He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Study Guide

LESSON FOUR

APPROACHES TO MEANING

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON AND STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video lesson. If you do not have access to the video, the study guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the lesson and study guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - **Schedule viewing** — In the Notes section of the study guide, the lesson has been divided into sections that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
  - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the study guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each section and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
  - **Record comments and questions —** As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
  - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
  - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
  - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

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Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

- Objects of Knowledge: The things that we try to understand.

- Subjects of Knowledge: The people that do the studying.

When we interpret the Bible, we are the subjects, and the object of our study is the Bible.

Three major approaches towards the objects and subjects of knowledge:

- Objectivism: It is possible to arrive at impartial knowledge.

- Subjectivism: Knowledge is always influenced by personal biases.

- Dialogism: Emphasizes the interplay between objectivism and subjectivism.

II. Objective (3:25)

Objective scholars believe that they can interpret Scripture impartially.

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A. Background (5:52)

Scientific Rationalism:

- René Descartes (1596 – 1650), the father of modern rationalism, promoted reason as the supreme judge of truth.

- Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the father of modern science, applied rational, logical thinking to the study of the physical world.

Structuralism:

Structuralists tried to use rational and scientific objectivity to obtain an exhaustive understanding of everything they studied.

B. Influence (10:15)

- Critical Biblical Studies: Evaluate Scripture with rational investigation only, and therefore reject many of Scripture's claims and teachings.

- Evangelical Biblical Studies: Affirm that Scripture is absolutely true and authoritative and that all scientific findings are subject to its teachings.

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III. Subjective (17:02)

Subjectivists recognize that human beings, the world, and matters of faith, are often too complex to be discerned by scientific rationalism.

A. Background (18:19)

Modern subjectivism gained prominence partly in response to the objectivism of the Enlightenment.

- David Hume (1711-1776), Scottish skeptic, believed that our emotions, desires and mental categories always influence our thinking.

- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), German philosopher, believed that we process our perceptions of the world through the rational categories or concepts that already exist in our minds.

Romanticism: Argued that poetry, drama, music and visual arts provide an understanding of reality that is far superior to rational scientific discourse.

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Post-Structuralism: Emphasized that objective claims of knowledge can't be trusted because of subjective prejudices, feelings and existing beliefs.

Subjective interpreters argue that the meaning of art and literature, including the Bible, must be located within us.

B. Influence (22:18)

- Critical Biblical Studies: Argue that no objective meaning can be found in a biblical text and encourage readers of the Bible to create their own meanings by using the Scriptures to suit their own purposes.

- Evangelical Biblical Studies: Acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word and its meaning is determined by God rather than by interpreters.

  Preachers and Bible teachers frequently read contemporary interests into Bible passages, without any concern for the historical setting of the text.

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IV. Dialogical (27:23)

"Dialogical" refers to the idea that interpretation involves a type of dialog or discussion between the reader and the text.

A. Background (30:16)

- Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) offered a well-known model of interpretation called the “hermeneutical circle.”

- Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) argued that scientific knowledge results from interactions between objective reality and our paradigms of understanding.

- Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) spoke of interpreting meaning in terms of the fusion of two horizons.

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B. Influence (33:30)

Evangelicals emphasize that reading the Bible is different because, unlike other books, the Bible has absolute authority over us ("authority-dialog").

C. Comparison (38:55)

1. Authority-Dialog and Objective (40:06)

The authority-dialog model acknowledges that objective truth can be found in the text of Scripture.

The authority-dialog model helps us avoid thinking that we can be utterly objective when we approach the Scriptures.

2. Authority-Dialog and Subjective (42:03)

The authority-dialog model acknowledges that our perspectives and beliefs influence the way we interpret Scripture.

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If we don't submit our subjectivity to the authority of Scripture, our interpretations of the Bible will be severely hindered.

Investigating the Bible is a lifelong process in which Scripture changes us and causes us to grow and mature in our Christian faith.

V. Conclusion (49:04)

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Review Questions

1. List and explain the three major approaches towards the objects and subjects of knowledge?

2. Explain the philosophical and cultural background of objective approaches to interpretation?

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3. What influence have objective approaches had on biblical interpretation?

4. Explain the philosophical and cultural background of subjective approaches to interpretation?

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5. What influence have subjective approaches had on biblical interpretation?

6. Explain the philosophical and cultural background of dialogical approaches to interpretation?

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7. Compare and contrast the authority-dialog and objective models and the authority-dialog and subjective models.

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Application Questions

1. What methods have you developed, or do you currently follow, to study the Bible? How do these methods help you? How could they be improved?

2. Is it possible to arrive at a strictly objective understanding of the Bible? Explain your answer.

3. How do you guard against a narrow emotional or intuitive reading of the Bible?

4. What are some ways you have encountered subjectivism in regard to biblical interpretation?

5. How has subjectivism influenced your understanding and interpretation of Scripture?

6. What is the danger in letting your personal experiences and preconceptions influence your understanding of Scripture?

7. What benefits have you received from prayerfully interacting with the Bible?

8. How should you adjust your dialog with Scripture to improve your understanding of the Bible?

9. How do you deal with your questions and opinions when studying the Bible?

10. How has your personal, subjective input been valuable to your interpretation of Scripture?

11. What are some specific ways you can influence others to engage the Scriptures in accord with the authority-dialog model?

12. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

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