles is that the Bible must be interpreted literally according to its normal grammatical sense - not allegorically. Let me quote from Calvin:

... [the allegorists] have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the outer bark of the letter, there lurk deeper mysteries, which cannot be extracted but by beating out allegories. And this they had no difficulty in accomplishing; for speculations which appear to be ingenious have always been preferred, and always will be preferred, by the world to solid doctrine.⁹

And the other Reformers said things similar. I don't judge people who violate this rule out of ignorance. Luther said it took him a long time to break the bad habit of turning everything into an allegory. He said,

[I]t was very difficult for me to break away from my habitual zeal for allegory, and yet I was aware that allegories were empty speculations and the froth, as it were, of the Holy Scriptures. It is the historical sense alone which supplies the true and sound doctrine.

Rule seven - Every word of the Bible can only have one intended meaning in any one place and in any one relation (Dan. 8:5; Luke 8:9ff; Eph. 4:8-10; Heb. 7:2; Matt. 15:15; Deut. 6:20). This is true of even symbols and double entendre (1 Cor. 10:4; Dan. 8; etc.).

The seventh rule given by the Reformers was that every word of the Bible can only have one intended meaning in any one place and in any one relation. They gave many applications of that one meaning, but they insisted that the original meaning of a phrase was one. As Luther said, "one should not therefore say that Scripture or God's word has more than one meaning."¹⁰ The meaning of Scripture is "a sure, simple, and unequivocal

⁹ John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 135.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull, Third Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 55-56.

meaning upon which our faith may build without wavering.”¹¹ And all the Reformers said much the same.

And of course, this too they derived from the Bible. In Luke 8 when the disciples ask, “What does this parable mean?” Jesus does not give multiple meanings. He gives one. The interpretation of the Old Testament ceremonies in the book of Hebrews is straightforward and does not exhibit manifold meanings. And there are many other examples of this principle. The Westminster Confession of Faith worded it this way: the full sense of every biblical text “is not manifold, but one.” (WCF Lix) Or as the Puritan writer, John Owen, worded it, “If the Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all.” Harold Camping should have paid attention to that statement because he turned everything into more than one meaning. Owen said, “If the Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all.” It’s just a rubber nose that you can twist to mean anything.

What about symbols - like the rock in the wilderness? Do such symbols falsify this rule? Didn’t Paul say in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that the rock represented Jesus? Yes, but that is still one meaning and it is the Bible itself that identifies it as a type or symbol. All symbols have a singular symbolic purpose, not layers of meaning. Symbols are anchored in literal history, but they serve to point to redemptive history. Thus the literal rock Moses struck was intended by God to have one symbolic meaning, not manifold meanings. It pointed to Christ being struck by God so as to pour forth the gift of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, though the vision being interpreted in Daniel 8 was a rich symbol, the vision as a whole had one “meaning” according to verse 15 - it represents in pictorial form the future of two empires. And each word in that vision gives one (and only one) meaningful contribution to the overall picture. Thus, the text says that “the male goat is the kingdom of Greece” and should not be seen as representing multiple kingdoms (like some commentators do). OK, enough on that.

There are many other very cool hermeneutical rules in the Bible such as the rule of definition, the rule of original usage, the rule of historical background, the rule of Old Testament precedent (that the New is in the Old concealed), the rule of non-contradiction, etc. Every one of those rules has dozens of examples of Jesus, the apostles, or the prophets using the rule to interpret an earlier prophecy.

Once the Great Axioms Project of Biblical Blueprints goes public, all the axioms of hermeneutics will be up there as well. But in the meantime, I encourage you to buy this book by Berkhof. It’s at least an introduction. And it is a book that high-schoolers should be able to understand.

In any case, this morning I wanted to at least introduce you to the concept so that you can realize that biblical hermeneutics is not scary or too complicated. It does take some study, but it is accessible to everyone. And that was the point of the Reformation - to make the Bible understandable to even the common plow boy. When people look down on you for

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 39 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 83.

not embracing the latest fad in hermeneutics, don't be embarrassed at the simplicity of Reformational hermeneutics. Rejoice in it. And pray for a return of the church to the Reformation on this and many other areas of doctrine. May the Lord give us increasing confidence that the Bible *is* sufficient for everything we need in order to glorify God. Amen.