Appendix 1 – Exegetical Problems

Letting the bible read us

We usually talk about reading the bible, but what we really need to do is to let the bible read us.[1] In other words, we are the subject in which the word of God is living and active, penetrating even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; judging the thoughts and attitudes of our heart[2]. If we are to truly allow this to happen we must develop an honest and fair approach to exegesis. This appendix touches on some of the more common errors that are made.

Exegesis or Eisegesis – reading out or reading in?

Exegesis is studying a text to discover the author's intended meaning; letting the text speak out to us, reading *out*. There is another way of studying a text known as *eisegesis*.[3] This is reading *into* Scripture a meaning that is not really there. It is difficult to avoid eisegesis completely because we are not always aware of our pre-conceived notions. When studying a whole passage we are on safer ground, but when we start with a subject and look for scriptures that pertain to it we are much more likely to come with our own preconceived ideas and look

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[1] This idea is discussed by R Webber in chapter 6 of his book, *Ancient-Future Worship*, Baker Books.

[2] Heb 4:12

[3] There is some variation in the way this word is used, including simply considering verses with a particular idea or topic in mind, but I follow the majority usage: reading *into* Scripture a meaning that is not really there.

for *proof texts*.[4] When Jesus said, "Seek and you will find" He did not mean that if we look hard enough, we will find scriptures to back up any and every point we wish to make in a sermon, yet so often that is how the scriptures are used. Perhaps a sermon title is given and the preacher finds the verses to support his arguments, or a question is raised and we quickly find the scriptures to back up our doctrinal position. When we do this, we are in danger of reading what we are looking for *into* texts that contain the words or thoughts we are interested in. This is eisegesis, reading *in*.

Probably the most common exegetical error, then, is *eisegesis*; to read into the text a meaning we are looking for in order to give support to some point we are trying to make. Of course the point we are seeking to make may be shown by other scriptures to be true, but that gives us no warrant to see that same point in places where the original author did not intend to make it.

An example of eisegesis

Here is an example from 1 Corinthians 14:2, "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God." In arguing that an interpretation of a tongue will always be a prayer or praise directed towards God, and never a prophecy directed towards the church, some teachers have included this verse, claiming that it is very clear teaching from Paul that

[4] We may feel inclined to accuse the NT writers of doing just this on occasions, when they quote OT passages to support or illustrate a point. Certainly there are some examples where the original does not seem to fit the NT authors usage, such as Matt 2:15 quoting Hosea 11:1 "Out of Egypt I called my son." Matthew applies it to Jesus whereas Hosea has Israel in mind. Each case must be looked at carefully, bearing in mind that the Holy Spirit can claim second meanings with an authority that we do not possess!

tongues are directed towards God. But before we employ this verse to support such an argument we must ask if this is the intended meaning. Are there other meanings that are equally valid or even more likely? Is this the point that Paul is trying to make, or is he addressing some other concern? If instead of looking for evidence to support a point, we simply ask, "What did Paul intend us to understand from this statement?" we are more likely to notice that at this point Paul is only discussing who the communication is with, not who is addressing whom. If two adults were talking to each other and a child tried to interrupt, one would turn to the child and say "Do not interrupt, I am talking to my friend". This is not intended to indicate that the conversation is entirely one-way. This is much more likely to be Paul's usage here. To claim that Paul intends, *in this statement*, to eliminate the possibility that God might be talking to the church through a tongue and its interpretation would require far more evidence than is available. Other verses, such as 1 Cor 14:13-17, may support the argument but not this one.

Trying to say something new

Another cause of this error of finding what we are looking for is the temptation to say something new. We may think that a new slant will grab the attention of our hearers better than the standard view. This is not a good enough reason to read our slant into scripture. I once heard a respected preacher use Luke 1:37 "For nothing is impossible with God." to argue that God will always answer our prayers, because to do "nothing" is "impossible for God"!

Trying to add authority by quoting scripture

An equally bad example is set when someone quotes a verse simply because it contains the words they want to say, imagining that this gives their argument more authority. An

even worse extension of this is when an appeal is made to some renowned person, who "also teaches this interpretation". The problem is that quotes can so easily be taken out of context and given a meaning or slant that was not intended by its author. The well known illustration of such misuse is "The bible itself says, 'There is no God'". You will find this expressed in the NIV no less than 15 times! The bible *says* this, but it does not teach it! Most times, this phrase is followed by words such as "but you".

Consider this example: Here I am, arguing the case for careful and honest exegesis. I can try to add authority to my argument by quoting 1 Cor 4:6 "Do not go beyond what is written". First, we have to ask if that is what Paul meant when he quoted this saying. (I will leave that for you to ponder.) But secondly, we have to ask what authority it adds to my argument. Surely it adds nothing. There is no reasoned argument in the quote; it is simply stating something that I hope the reader would agree with. So does the fact that it is a quote from the bible (which we take to be authoritative) add anything? No, not in itself. It only adds authority when the *context* is arguing the same point that we are making, and we include and explain that context.

Reading from our own world view

When trying to work out the author's original meaning we must shut out our own concerns. We must imagine the author in his own time and culture and try to follow his thoughts and reasoning. We must read the text as if we were in the shoes of one of the original intended recipients. Before applying the text to our own context, we must attempt to determine the originally intended meaning by distancing ourselves from our own culture and concerns and connecting with the authors

culture and concerns. This is called distanciation[5] and is an important step in exegesis. The following examples illustrate what can happen when we fail to do this.

Personalisation

I suspect that personalisation is the most common and easiest distanciation trap we fall in to in exegesis. This is when we read the text as if it were addressed to, or describing, ourselves. For instance, in reading Romans 7 about Paul's experience of the law, I may be tempted to say, "That is just how I feel. I want to do the right thing, but I keep on doing the wrong." I may then assume that Paul is writing about the struggle that Christians have to live holy lives. This is quite wrong. A careful reading of the whole chapter makes it clear that Paul is describing the powerlessness of the Jewish Law to make a Jew righteous. I am neither a Jew nor have I ever been subject to the Law of Moses. Paul is not intending to describe my experience. If it matches, that is coincidental, not intended and my exegesis and application must take this fully into account.

Of course, once I have understood the meaning of the text I must re-read it as if it were addressed to me. But this is a hindrance when seeking its original meaning. We must first try to read it as if we were one of the people it was originally addressed to.

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[5] Whilst on the subject of long words, there is often confusion over the terms hermeneutics and exegesis. Exegesis is the *process* of interpreting the text to discover the original meaning. Hermeneutics concerns the theories, principals and techniques employed to discover the original meaning *and* present significance of the text. The first task in this process is exegesis – taking the hermeneutical principals and applying them to the text to elucidate its original meaning. The second task in the hermeneutical process is to uncover the significance of the original meaning for us today.

A different time

Another easily made distanciation mistake is to forget that we are wiser after the event. Let us suppose you are discussing Mat 16:24 in your home group. This is where Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The leader asks, "What is the cross you bear?" You will probably get answers like, "My unbelieving and overbearing husband", "My critical boss", "My bad back", "My mother-in-law" and so on. But what kind of answer would the disciples have given to this question? First of all, they would not have made any connection with the cross that Christ died on, for he had not yet died and they were certainly not expecting him to do so on a Roman cross. This simple fact on its own is at the same time obvious (when you ask the right kind of question) and yet startling. The disciples only reference for Jesus' meaning was the crosses they saw at the roadside around Jerusalem on which criminals and rebels were killed. Whatever Jesus meant, we have to start by trying to hear His words as one of the disciples would have heard them. We may then move forward to the time following Jesus' crucifixion to consider how those same disciples may have re-interpreted what Jesus had meant. Perhaps it was a reference to baptism which, following the crucifixion, was understood to be an identification with Christ's death. Whatever we come up with as a possible meaning for Jesus' statement, it must make sense in its own time and context. Only then can we ask ourselves, "What is the cross we bear?"

Doctrinal motives

Another distanciation mistake is where we allow our doctrinal bias to shape our reading. Consider, for example, Peter's famous confession:

> Simon Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mt 16:16-19)

The natural reading of this is to associate "upon this *rock*" with Peter himself, whose name means *rock*, and to understand the keys as being given to Peter. But most protestant commentators associate the *rock* with Peter's confession rather than Peter himself, and claim the keys are given to the church. They do this, despite the fact that each "you" in the last verse is in the singular. They attempt this forced interpretation because the Roman Catholics use this verse to claim Papal authority.

Personal motives

There is one more example of distanciation mistakes I want to bring to your attention, which is when we allow our personal agenda to distort our reading of the scriptures. There are many issues where personal motives may strongly influence our reading of scripture. For example, when reading about our freedom from the law because of grace, many Christians understand this to include freedom from having to keep to the speed limits[6]. This careless interpretation is, I presume, a result of wishing to justify their behaviour. Other examples where our personal views or preferences may significantly influence our interpretation of scripture are the role of women in church leadership, couples living together before marriage, remarriage

[6] Despite Paul's very clear instructions to obey the laws of our government. See Rom 13.

following divorce, handling wealth, good works, church government structure, leadership style, worship style etc.

A little Greek

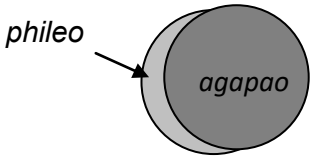
I know a little Greek. His name is Demetrius… It can be good fun to do a little digging around in the Greek or Hebrew text and this is much easier now with the computer bible study programs that are available. But we must treat the results of our word studies with a good deal of care. It is tempting to think that word usage in Greek or Hebrew is far more disciplined than in English; to imagine that a word used to mean one thing in one place will mean the same in another. This simply is not the case. Words have a range of meaning, often having considerable overlap with other words. The precise meaning, within this range, can only be deduced from its context (including historical, social and theological as well as textual). A word's meaning is determined by its relationship to the whole.

Word roots

Word roots may be interesting to look at, but they rarely tell us anything important about a word's meaning that is not apparent from its context and usage. Words are usually developed from roots to mean something completely new. What do the roots of nouns such as car (carriage) or butterfly (butter & fly) tell us? A car is used for carrying things but what does a butterfly have to do with butter? Neither is very interesting. Or what of verbs such as dis-card, re-novate, co-respond, mis-carry? In these examples the roots offer some insight into the word's meaning, but we would be foolish to use root meanings to give authority to an interpretation that cannot be substantiated in some much more reliable way.

Subtle differences

Another favourite is to try to make a point out of the use of different words that mean similar things. Words have a range of meaning that can be illustrated as a circle, containing all the different nuances of meaning. Two similar words would be two circles laid one on top of the other, but slightly offset as in this diagram. The meanings that the two words have in common are in the overlapping portion, with the few meanings that are different in the non-overlapping parts.



One pair of similar words where a d~~i~~estinction of meaning is often claimed is *phileo* and *agapao*, both translated *love*. The popular belief is that *agapao* describes a selfless Godly love whereas *phileo* describes human affection, or brotherly love. In fact, there is a very large overlap in the meaning of these words, as a simple word study[7] will show. In looking for non-overlapping meaning, we may observe that the meaning of *phileo* includes to *kiss* (Judas kissing Jesus to betray him, Mk 14:44) but that *agapao* is not used in this way. It is much more difficult to find any meanings for *agap~~e~~ao* that are not shared with *phileo*. To claim that *agap~~e~~ao* is some special kind of godly love is to ignore the fact that John uses *agapao* when talking about not loving the world (1 Jn 2:15) and Paul says that Demas has deserted him because he loved (*agapao*) the world (1 Tim

[7] A simple word study involves looking up every occurrence of the word (either in English or better, in the Greek/Hebrew) to see how the word is used. A more thorough word study, particularly of Greek words, would include examining the word usage in a much wider range of available texts including the Septuagint and the many other available contemporary Greek texts. Thayer's Greek Lexicon is a useful tool.

4:10). Likewise, to say that *phileo* is human affection is to ignore the fact that the Father loves (*phileo*) the Son (Jn 5:20).

There has been much speculation over these two words in Jesus' discourse with Peter in John 21:15ff where Jesus asks Peter three times "Do you love me". Before we look at the use of ~~*agapeo*~~ *agapao* and *phileo* in this discourse, we should note that we are not discussing the words that Jesus used, but only John's translation into Greek of the words that Jesus spoke, which were either in Aramaic or Hebrew[8]. Thus, to make a point out of the minute difference in meaning of the two Greek words used is even dodgier!

> "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love (*agap~~e~~ao*) me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "You know that I love (*phileo*) you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love (*agap~~e~~ao*) me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileo*) you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love (*phileo*) me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love (*phileo*) me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love (*phileo*) you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." **(**Jn 21:15-17**)**

[8] It has been generally assumed that in the gospel period, the Jews spoke Aramaic, but there are a number of Jewish scholars who believe there is good evidence to suggest that Hebrew was the language spoken.

We have three questions, three answers, and a statement made by John.

"Do you *agapeao* me?"	"You know I *phileo* you."
"Do you *agapaeo* me?"	"You know I *phileo* you."
"Do you *phileo* me?"	"You know I *phileo* you."

Jesus asked the third time, "do you *phileo* me?"

Some people have tried to make a point about the use of these two Greek words, saying that Jesus was asking if Peter had self-sacrificial love for his followers, whereas Peter could only say he had affection for them. But what, then should we make of "Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the *third* time, 'Do you love (*phileo*) me?'" We notice that Jesus only used *phileo*[9] the third time, so either Peter was hurt because Jesus changed his question from *agapeao* to *phileo*, or he was hurt because Jesus repeated his question three times. Surely, the latter is far more likely. That is the point John wishes us to think about, not the change of Greek word, which he makes no comment about.[10]

If we are going to try to make something of this minor change of word, should we not also speculate over the change in metaphor that Jesus uses in referring to his disciples: "Feed my lambs", "Take care of my sheep" and "Feed my sheep"? To make a point out of these perfectly natural variations in speech without any independently compelling reason might make an interesting sermon, but is it good exegesis and rightly handling the word of God?

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[9] Please remember that we are actually discussing John's translation of Jesus' words, but for the sake of clarity, I have not kept repeating this.

[10] For a fuller examination of this issue, see Carson's Exegetical Fallacies, p31f, 51ff.

Modern Usage

Another old favourite is to use modern usage to try to illuminate ancient meaning. You may have heard a discussion of the Greek word *dynamis*, meaning power. People often remark that this is the word from which we get our word dynamite. The gospel is the power – the dynamite – of God for salvation (Rom 1:16). But a moment's thought will convince us that this kind of reverse derivation is ridiculous. How can a 2000 year old Greek word have its meaning explained by its usage in English 2000 years later? Even more ridiculous is the notion that, had dynamite had been invented in Paul's day, he would he have used such a destructive havoc-wreaking substance to illustrate the power of the gospel for salvation.

Another example is *hilaros* in 2 Corinthians 9:7. God loves a cheerful giver. The fact that the English word *hilarious* is derived *from* the Greek, does not tell us that the Greek meant hilarious. All it tells us is that the English word has its root in an ancient Greek one.

Different meanings for the same word

Another easy error is to assume that a word used in one way in one context, or by one author, is to be understood in the same way when used in another context or by another author. For instance, Matthew uses "call" (*kletos*) to mean "invited" (Matt 22:14), but Paul uses the word to mean "elected" (Rom 8:28).

Acceptance of other people's errors

The errors we have considered so far are ones that a careful student of the scripture can avoid for himself. There are other errors that commentators and preachers make, which may be beyond the ability of the average student to discover. For instance, in Mt 19:24 Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into

the kingdom of God." Many years ago, a commentator claimed that there was a narrow gate into Jerusalem called the needle gate, and that this is the *eye of a needle* that Jesus means. However, it is now widely accepted that there is no evidence whatsoever that such a gate existed, nevertheless the interpretation remains very popular.

By being aware of some common errors, we are at least warned to be cautious about adopting interpretations that are not otherwise well supported from the evidence available to us. For this discussion, I am indebted to D. A. Carson for his book "Exegetical Fallacies". I would recommend this book to the stouter students of the word (there are sections dealing with rather technical aspects of grammar which are beyond me!) I have selected a few examples that readers are likely to have come across. For the sake of simplicity I refer to these as *commentators'* errors, though some are more likely to be *preachers'* errors rather than commentators' error.

The aorist tense

Commentators sometime claim that the *aorist* tense is used to indicate that an action is a once-off completed action. This is far too simplistic. The aorist is a *punctiliar* tense. This is commonly, but wrongly, taken to mean that it is describing an action that occurs at a specific point in time. In fact, the word *aorist* means without a place! The tense refers to the *action*, but without indicating its timing or uniqueness.[11] Although the aorist tense is often used where there is a single completed action this same tense is also used where that is clearly not the case. Consider the following few examples amongst many:

[11] See Carson's Exegetical Fallacies, p68.

> Phil 2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed *(past continuous action)* --not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
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> Mat 6:6 But when you pray, go *(repeated action)* into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
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> 1John 2:24 "what you have heard *(extended action)* from the beginning…"
>
> 1 John 5:21 Dear children, keep *(continuous action)* yourselves from idols.
>
> Eph 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show *(future continuous action)* the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

These are examples of usage where the action is repeated or extended and placed in the past, the present and the future. This illustrates that the *aorist* tense cannot, in itself, be used to claim that an action is a one-off completed past action. There must be other grounds for such claims.

An example of this issue may be found in commentaries on Hebrews 8:3

> "Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer." (Heb 8:3 NIV)

The verb "to offer" is in the aorist tense and some commentators use this fact to assert that the offering was therefore a single offering made in the past, in contrast to the

same word being in the present tense in He 9:25.[12] But no such assertion can be made. The reason the aorist tense is used in 8:3 is precisely because no particular time for the offering is indicated, whereas in 9:25 the present tense is naturally called for. The assertion that this was a one-time offering can be made from other texts, but not this one.

False claims to usage

It is quite normal to derive a meaning for a word based on its usage elsewhere, but sometimes mistakes are made. For instance, in trying to get to grips with Paul's teaching about the roles of men and women, an argument has been made for the interpretation of the word "head" (*kephale*) as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 to mean "source".[13] The problem with this is firstly that the claim is based on an older usage than that of the NT period, and secondly, the word is never used in the singular (as it is in 1 Cor 11) to refer to source, but only to the mouth of a river. There is no NT usage that suggests that the word should be rendered with the meaning of source rather than authority.

Errors of comprehension

Sometimes we make simple errors of comprehension; misunderstanding the grammar and logic of a text.

Similarity in some does not imply similarity in all

Noting a similarity between different parties in some respects does not imply similarity in all respects. This seems obvious

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[12] See for example the Tyndale New Testament Commentary.

[13] Berkeley and Alvera Mickelson, Christianity Today, 20th Feb, 1981. Quoted in Carson's Exegetical Fallacies, p37.

when stated like this, yet this error is often found (again!) in discussing the roles of men and women. For example, in quoting Gal 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" some argue that there is therefore no distinction in the roles of men and women in Christ. However, the fact that they are alike in some respects (in regard to their access to saving grace, which is of course the context) does not mean they are alike in all respects.

Widening the application beyond its intention

Sometimes we misunderstand or misapply a passage by extending its application beyond the author's intention. Consider, for example, Phil 4:13; "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Does this mean "I can make my business turn a huge profit so that I can give more to the church"? or "I can complete this charity marathon run"? or "I can learn everything I need to pass my exam"? or "I can become prime minister"? What did Paul mean by everything? Well, he may have had a broad range of things in mind as he thought about all the promises of scripture and his wide-ranging experience of walking with Christ, but this is not indicated in the text. We do know he had in mind his experience of living in material need and in material plenty. As a promise, we can take it no further from this text.

False conclusions

Another easy mistake concerns what are technically called syllogisms (roughly speaking, deriving a conclusion from two propositions). A classic example is found in Rom 10:9-10 "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are

justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." What does this say about Mary Jo, who has neither confessed with her mouth, nor believed in her heart?[14] We would assume that Mary Jo can-not be saved. Our syllogism goes like this (with a parallel syllogism to make the point abundantly clear):

Proposition 1: If you confess and believe you will be saved. (If you are a dog you are an animal).

Proposition 2: Mary Jo has not confessed and believed. (Chivers the cat is not a dog).

Conclusion: Mary Jo is not saved. (Chivers the cat is not an animal).

But that is not what this text says. Paul does not say who is *not* saved; he only states a condition that assures salvation. If he had said "*only* those who… are saved", that would be different, but he doesn't say that here.

Let us examine the syllogism derived from 2 Cor 13:5 "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?" Calvin tried to argue that all those who lack the confidence to say "I am in the faith. Christ is in me!" have failed Paul's test and are therefore not in Christ.[15] This argument fails in exactly the same way. The problem stems from trying to make a negative assertion from a positive one (or vice versa). Paul is not intending to give a test to determine who is not saved, but a test by which those who *know* they are saved may have confidence in the arguments he is presenting to them.

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[14] Example taken from Carson, p98.

[15] Quoted by Carson, P102

Arguing from silence

This leads on to another potential error: that of arguing from silence. This can be valid (though rarely conclusive) where you would strongly expect a~~n~~ comment that is absent. For instance, the absence of any suggestion in the NT that believers should observe the Sabbath is very surprising considering the extreme importance that had been attached to Sabbath observance since Moses. Likewise, the complete absence of a command in the NT, outside of Jesus' summary of the Mosaic Law, to love God is very surprising. Again, the absence of any command in the Law to pray is surprising. These and many other silences are, at the very least, starting points for further study, but do not in themselves prove anything.

On the other hand, the fact that the NT says so little about breaking bread[16] could hardly be taken to indicate that the practice had never become established in the NT churches. We must first look for passages where the subject we are considering is being discussed. If, on examining the context, we decide that we would fully expect a reference to the subject but find none, then we can consider if there may be any significance to the silence.

Question-framing

Sometimes we unwittingly exclude the correct meaning of a text by asking questions in such a way as to limit the answer. This is called *question-framing*, or *excluding the middle*. "Was Paul for or against women having a ministry in the church?" The answer cannot be properly made in the frame in which the question is asked, because it excludes the middle. In some

[16] Apart from its institution in the gospels, Acts 2:42 and the one passage in 1 Cor 11 it is not mentioned.

circumstances Paul is encouraging of women's ministry and in others he is discouraging.

Appeal to emotion

Sometimes claims are made without any proper arguments but simply with an emotive statement. Examples are "obviously", "any right thinking Christian must believe…" or "no one can be secure in their faith unless they believe …" or "if you believe the bible, you must believe this". Unless such statements are backed up by proper argument they are merely emotional brow beating.

Failure to note the genre or the story line

Each passage of scripture is of a particular type, whether it be narrative history, wisdom poetry, prophetic poetry, doctrinal argument, affectionate letter and so on. We must take note of the kind of writing we are considering if we are to approach its interpretation correctly. This is perhaps more commonly a problem in interpreting the Old Testament where there is a wide range of style and story line. How do we understand the teaching contained in Job that comes though the mouths of his comforters? Can we learn anything about God from them, much of which seems good, or is it all wrong because God said that they had not spoken right? Or how are we to deal with a proverb such as 26:4-5[17], which says one thing and then immediately says the opposite? Or how are we to read the creation accounts in Genesis where the two accounts are quite different?

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[17] " Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."

These are all matters to do with recognising and adapting either to the genre or to the story line. Genesis, for instance, is the setting out of the redemptive beginnings of God's dealings with mankind. Its *purpose* is not to elucidate the steps by which the seas and mountains were formed. If it describes the steps and timeframe of the creative acts of God, this is a secondary and incidental matter. It is not itself crucial, either to an understanding or appreciation of God's creative power, or his redemptive purposes. The use that the rest of scripture makes of the creation story is illuminating: it is frequently used to illustrate God's sovereign ability prior to some promise or warning.[18] Never is the story recounted to explain the *process* of creation, only that God created it (see for example the poetry of Job 38-41).

Failure to recognise the difference between our modern mindset and the Hebrew mindset

The Hebrew language is poetic and the bible is primarily concerned with relationships. Modern language, as applied to the study of scripture and the description of biblical doctrines, attempts to be precise and is often technical. Legal and philosophical analysis is applied in seeking to understand and explain God and His ways. Contradictions are not allowed. But the bible authors did not generally share these concerns. They wrote in the poetical Hebrew idiom to communicate particular stories, realities or ideas. Paradox is a frequently used device in the scriptures. It is used to show us both sides of a truth – the sovereign acts of God and the morally responsible acts of men which together make up God's story. God lives in the presence of men and man lives in the presence of God.

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[18] See Isa 40:26, Isa 42:5, Isa 45:12,18, Eph 3:9, Col 1:16, Heb 11:3, Rev 4:11, Rev 10:6

When we try to apply Greek or western analysis to Hebrew poetry we are bound to get in a pickle.

The authority of God's word is not called into question because it says contradictory things in different contexts; only the authority of its interpreters is called into question.