

D5 – the hermeneutic (Read It Forward!)

Read it Forward: Understanding the Nature of Progressive Revelation

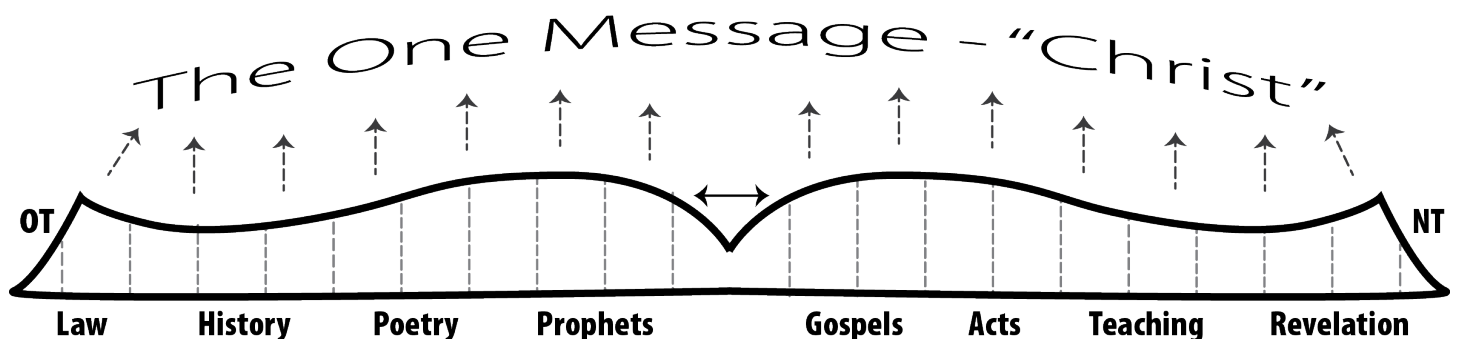
A reminder to not forget the basics:

The whole, the pieces, and proper interpretation:

The one Author of the one Book He wrote has one primary message to communicate in His Book. But the way that God assembled His Book was through two testaments, each comprised of many human authors writing many narrative, poetry, prophetic and teaching sections with countless paragraphs, exhortations and instructions. What is the relationship between the message of the whole and the two testaments? What is the relationship between the message of the whole and the specific meaning of the pieces (stories, paragraphs, poems, instructions, etc.)?

If the plethora of individual texts from the older testament through the newer testament helps us assemble the one message of the whole, then how much is each text weighted with that one message of the Bible? If the message of the Bible is summed up as/in “Christ,” how is He related to each text in the Bible? Must each individual text bear the full weight of the one message of the whole Bible (Christ)? Is Christ (the one message of Scripture) in every single text? Is this way to Christ in the Bible the one with the most integrity and that does proper justice to each individual text? Is there a better way to get the one message of the Bible that glorifies Christ?

The Bible



The many pieces of the 2 testaments

As you approach the Bible to rightly interpret it, you must strive to hold these two elements in proper relationship and tension with one another: 1.) The unified message of the whole Bible, and, 2.) The unique meaning of individual texts. How do we hold these two elements in proper relationship? The prevailing tendency of many interpreters of the Bible is to override the second element in favor of heavily accenting the first element. We “feel” safer when we hold to the continuity of Scripture (the one message), but “feel” more uncertain when distinctions between texts/testaments are accentuated. What should we strive for as we interpret the Bible:

1. Begin with the meaning of individual texts in order to move toward the message of the whole Bible. How can you understand the whole message of a book all at once??
2. Let the order or progression of revelation guide you: read/interpret texts in a forward fashion; be mindful of the progressive nature of revelation. God did not unfold everything at the beginning, but He did unfold His mind and being in successive steps.
3. Be mindful of where individual texts sit in that progression of revelation. OT or NT? Law? Prophets? History? Wisdom? Gospels? Acts? Epistles? Etc.
4. Properly isolate your individual text in such a way that allows you to hear most clearly its specific meaning more than the meaning of another passage or the message of the whole Bible. Trust the Author of the Bible who put the pieces together! Letting one piece speak for itself in its own setting will not do violence to the one message of the Bible the Author longs to communicate. Momentarily suspend the meanings of other texts and the message of the whole.
 - a. The passage that has the most authority concerning its meaning is the immediate passage you are interpreting.
 - b. Another passage does not have more authority over the passage you are currently interpreting (although it does have some complementary bearing).
 - c. Be very careful to not override the specific meaning of an OT text with the later message of the NT or meaning of a NT text. Would you override the meaning of a NT text with the prior message of the NT or meaning of an OT text (consider Hb 2:17)?
5. Do not overly isolate your individual text so that you never consider that a later testament or later texts have come. In the end, don't forget the NT! Don't forget the first coming of Christ! Don't forget the second coming of Christ nor the eternal state!
6. Always strive to summarize, develop, and refine the one message of the whole Bible. Read and reread the Bible! Work your way through key texts and themes (from OT to NT). The same could be said of your theological system or theological conclusions that we said of the one message of the whole Bible. Summarize, develop, and refine your theological system or conclusions based on your interpretation of individual texts.

Christ-centered continuity of the Testaments (reasons to see only one Book):

The following continuity and discontinuity sections primarily speak to how the Christian should see their relation to Mosaic Law, Christ and morality.

According to Jesus and Paul, an organic union exists between Moses' writings and Jesus' words, John 5:39-47; Acts 28:23.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is rooted in Moses' writings and Law according to Jesus and Paul, Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 13:26-41; 17:2-3; 26:22-23; Galatians 3:8.

Paul saw his teachings united alongside the OT for the church's benefit (Peter did, too), 2 Timothy 3:10-17; 2 Peter 3:14-16.

Peter also saw his own teachings united alongside the OT for the church's benefit, 2 Peter 3:1-2.

Christ-centered discontinuity of the Testaments (reasons to see 2 testaments):

Christ-centered, or Christ-exalting discontinuity is just as important a tool or servant that reveals the unity of the Bible as Christ-centered continuity is. We see in the following examples that discontinuity, or differences, actually can reveal unity: The unique differences between the role of a husband and the role of a wife in marriage serves to unify them. The unique differences between the roles of the members of the Godhead serve to show the unity of the Godhead. The same can be said of the unique, Christ-exalting differences between the two testaments – they serve to show the unity of the Bible. Don't fall into the trap that the only way the NT and OT can be unified is that they both have to say the exact same revelation the exact same way (don't flatten out the texts of the older and newer testaments). How does the NT exalt Christ by showing some distinctions between the OT and the NT?

Jesus clearly declared John the Baptist's ministry to be a distinguishing line worth noticing, Luke 16:16.

Jesus acted and taught with an authority that authorized Him to inaugurate a new era and law (or regulation), Luke 4:18-21, 42-44; 7:22; 8:1; 9:11; 11:20; 17:20-21; 18:20-25; 20:1-2.

Jesus called His hearers to be specifically regulated by Him, Matthew 11:28-30.

Jesus displayed authority over Sabbath regulation in Mosaic Law, Matthew 12:1-14.

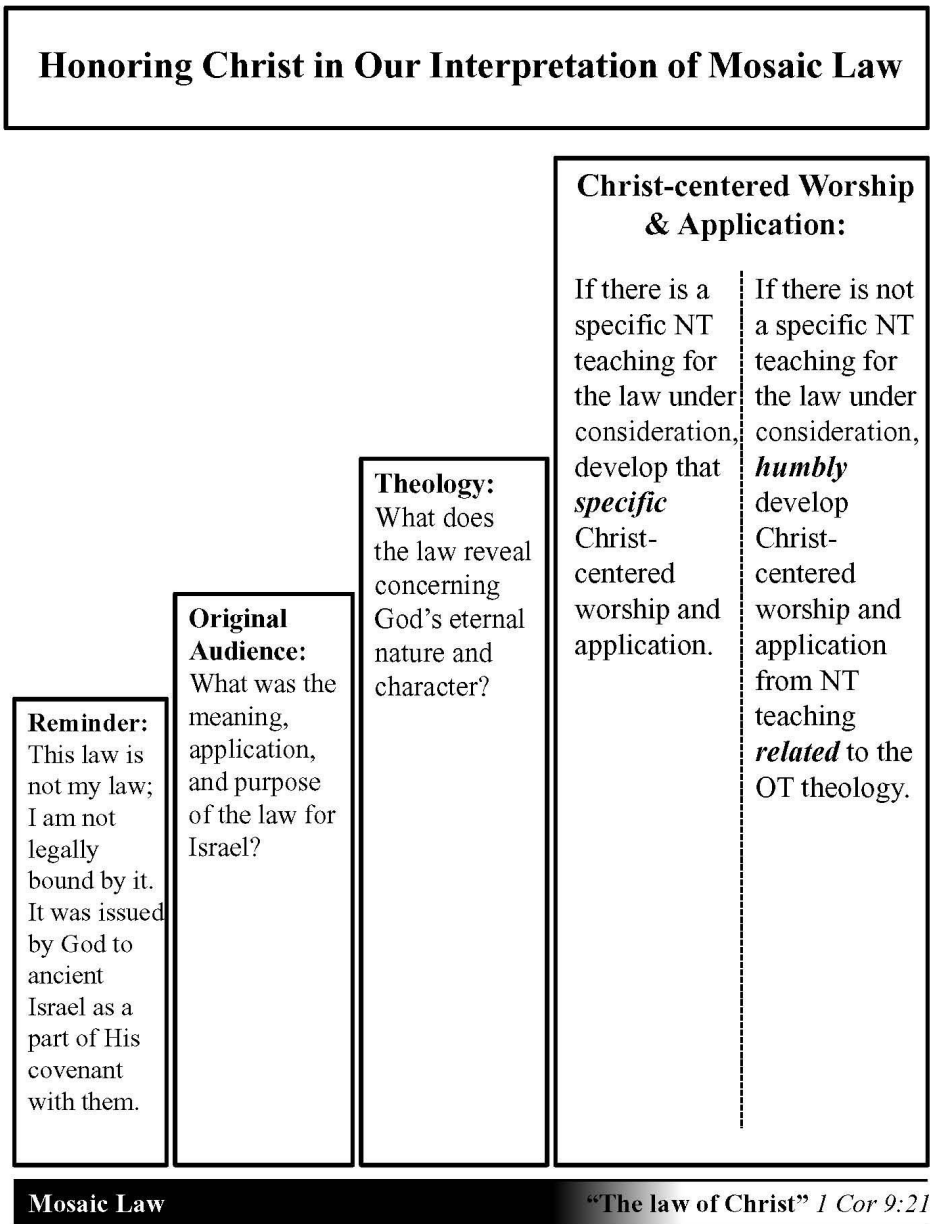
Jesus' authority reached beyond the regulation of Mosaic Law, Mark 7:14-23.

God eclipsed Moses and Elijah (the great representatives of the Law and the Prophets) with His own Son and His teaching, Matthew 17:1-18.

Jesus' authority in the Sermon on the Mount reaches beyond the authority of Mosaic Law, thus obligating all to obediently listen to His words, Matthew 5:1-48; 7:24-27.

Jesus authoritatively advanced His commands into the nations through His Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:1-3.

A Christo-centric interpretation of Mosaic Law that attempts to hold continuity and discontinuity in relationship:



- In the 'Theology' column, add other -ologies like, anthropology, hamartiology, etc.
- Something like this interpretation needs to take place with the wisdom, prophetic, and historical sections of the OT also.
- Do you see a striving for balance here between the pieces and the message of the whole? We must get to Christ as Christians (no matter where we are in the Bible). But each text must speak loudly for itself on its own terms with its original audience in mind. But the text must not speak more than what God intended it to say. That is where the difficulty lies. It is tempting to import into the OT what the NT later reveals.

Quotes to chew on:

The sense of the OT text must be determined within its historical and cultural setting, and that sense is determinative for the NT fulfillment. This means that the OT economy must not be forced upon the New. There must be the allowance for genuine progress in divine revelation and salvation history. On the other hand, it is equally as grievous an error to impose the NT on the Old, as though there was some need to “christianize” it. If both Testaments are granted their integrity, their message will harmonize, since there is the single divine mind behind both. Paul D. Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 127

[T]he unity of the two Testaments does not require the uniformity of the two Testaments. Unity does not preclude diversity. The two Testaments may be unified just as certainly through discontinuity as through continuity. Both continuity and discontinuity are a part of the unity of the biblical revelation. There is both continuity and discontinuity between Israel and the church; and, if I understand Scripture correctly, there will be both continuity and discontinuity in the future between the church and Israel. Ibid, 128

Though Old Testament theology has a close relationship to the New Testament the two have discrete witnesses of their own. Therefore Old Testament theology must state the Old Testament’s unique message before incorporating the New Testament perspective. The ultimate goal is still to produce biblical theology yet to unite the testaments at the proper moment. This procedure is sound on historical, canonical and exegetical grounds and will make scriptural unity plainer than starting from the opposite end of the canon. It will also help the Old Testament’s unique value for theology be clearer. House, *Old Testament Theology*, 54

That is how Scripture differs from an encyclopedia. When I use an encyclopedia, I do not need to read other articles to understand the one I am reading at the moment. One article has no connection to another; there are no overarching themes. In the Bible, however, every passage is dependent on the whole, and the whole Bible is held together by interdependent themes that run through every passage like rebar, the steel rods that reinforce concrete. . . These themes give me a sense of identity, purpose, and direction that will fundamentally alter the way I think, desire, speak, and act. . . The sad fact is that many of us are simply not biblical in the way we use the Bible! Being biblical does not mean merely quoting words from within its pages. Being truly biblical means that my counsel reflects what the entire Bible is about. The Bible is a narrative, a story of redemption, and its chief character is Jesus Christ. He is the main theme of the narrative, and he is revealed in every passage in the book. . . Lasting change begins when our identity, purpose, and sense of direction are defined by God’s story. Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 26-28

Biblical themes to progressively isolate one text at a time (for grasping the one message of Scripture):

- Promised seed/offspring (to Eve, to Abraham, to David). Why so many genealogies??
- Sacrifice
- An innocent substitute (and blood)
- Sacrificial lamb
- Priest (high)
- Tabernacle/tent/temple
- Sabbath rest (an example)
 - Genesis 2:1-3

- From the Fall to Mount Sinai (Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19; 3:15 and 5:28-29; 8:10, 12; Exodus 16:22-30)

- Mount Sinai – an explosion of Sabbath/rests!
- The second generation to Joshua (entering the Land), Deuteronomy 12:8-10; 25:19; Joshua 11:23; 14:15.
- King David, Psalm 95:6-11.
- Jesus' first coming and rest, Matthew 11:28-30; 12:6, 8.
- What the death of Christ accomplished, Colossians 2:16-17.
- A summary or conclusion thus far, Hebrews 3:11, 18-19; 4:1-11.
- Revelation 6:9-11; 14:13; 22:1-5 (esp. v. 3)

- King (Davidic)
- Kingdom of God
- Etc.

Summarizing the message of the whole Bible (an example):

The glory of God in the cross of Christ to bring about transformation of life by the Spirit. . .