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CHURCH-BASED HERMENEUTICS: CREATING A NEW PARADIGM

We live in a time when the whole nature of life, culture, and even the very essence of work is changing. Our world is changing from nation states to regional economics. The global explosion of information is creating a whole new type of work, giving birth to what Peter Drucker calls the "knowledge worker." The knowledge worker is going to need to learn a new set of skills. Knowledge is fast becoming the new capital. Yet information and knowledge are not enough, we must learn how to apply this new knowledge. Drucker continues to reason that these enormous shifts will eventually lead to a whole new understanding of an educated person:

> This must change the very meaning of "educated person." It must change the very meaning of what it means to be educated. It will thus predictably make the definition of the "educated person" a crucial issue. With knowledge becoming the key resource, the educated person faces new demands, new challenges, new responsibilities. *The educated person now matters.*[1]

Drucker goes on to argue, very convincingly, that the educated person cannot be reduced to a traditional classical understanding, but must take into account the enormous demands of the new information age. He cannot be a generalist in the sense of knowing all disciplines, because there is too much to know. (Our current knowledge base has about a four-year half-life, which means that every four years, half of our knowledge will be obsolete.) In order to succeed in this new society we must have the ability to gain knowledge, and process it accurately.

This provides a tremendous opportunity for the evangelical church if we reflect carefully on its implications. If anyone has the opportunity to become truly educated people, effective in life and work in the coming global village, it ought to be believers. Yet we live in a time in the church when theology has been professionalized and divorced from church life. One of the areas where this is at epidemic proportions is in the area of hermeneutics. Most believers cannot accurately interpret even the most basic texts of Scripture. They have become products of a relativistic, experience-oriented society, which no longer has the critical ability to interpret the constitution or good literature according to its original intent. Edward Farley hit the nail right on the head in his assessment of the average church member in his article "Can Church Education Be Theological Education?"

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[1] *Post Capitalist Society*, by Peter F. Drucker (Harper Collins), p. 211.

> Why is it that the vast majority of Christian believers remain largely unexposed to Christian learning–to historical-critical studies of the Bible, to the content and structures of the great doctrines, to two thousand years of classic works on the Christian life, to the basic disciplines of theology, biblical languages and Christian ethics? Why do bankers, lawyers, farmers, physicians, homemakers, scientists, salespeople, managers of all sorts, people who carry out all kinds of complicated tasks in their work and home, remain at a literalist, elementary school level in their religious understanding? How is it that high school age church members move easily and quickly into the complex world of computers, foreign languages, DNA, calculus, and cannot even make a beginning in historical-critical interpretation of a single text of Scripture? How is it possible one can attend or even teach in a Sunday school for decades and at the end of that time lack the interpretive skills of someone who has taken three or four weeks in an introductory course in Bible at a university or seminary?[2]

This is a very accurate description of our churches. The solution needed is far deeper than just teaching a basic hermeneutics course in church. Our whole orientation as a Western church must change. We must fundamentally change our approach to the discipline of hermeneutics, bringing it back into the life of the church. We must move away from it being merely an individualistic, professional enterprise for ministers, and develop broad-based interpretation skills within our churches. And finally, we must develop a desire within our churches for every believer to become a thinking Christian. It will be impossible to take full advantage of the opportunity presented to the evangelical church as we move into the information society without equipping all believers in our churches to think critically and biblically through the mass amount of information which comes through their lives and work. This illiteracy problem must become a priority amongst churches.

PARADIGM SHIFTS IN WESTERN HERMENEUTICAL THOUGHT

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I am not going to attempt to survey the history of interpretation down through church history in this paper. Instead, I am going to attempt to envision for you the major paradigm shifts[3] which are taking place in hermeneutics as we move from the modern to the postmodern era, and then apply it to the need in the church today.   Actually, there are two major

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[2] From "Can Church Education Be Theological Education" in *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University*, by Edward Farley (Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 92,93.

[3] I am not going to review the concept of paradigm or defend it as a credible, scholarly way of understanding the times. See my previous paradigm papers for several examples. For two exhaustive seminal works on the paradigms of church history from a theological and missions vantagepoint see *Christianity: Essence, History and Future*, by Hans Kung (Continuum, 1994), and *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, by David Bosch (Orbis, 1991).

shifts that are taking place and appear to be reshaping the entire hermeneutical process. One is philosophically driven, and the other is technologically driven. Our examination of both of these shifts coupled with our understanding of the church-based model—which has unfolded through our paradigm papers[4]—will go a long way towards solving the problem of churches being full of non-thinking believers.

PHILOSOPHICALLY DRIVEN PARADIGM SHIFT (PARADIGMS OF THINKING).

The paradigm shift in hermeneutics from a philosophical standpoint is much larger than biblical interpretation. The most influential figure by far in this shift is Hans-Georg Gadamer. The contributions of his work are rippling far beyond biblical studies, reshaping such giants as law, education, philosophy, and linguistics, to mention a few. Gadamer's most important work is *Truth and Method*. His fundamental idea is that in the modern era, the Enlightenment, we thought we could come to truth through scientific method alone. He philosophically proves that in reality we can get much closer to the approximation or full discovery of truth through a reflective process involving dialogue amongst several people. In *Truth and Method* he writes the following conclusion:

> Thus there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free from all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed toward escaping their thrall. Throughout our investigation it has emerged that the certainty achieved by using scientific methods does not suffice to guarantee truth. This especially applies to the human sciences, but it does not mean that they are less scientific; on the contrary, it justifies the claim to special humane significance that they have always made. The fact that in such knowledge the knower's own being comes into play certainly shows the limits of method, but not of science. Rather, what the tool of method does not achieve—must—and really can—be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth. [5]

Most consider Gadamer as the father of the postmodern paradigm of hermeneutics. His thinking symbolizes the emerging of an entirely new way of thinking from what has dominated us for the last several hundred years. The following chart, figure 1, "Paradigms of Thinking," attempts to

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[4] This is the final paper in a series that has been written and delivered over approximately five years. Four were delivered at BILD-International conferences, one at the North American Professors of Christian Education (NAPCE) annual conference, and one at the 1995 Christian Leadership Summit. They are now collected into a series entitled New Paradigms for the Postmodern Church. The previous five papers are:
> *Church-Based Theological Education: Creating a New Paradigm*
> *Church-Based Missions: Creating a New Paradigm*
> *Church-Based Theology: Creating a New Paradigm*
> *Church-Based Christian Education—Part I: Childhood and Adolescence*
> *Church-Based Christian Education—Part II: Adulthood*
These papers may be order from BILD-International (515) 292-7012 or LearnCorp Leadership Center (515) 292-6810.
[5] *Truth and Method*, by Hans-George Gadamer (Crossroad, 1975, 1989)

summarize the shift that is taking place. The two ovals represent the waning and emerging paradigms. The waning Enlightenment paradigm centers around "calculative thinking"—thinking which is method-based. The emerging paradigm in philosophical circles is called Gelassenheit (releasement) thinking. This probably best parallels our common idea of meditative thinking.

The goal of the Enlightenment model of hermeneutics was to train teachers and scholars in methods and techniques to enable them to objectively, almost scientifically, arrive at the truth in a text. In the emerging postmodern model, the goal changes to be the creation in an individual of what Gadamer calls a "hermeneutically trained judgment." In other words, the goal is not the best method of study, but the ability to think clearly and soundly. This is what has been referred to down through the centuries as practical reason or practical wisdom. All through the history of Western thought, from Socrates and Plato on, the goal was to develop practical reason. Except for during the Enlightenment, the goal has not been method but the ability to reason clearly and critically. Gadamer speaks favorably of tradition predating the Enlightenment. Anthony Thiselton, in his monumental work *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, summarizes Gadamer's thought:

> Gadamer does not accept the later Heidegger's negative evaluation of tradition since Plato. Rather, he traces a positive continuity of emphasis on "practical reason" from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, through Roman legal thought, to Vico, Shaftesbury, Thomas Reid, Hegel, and Bergson. English empiricism and Enlightenment rationalism represent *an artificial narrowing of this tradition in which positivistic, theoretical, and individual-centered wisdom becomes abstracted from tradition and community.*[6]

Gadamer refers positively to Plato's "the scholar and the wise man," and Aristotle's practical wisdom (phronesis). So those entering the postmodern era, an era "enlightened" as to the limitations of scientific method, have two courses available to them. One is the path where there can be no determinate criteria for discovering truth—science is fallible so there is no path to truth—the typical postmodern answer. The second path is having a mature approach to the pursuit of truth, which down through the centuries has been referred to as practical wisdom. The latter is the correct approach for the evangelical.

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This reality—though at first rather abstract to most Christians—is very practical. Note one phrase from the Thiselton quote above, "individual-centered wisdom becomes abstracted from tradition and community." This

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[6] *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, by Anthony C. Thiselton, pp. 320-321.

Paradigms of Thinking

Heidegger ⟹ Gadamer

Waning Enlightenment Paradigm

"Calculative"
(Method-Based)
Thinking

Examples:
higher critical methodology
methodical Bible study – Traina
Greek and Hebrew exegetical
methodology
exegetical commentaries
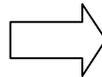
Goal: The goal is to train teachers and scholars in methods and techniques to enable them to objectively, almost scientifically to arrive at the truth in the text.

English empiricism and Enlightenment rationalism represent an artificial narrowing of this tradition (practical wisdom) in which positivistic theoretical, and individual-centered reason becomes abstracted from tradition and community. (Thiselton, p.320)

Emerging Post Modern Paradigm

"Meditative"
or "Releasement"
(Gelassenheit)
Thinking

Examples:
Gadamer's "hermeneutically trained" judgment
Johnson's hermeneutical spiral adaptation
Browning's strategic practical theology in
community
Childs' canonical process
Cobb's practical Christian thinker, reflective
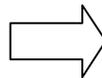
Goal: The goal is the creation of what Gadamer calls "hermeneutically trained" judgment, which is consistent with a concept in all ages except the Enlightenment: practical reason, or practical wisdom.

Continuity line through the ages: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, through Roman legal thought, to Vico, Shaftesbury, Thomas Reid, Hegel, and Bergson. (Thiselton, p. 320)

is practically what has happened in the lives of our churches. Hermeneutics is no longer a "practical reason skill" carried out in the context of dialogue and community. Instead our biblical studies have become academic, individualized, critical, and very technical. Greek and Hebrew exegetical methodology is practically out of reach to all, and our commentaries which contain in-depth research are all written in a way which particularizes the text and records the research in a way which is almost completely irrelevant to the life and ministry of the church. Though these are difficult ideas to comprehend, in the end they are very practical to the life of the church.

This is probably a good spot to comment on the work of Paulo Freire.[7] Freire's concept of critical consciousness is a lot like Gadamer's idea of hermeneutically trained judgment. Freire develops his concepts in the context of education—especially literacy programs at a national level. Freire argues that effective education of the masses involves engaging them in a problem-posing process drawn from their own life situations. In this process they begin to operate with the larger world around them and its knowledge base, and through that interaction develop "critical consciousness," enabling them to put that knowledge to work in their own lives. Once the critical consciousness is there, they are able to think clearly and develop soundly. According to Freire, these skills are not limited to the privileged who have access to the formal educational systems of the Western countries.

One additional point is important at this stage. In my *Church-Based Theology* paper I addressed the problem of theology being married with the Western academy from the middle of the second century until today. We saw that a theological tradition actually predated the Western academy model. This Greek model—the Antioch tradition—was driven by a pastoral agenda of establishing and shepherding churches. Building on that argument, a case can be made that more change is needed than just a return to the pre-Enlightenment tradition of practical reason from academic hermeneutics. It is not enough to go back to practical wisdom with a token nod to community. Our interpretive model must become rooted in the life of local churches, and we must develop churches filled with Christians who can practice practical reason—sound critical thinking—in community together. Those gifted as what we might refer to as theologians must not view their gifts as a call to a life of "individual exegetical" work, but to helping churches grow, become established, and multiply.

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Lets briefly review some of the key concepts of this emerging paradigm, which picks up on the more important elements of the practical wisdom tradition. Probably one of the best phrases that pictures the direction we need to go as evangelicals is reflected in Gadamer's idea of a hermeneutically trained judgment. This means that our focus should not be so much on method, but on thinking skills and processes. It is more important to help each believer develop the ability to think than it is to follow a specific method of study. Another key idea is the "genre logic

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[7] Freire's two most important works are *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum, 1984) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Continuum, 1994).

process," first developed by E.D. Hirsch in *Validity in Interpretation*[8] and built upon by Elliott Johnson in *Expository Hermeneutics*.[9] Johnson places the emphasis on a "spiral process." It is very close to a description of the actual mechanism that is in operation when we use our critically-trained judgment. I will develop this idea in the last part of this paper. Another key concept is Don Browning's "strategic practical theology."[10] It is another way of saying that churches need to develop the ability to think, strategize, and develop ministries based on a community-wide, critically-trained judgment—a practical reason. Brevard Childs also calls us to a sort of theology in community dialogue with his "canonical process."[11] Even though he believes that Scripture itself progresses under the interpretation of the contemporary believing community—his call to interpret the text accurately as first received by the believing community to which it was written, and then interpret it in contemporary community life, is very much in the new emerging paradigm tradition. His research also "sews back together" the books which were dissected by the higher critics at the height of the scientific hermeneutic days. And finally John B. Cobb, Jr.'s concept of the "thinking Christian" is very useful in trumpeting the call for all Christians to develop a critically-trained judgment.[12]

TECHNOLOGICALLY DRIVEN PARADIGM SHIFT (ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING)

There is another force driving the emergence of a new paradigm in hermeneutics—technology. More specifically, the force is electronic publishing. Electronic publishing, linked with the fast developing field of linguistics, is driving the new paradigm quickly up the paradigm curve. Wycliffe—widely know to be one of the pioneers in the field of linguistics—has long felt that we teach language incorrectly in our traditional seminary Hebrew and Greek programs. It is clear that our seminar language and exegetical approach has been dominated by the method-based paradigm—learn the exegetical methods; memorize the language paradigms (different use of paradigm!). I will never forget the casual conversation I had several years ago with a top Wycliffe linguist, which turned out to be surprising. We were discussing the differences between the traditional seminary language approach and that of a linguist. I happened to agree with her ideas, so that is not what surprised me. The surprise came in the intensity of her convictions—convictions which I have

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[8] *Validity in Interpretation*, by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (Yale, 1967). Hirsch develops his genre logic concept in chapter 3, "The Concept of Genre."

[9] *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, by Elliott Johnson (Zondervan, 1990). Johnson develops his "spiral process" in chapter 7, "The Task of Recognition."

[10] Browning develops the whole concept of strategic practical theology in his book *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, by Don Browning (Fortress, 1991). The whole book is on the process, with four churches serving as models. His main ideas are explained in the introduction—"From Practice to Theory and back Again."

[11] Childs has several works out—Old and New Testament introductions, a biblical theology work and several others all working with his canonical process method. Probably the most useful introduction to his work is *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Fortress, 1979). Chapter 3 "Canon and Criticism" explains the method.

[12] John B. Cobb, Jr. has written innovatively and radically on theological education and is a very creative thinker, though again not evangelical. His concept of every believer becoming a practical Christian thinker is developed practically in *Becoming a Thinking Christian* (Abingdon, 1993).

grown to appreciate only recently. She believed that in the long run, our current seminary approach is detrimental to the lives of our churches.

The basic difference is this—the scientific method-based approach relies on the calculating skill, and the methodical detailed research of the individual interpreter; while the more natural linguistic approach relies on the grasp of the basic principles of language and the clarity which comes from understanding the dynamics of language and communication. The sharpening of our instinctive understanding of language rather than the allusion of mastering dead languages is more the hermeneutical goal. This, of course, is accessible to more people, and places a different "principle of selection" around the choice of word meanings. In other words, anyone who understands language well, has access to the meanings of the Greek and Hebrew words, and a basic understanding of the key linguistic characteristics of Greek and Hebrew,[13] can do as good of a job "exegetically" (and sometimes better) as a seminary student with two or three years of Greek and Hebrew. This is greatly accentuated by the emergence of electronic publishing.[14] With the aid of a tool like *Logos Library System* (based on the old Dallas Seminary CD Word), you can now do the biblical language research in two hours that used to take two days. We can now carry $2,000 worth of language tools around in our pockets and almost instantly search dozens of language resources. The rules are changing. So is the paradigm.

It seems timely at this point in the paper, to address several implications of our observations thus far:

1. *We need to stop viewing the study of hermeneutics as primarily an academic, scientific exercise for theologians and ministers.* Hermeneutics is not primarily an individual enterprise to be carried out in a scientific manner by theologians and professional pastors, but a skill needed by all believers. The professionalization of this training process has removed the skills from an average believer, and often actually removed the message from the understanding of those listening to the Sunday exposition of the Word. Basically today we have an educated clergy and an uneducated laity, and in essence, neither are truly educated. Our hermeneutical approach lies at the foundation.

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[13] The way the biblical languages are taught in seminaries is beginning to change. Several texts have been written in the last few years on the linguistics of the Greek and Hebrew languages. Besides the work of Louw and Nida, especially *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, by Eugene Nida and Jan De Waard (Nelson, 1986), consider purchasing the following: *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, by Peter and Max Turner, IVP, 1989), *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*, by David Black (Baker, 1988), *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach,* by Richard Young (Broadman & Holman, 1994) and *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, edited by Walter Bodine (Eisenbrauns, 1992).

[14] Logos Library System is leading the way in systems which allow you to work with the original Greek and Hebrew, not just the numbering systems. The following papers will allow you to get a clear understanding of the directions and tremendous future contributions of electronic publishing to biblical hermeneutics. *Original Languages*, by Scobie Smith (A Logos Research System Workshop), "Mission Research and the Path to the CD-ROM: Report on the Global Quest to Share Information," from *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October, 1995).

2. *We need to seek to develop a critically trained judgment in every believer*. People are in Bible studies and small groups every week. They are in the Word daily in many churches, yet most do not know how to interpret accurately. They go after whatever stands out to them, because they do not have "practical reason skill." They cannot read a text and quickly and naturally come up with its true meaning. We must develop this in our people if we expect them to be effective "knowledge workers," leaders in their lives and work.

3. *We need to replace our rigid exegetical methods with a much more natural, reflective process*. We need to make Bible study more natural yet far more substantive. This is no easy task. Skills must be taught, and yet related to the everyday way we read, learn, and communicate. Most of us need to develop far greater skills in understanding our language—learning to accurately interpret what we read and what others say. These are skills. We need fresh methods of study which are process-oriented. We need resources which teach us to think. Our fill-in-the-blank resources only encourage others to think for us, and in reality warp our own ability to think.

4. *We need to engage the entire local church community in the interpretive process. That is, to teach our churches to become hermeneutical communities*. Our churches ought to be places where we all learn to think through life's issues thoroughly and biblically as a community. We cannot be one-minded as a church if only a few can think biblically and critically. This still leaves room for some to take the lead on issues; in fact, it also opens the door for churches to take on resident theologians. This concept seems like a waste to churches today, because we do not see theology as relevant. We must reeducate ourselves to think of the church as a serious community of faith capable of addressing and solving major issues in our lives, communities, and ministries.

5. *We need to renovate our seminary language departments, teaching language in a way that can be passed on*. We need to be teaching our future leaders the nature of language and clear communication in a way that they can pass it on to every believer. Language is instinctive to man. It should be taught in a more natural manner. Linguists ought to become part of our language department. Our seminaries ought to become more like resource centers to churches to assist believers in learning how to develop "practical reason skills." The linguistics of the biblical languages ought to gradually become part of the "practical reason skill" of many believers in our churches.

6. *We need to develop commentaries and other forms of biblical research in forms that are more relevant to the life of the Church*. It is totally amazing to me that almost all of our commentaries follow the same dry format, and yet we keep producing more of them. The commentary paradigm should stand as a monument to us of the disassociation of theology from the life and ministry of churches. We need fresh forms of biblical research which are usable to churches, and to the lives of believers. We will know when we have hit the mark when we develop

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a style of commentary which deals in-depth with biblical texts, and yet the average believer finds it attractive, relevant, and desires to read it and use it in his life and ministry.[15]

REVISITING THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION

We will not go into the validation of the principles of hermeneutics from the early church in this section, instead we are going to go back and look at what the churches and their leaders were held responsible for as they interpreted and used the Scriptures.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The New Testament actually has a lot to say about interpreting the Word when approached from the vantagepoint of this paper. Both leaders and the churches were responsible to be able to think clearly through the Scriptures and to interpret them accurately.

The Churches. The church members were all to have critically trained judgments. You can see this very directly in Hebrews 5:11-14:

> Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes of milk only is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (NSAB)

Several concepts are important here. First note the mark of maturity—"through practice have their senses trained." The first key concept is "practice." It is a discipline, literally a habit which has resulted from practice and is now part of your essence. The next concept is "senses" which literally means "our sense of perception." The last key word, "trained," is the Greek word gymnadzo, which is where we get gymnastics or gymnasium. He is speaking here of an ability to accurately perceive the truth, naturally as part of your being, as a result of mastering and practicing the first principles. It is a skill of learning to think critically and see life through the first principles. That is the issue of the passage. The "good and evil" is good and evil teaching. If the elementary principles (literally "the first principles" in the Greek) are not mastered, then the rest of the oracles of God will easily be distorted. *This is exactly Gadamer's concept of a hermeneutically trained judgment!*

Paul works with similar ideas in Colossians 2:6-8, where he refers to the elementary principles (same word—first principles) of the world and the elementary principles of Christ. One set of principles will drive us. Those who are established (the word means rooted, grounded in them) in the

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[15] An example of the type of tools we are purporting is the *4th Generation Life Cycle System*, a LearnCorp Leadership Center resource, which is based on over 2,000 house of research and contains commentary level research, but is designed for every believer.

ability to think through life's choices based on the first principles of the faith are considered mature thinkers. The book of *Hebrews* carries with it some difficult concepts, but those with a critically trained judgment will be able to understand them. Peter tackles the same issue in 2 Peter 3:14-18 where he states that many of Paul's teachings are difficult and the unestablished will distort them, and will fall victim to "unprincipled men."

How do we know if believers have a "hermeneutically trained judgment"? It can be measured by an ability to accurately grasp the truths of Scripture and think through the implications for one's life and work. I see the lack of this all the time in small study groups. When a person is asked to explain the meaning of a passage, verse, or concept, often the answer comes back with no real relationship to the meaning of the text. It is almost as if the person is saying the first thing that comes to his mind with no sense of what the text is saying. That person probably lacks a hermeneutically trained judgment, or in *Hebrews* terms, is not mature. This would not be so bad in our churches if it just happened occasionally, but the sense that I have is that it is an exception to find a believer with this practical reasoning skill. The biblical mandate infers that every believer can and should develop a hermeneutically trained judgment.

The Leaders. They are responsible to have hermeneutically trained judgments. You can see this clearly near the end of Paul's ministry as he sort of released Timothy from his oversight. Paul challenged Timothy to discipline (the word gymnadzo again) himself for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7-16). A big part of that discipline was devoting himself to be absorbed in carefully teaching the Scriptures. Later in 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul also exhorted Timothy:

> Be diligent to present yourself to God as a workman who does not
> need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. (NASB)

Earlier in 1 Timothy 6:2c he exhorted him to "teach and preach these principles." Paul referred to the teaching he had entrusted to Timothy as "a deposit." Timothy faithfully accepted that deposit and built his life and ministry solidly on the principles of that teaching and in association with Paul. Now he was to carry out the difficult, lifelong task of living his life, establishing churches, and dealing with all sorts of complicated "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1) which would come at the churches. Timothy, and all leaders after him (2 Timothy 2:2), needed a hermeneutically trained judgment. It is important to note here that the early teaching, or building of this judgment, came from a mature leader faithfully entrusting the teaching, and then the ability grew in order to handle doctrines of demons. The hermeneutical process was passed on in the context of a local church agenda. Today this is often not the case. Advanced hermeneutical questions—in the context of academic freedom—often lead young aspiring leaders not to the sound ability to think critically, but into a wrangle of words and ideas, and straight into the doctrines of demons. Look at Princeton today.

The Early Church. The early church—the church during the first three centuries after the Apostles—began in this Pauline, or what is now called

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the Antioch tradition. The concerns of the churches drove the entire process. In *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology*,[16] Justo Gonzalez called this tradition the pastoral tradition (an idea which is developed more extensively in the Church-Based Theology paper). This tradition was gradually abandoned as the 2nd century apologists turned to the questions of the Greek academy, and eventually the marriage of theology and the Western academy began to dominate. At least the Western academy concept of practical reason prevailed until the Enlightenment, when that too was replaced by the scientific method-based approach to truth.[17] In this paper we are calling for a return all the way back to the Pauline/Antioch tradition, and then forward to the postmodern 21st century.

TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM: DEVELOPING A "HERMENEUTICALLY TRAINED JUDGMENT" IN COMMUNITY

Having identified our radically shifting cultural milieu, the reality of churches who are full of hermeneutically untrained believers, and having looked afresh at the New Testament and the Early Church, the objective of this paper is to bring us to a point of beginning to build a model that will effectively work in the 21st century world that we are entering. Therefore this section is entitled, "Toward a New Paradigm: Developing a 'Hermeneutically Trained Judgment' in Community." *Toward* in the sense that we are just beginning to move up the paradigm curve, and are following the wave biblically, not actually creating a paradigm. I used the term "hermeneutically trained judgment" because I like it—it carries a certain historical weight, and reminds us of the pre-Enlightenment *wise man/scholar* (Socrates), *senses trained* (Hebrews 5:11-14), *practical reason* (Aristotle), *habitus* (Farley), and present day Gadamer tradition. (Though this is not to infer the *Hebrews* concept is man-made.) And finally, I used the word *community* to remind us that the entire process is to take place in community, the community being a local church and leaders of a church multiplication movement.

So how to we go about the process of developing a hermeneutically trained judgment in community? How do we change the attitudes of—at times— entire churches? How do we even begin to accomplish such a monumental task? First we need to isolate our guiding principles. Then we must build a general model.

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[16] *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology*, by Justo Gonzalez (Abingdon, 1989).
[17] For those of you who have followed Farley's argument as its has unfolded through these paradigm papers and the BILD leadership series seminar training, Farley, in his habitus concept, is really tapping into the pre-Enlightenment Western academy tradition of Plato's wise man and Aristotle's practical reason.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. *The process of developing a hermeneutically trained judgment must be church-based at its very heart and soul.* We have already established this point from several directions. The kind of judgment we are trying to create is not primarily academic, although it does involve academic elements. It is for churches and the believers in those churches. The driving force must be the establishing of churches in the first principles of the faith and then helping the believers to develop sound judgment—an intrinsic natural ability to interpret the Scriptures and their implications for their lives and work. How we think about the whole process must be church-based.

2. *The process of developing a hermeneutically trained judgment must grow out of believers being well established in the first principles of the faith.* This point has been established previously as well. Yet it is easy to miss its implications. We live in a pluralistic society where truth is relative. One of our highest values is academic freedom—each individual is free to make up his own mind. This concept permeates our theological academies to varying degrees, but it is always there to some degree. This is a very easy idea to misunderstand so listen carefully. It is a given that if each person needs a hermeneutically trained judgment, he or she must need to do some very important thinking for himself, particularly in regards to his own personal life and work. But the ability to think "Christianly" and critically does not mean we have the right to form our own set of first principles. This point is very important. We are to be taught the first principles. We are to faithfully integrate them into our lives. Only when we have mastered them are we in a position to go on to deeper things and begin developing a mature judgment as described in *Hebrews*. If we're not careful, in the name of academic freedom, we may not learn the first principles, or may neglect some of them. This can get us off course for our entire lives. In addition, our ability to think biblically and critically assumes a foundation of the first principles. Some how they converge, through experience and the work of the Spirit, to develop within us this mature judgment—or what we are calling a hermeneutically trained judgment. We can only experience true "academic freedom" when we are properly grounded in the first principles of the faith. This is logical in every realm if you really think about it. We may want creative freedom in mathematics, but if we fail to become established in the first principles of math, we will be thinking freely, but also ridiculously as well. In fact, John Newman, is his classic *The Idea of the University* (which has two fresh editions released in just the last few years), argues that every discipline has a set of first principles and that a university is an environment where students are always "pushing up the first principles" and ultimately integrating their findings into their lives and work.[18]

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[18] Newman's original work was written in 1852. The two new additions recently released are *The Idea of the University* (Notre Dame, 1982) and *The Idea of the University* (Yale, 1996). Also note Pelikan's work *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination*, by Jaroslav Pelikan (Yale, 1992).

3. *The process of developing a hermeneutically trained judgment must be linguistically sound.* It is also very important to realize that though we cannot get to this mature judgment without being established in the first principles, this is not some spiritual place that is inconsistent with the way God made us. A very impressive study has been done by Jean Grodin in his book *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics.*[19] He makes a clear point, that what distinguishes us from animals is an inner logic (reason), which he calls the universality of hermeneutics. This is intrinsic to all men. E. D. Hirsch, in his now classic *Validity in Interpretation*, attempts to describe the process of communication with others and develops the concept of genre-logic. The process, natural to all men, goes like this: We all have a reasoning process which goes on inside of us, and eventually leads to a desire to communicate. That communication is formed into an idea. We then choose the particulars of language to communicate the idea. Another person encounters the particulars first, then recognizes your idea, and determines what you mean to say, and communication takes place. If your particulars are not clear, then the other person may think you are talking about something else. Eventually, though, it becomes clear, and he will say something like "Oh, I thought you were talking about . . . ." and communication takes place. This process is universal to all mankind.

Linguists have taken the process a bit further. They have convincingly proven that there is a core set of universal characteristics common to every language. This is very important in how we understand cross-cultural missions and cross-cultural communications. Far too much has been made of a premise that people from different cultures think differently. It is true that we may see the world differently. We may have different values. Our language may be different. We may not even understand each other's illustrations. But fundamentally, deep down, we do not think differently. We all have the same intrinsic ability to reason, we all go through the same communication and interpretive processes, and we all share some of the most basic conventions of language in common. That is the way God made us. So whatever process of interpretation we create, it must be consistent with the way God has made us. Another implication seems to be: if we can design methods that are consistent with the way we have been made, anyone should be able to be trained to use them.

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4. *The process of developing a hermeneutically trained judgment must be viewed as more a process than a method.* This is not to say that it is without method, but once a sound process is established, many different methods can be followed. The process needs to take into consideration at least two important elements: (1) the individual's reasoning process —coming to the point of understanding both the meaning of the biblical text and its implications for one's life and work; (2) the community dialogue element. Dialogue is key. It is often referred to as Socratic dialogue or questioning (see Gadamer quote on page 3).

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[19] *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, by Jean Grodin (Yale University, 1994).

We have structured the BILD-International courses around these core processes. Each individual must go through a reflective reasoning which leads him through the natural process of understanding the meaning of the Scriptures, thinking through the life implications, and developing convictions. Each individual must also go through a sort of Socratic dialogue in community, to test, refine and sharpen himself—all part of developing a hermeneutically trained judgment.

A final element of the process related to developing this "reason skill" is gaining some sense of the whole of the knowledge that is being pursued. This is what is often referred to as the "encyclopedic issue." Our judgment will become sharper, both in regards to what we know, and what we do not know, if we have answered the basic encyclopedic questions: "What is the total picture of the body of knowledge we need to learn?" "In what order ought we to study the body of knowledge?" From a biblical vantagepoint, we have addressed the encyclopedic issue in depth in the *Church-Based Theology* paper and in the new BILD course *Toward a Theology in Culture: A New Encyclopedia.* One of the main reasons Christians do not develop a hermeneutically trained judgment is that they actually do not know very much about the Bible.

A WORKING MODEL:

We now want to set forth a working model for developing a hermeneutically trained judgment in churches and amongst leaders of church multiplication movements. This model will just be briefly visualized here, but has been in the process of development for over twenty years. My thinking started down this course about twenty years ago under the mentoring of Walter Kaiser and Elliott Johnson, who were both involved in writing and debating in the area of hermeneutics. I remember hearing both of them discuss and debate at the "International Council of Biblical Inerrancy Summit" in the 70's. They reshaped my thinking around some very important concepts—author's intended meaning, single meaning of a text, the hermeneutical spiral, and biblical theology as foundational to theology in culture. All are pieces of building a sound, reason-based interpretive process. Then I began to travel extensively in cultures quite foreign from my own, and the whole issue of linguistics began to surface. Finally, thinking through the implications of the church-based nature of hermeneutics amidst our church-based debates in the BILD network, the realization of how essential it is for the whole process to be ecclesiologically driven began to blossom. The following model is in one sense very basic, almost too basic. Yet upon careful reflection, I believe it contains all of the key issues that are necessary to build a community of faith that possesses a mature trained judgment. The model is visualized in figure 2, "Developing a Hermeneutically Trained Judgment in Community."

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PHASE 1: TRAINING IN THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

We must begin with teaching the first principles of the faith. In our culture it seems logical to begin with principles of interpretation, so that each person can discover the first principles for himself. At one level this is true.

We want to be developing their thinking processes right from the beginning, but the burden of training must rest on teachers training them in the first principles. These principles then will converge, giving them the base to think with sound judgment. Everyone needs to be established in the first principles. It is also important to note at this point the emphasis that Paul placed on establishing churches in the didache—the apostles' teaching, which he also referred to as *the deposit*. The men he trained needed to be faithful with that deposit. Paul was driven to establish churches in the core truths so that they could go on to maturity. His men needed to master the first principles and preach them in season and out.

In our churches we must have a plan for establishing believers in the first principles of Christ. In the early church they developed didaches to train new believers and required all to learn them very early in the faith. We often lack such disciplined approaches in our churches today. BILD-International and LearnCorp Resources have developed *The Establishing Series,* a process-oriented resource designed to establish believers in the first principles of the faith and in developing the elementary skills of a hermeneutically trained judgment. The *Leadership 2005* program is a more comprehensive plan, which sets the stage for the next phase, and in fact it leads one into it.

PHASE 2: REFINING AN EMERGING HERMENEUTICALLY TRAINED JUDGMENT

Once the first principles are laid as a foundation, and evidenced as shaping the life and work of a believer, it is time to directly work on sharpening his "judgment" skills. This is the time to train in the skills themselves. Several skills should be taught at this time:

> Sound language principles (linguistics)
> The framework of Scripture and a vision for how to approach the Bible as a whole
> A process of study—Scripture, reading, Socratic discussions, projects (process built into the *BILD Leadership Series*[20] curriculum and the *Establishing Series*)
> How to develop a long-term plan to master the Scriptures and incorporate them in your life and work
> A sound study method which itself is process-oriented

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The *Leadership 2005* and *2025* plans[21] are designed to guide believers through this process and position them to enter phase three long term. Book four of the *Establishing Series,* together with workshops on aspects of developing a hermeneutically trained judgment, should go a long way in preparing them for "the meat of the Word."

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[20] Brochures on the Leadership Series I and II are available from BILD-International upon request. Call (515) 292-7012.

[21] Brochures on *Leadership 2005* (for adults) and *Leadership 2025* (for high school students) are available from LearnCorp Leadership Center by request. Call (515) 292-6810.

Developing a Hermeneutically
Trained Judgment in Community

Phase 1: Training in the First Principles

    train every believer in the first principles

    train aspiring leaders in the first principles, and
have them minister amongst churches
demonstrating their faithfulness to those
principles
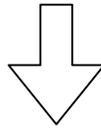
**Phase 2: Refine an Emerging
Hermeneutically Trained Judgment**

    train in the elements of reason, discernment,
language (how to think)

    train in a process – study, reading, Socratic
discussion, projects, etc.

    build an encyclopedic understanding

    teach a solid method with new paradigm
elements

    build a long term plan – biblical theology,
theology

Phase 3: Fully Entering the Community Process

**Hermeneutical
Community in Action**

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**Leadership
Ordered Learning**

**Adult
Ordered Learning**
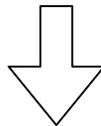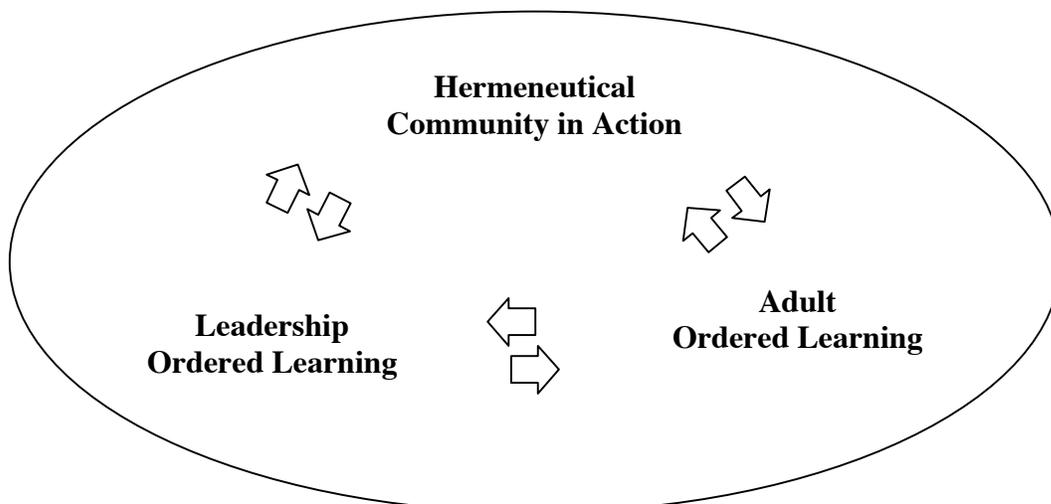
Just a few thoughts about method. Methods can vary, but a good method, in the context of the discussion of this paper is very useful. It is also important to stay with an ordered learning plan. We use a hermeneutical method throughout the entire BILD-International and LearnCorp Leadership Center curricula and resources. The method incorporates most of the key concepts of this paper, and it is maximized in the context of community, as argued throughout this paper. Yes, it is a method, but it emphasizes the process of thinking. Principles and procedures for interpreting a text—our method—are listed in Appendixes I and II.

> Appendix I: Principles for Understanding and Interpreting the Meaning of a Biblical Text
> Appendix II: Procedures for Understanding and Interpreting the Meaning of a Biblical Text

It may be helpful to point out a few distinctives of the method, which has grown from the Hirsch-Kaiser-Johnson conversation and writings over the last 15-20 years.

1. The author's intended meaning expressed in the text is the central determinant of meaning.
2. An author's intended meaning statement (To…by) and validation is the form used for working with the text.
3. A genre-logic (Hirsch, Johnson) formula is used to guide one in selecting particulars in the text which can be studied further, rather than "scientifically" exegeting every detail.
4. Antecedent theology (Kaiser) is an integral part of the process, ultimately leading to the practice of biblical theology.
5. Literary design plays a large role in structuring the message of the book.
6. Instead of simply applying the text, a more complex reflection is built into the final step of the method, which leads to the process of doing theology in culture, as discussed in the *Church-Based Theology* paper.

One final note on developing skills in interpreting. Electronic publishing offers a level of study previously unavailable to most believers. Now, for about $300 one can purchase a mini-library of reference and language aids for biblical study that used to cost $2,000 to purchase and forever to use. A few lessons on how to use the resources, several weeks of practice together with a plan for regular study, and whole new vistas of understanding can be opened up.

PHASE 3: FULLY ENTERING THE COMMUNITY PROCESS

Once the emerging hermeneutically trained judgment is refined, a lifelong process begins for all of us. It is probably best to recognize that those who are leaders ought to approach the whole training process more intensely. They will have to deal with everything that comes the way of their church, and need an ever increasing skill in anticipating and dealing with doctrines of demons (world philosophies) as well as assisting churches and individuals deal with all sorts of problems. All adults, though, need to be

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involved in a serious ordered learning process, which will ever be sharpening their effectiveness in their lives, work, and ministries. As they increasingly master the Scriptures, built upon the foundation of the first principles, they will become more and more mature in their thinking and discernment.

There is a sense in which the community of faith is always using their collective judgment. They have to decide on issues within the community of faith and how to respond to issues outside the church in the culture in which they live. There should be a constant interaction between the leaders, individuals, and the entire community of faith on matters of life, work and ministry. The problem today is that many leaders, most believers, and often entire churches lack any real sense of a critically trained judgment.

These ideas are developed extensively in the paper on *Church-Based Theology: Creating a New Paradigm.* It would be ideal to read it at this time.

CONCLUSION:

Where does all of this lead us? We must get rid of the clergy/laity gap. All Christians must learn to think soundly and critically. We are moving into a whole new era in history—new questions are going to be raised; new philosophies are going to attack the church; new skills are going to be needed by believers in their lives and work.

These are unparalleled times for believers. We are moving into the age of "knowledge workers." If we can learn to think biblically in every area of our lives, there is no limit to the impact we can make in the world of the 21st century. In addition, since knowledge is the new capital, there is a new premium being set on wisdom. The sharp, perceptive Christian will have a tremendous edge in the information society.

A new paradigm is emerging in hermeneutics—a postmodern paradigm. We must get busy creating a new paradigm within our churches, which is more biblical than at present. We need to infect every believer with the conviction that he or she needs a sharp, hermeneutically trained judgment. We need to move the interpretive process back into the lives of local churches—becoming true hermeneutical communities.

The model set forth in this paper will not be easy to implement in our Western churches. This is not how believers in our churches are oriented. At first it may seem too academic—we are lazy and look for quick fixes. We are talking about changing a whole mindset; but it must be done if we are going to reverse the decline of our churches and impact our Western cultures. The U.S. is already considered to be a post-Christian nation. As we enter the 21st century, we are on the brink of unparalleled opportunity, but unless we begin making some paradigmatic changes in our churches of the magnitude described in this paper, it is likely that the churches in the U.S. will continue to decline.

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Many of you here today are from cultures around the world. Most from fairly young churches—few over four generations old. You are entering the same global village in the 21st century as we are in Western cultures. It is just as important, if not more so, that you develop sound trained judgment in the members of your churches. These are unparalleled times. Oh, that we could model for the world of the 21st century, a truly educated person—solid in life skills, fully established in his or her faith!

APPENDIX I: PRINCIPLES OF UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING THE MEANING OF A BIBLICAL TEXT

1. It is assumed, due to the acceptance of a book into the biblical canon, whether it be in the form of a poem, a narrative, a letter, etc., that the book has normative application to churches and believers regardless of cultural milieu or time in history.

2. The meaning of the text that the original author intended to express to his original audience must be clearly understood before it is possible, with any degree of objectivity, to understand its relevance to a contemporary audience.

3. Since the literature of the Bible takes on all different forms as chosen and shaped by the author, often using the cultural forms of his day, it is necessary to pay attention to how he structured the message in order to fully and clearly grasp his intended meaning.

4. The normal conventions of the language in which the biblical text was written must serve as controlling guides to understanding the intended meaning. Unless they are accurately transferred to the normal conventions of the language of a contemporary interpreter, which then serve as controlling guides for his interpretation, then accurate communication can not take place or be validated (literary design).

5. All the particulars in a text (paragraphs, sentences, phrases and words) will logically enhance the author's intended meaning if it has been clearly understood. Any particulars which conflict with the construed meaning of the text means that either the conception of the author's intended meaning is inaccurate or the particulars have to be studied more carefully to discover the full range of their use.

6. It is often difficult to fully understand the meaning of a biblical text without understanding Scripture written prior to it, since the biblical texts often refer in brief to preceding texts in the form of partial quotes, words that have taken on special significance, and allusions to events and people who are significant to God dealing with His people.

7. Since any book, section, passage or verse in the Bible also makes up a larger book—the Bible, which itself has unity and continuity—it is essential that this larger context be taken into account before attempting to apply the message today. Once the author's intended meaning of a text is clearly understood, a biblical text must be placed in the whole canon in order to see clearly its full message and implications for a contemporary audience.

8. All of the above presuppositions are natural to the way we all communicate. At times they may lead to difficult study patterns and point to needed research, but if churches and believers approach the reading of Scripture with an open mind and normal communication processes, these presuppositions enable us to understand the basic message almost instinctively. Our interpretations however, as

instinctive as they might be, ought to be carefully validated in community under the leadership of mature pastors and elders.

APPENDIX II: PROCEDURES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING THE MEANING OF A BIBLICAL TEXT

1. *Begin by determining the function of the book in the Biblical canon, and the intention of the author in writing the book.*

   a. Begin by addressing the function of the book in the Biblical canon. Unless we have a basic grasp of these divisions and their purposes in the life of the nation of Israel or the early church, it is difficult to understand their meaning as intended by the original authors and accepted by the people of God to whom they were written. This can be accomplished by both carefully reading the books of the division in which the book you are studying is found and by referring to a sound Bible encyclopedia or dictionary for basic information on the structuring of the Jewish Old Testament Canon and the New Testament writings of the early church.

   Canonical divisions:
   Old Testament:
   - The Law
   - The Prophets
       1. the Former
       2. the Latter Prophets
   - The Writings
   New Testament:
   - The Synoptic Gospels
   - Acts and the Pauline Epistles
   - The General (Catholic, Jewish) Epistles
   - John's Writings

   b. Write a basic statement summarizing the author's intention, reasoned from the book itself, being careful not to speculate or postulate without good textual evidence. An excellent format for a statement would include a summary statement beginning with the preposition "To" followed by a set of subordinate statements each beginning with the word "by" which trace the argument or structuring of the text as it unfolds.

   Answer three basic questions:
   - What is the author talking about? (subject)
   - What is he saying about the subject? (complement)
   - Why does the author write? (purpose)

   Note: If the book is a compilation written by several authors (i.e. Psalms and Proverbs) just adjust the questions slightly:
   - What are the authors talking about? (subject)
   - What are the authors saying about the subject? (complement)
   - Why was the work compiled?
   - Are there introductory, structural, or arranging or concluding remarks that serve to give an overall purpose to the compilation?

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2. *Carefully, but simply, outline the book according to its literary design and structure.*

    a.   Become familiar with the literary compositions in the Scriptures. The biblical authors used literary forms to express their writings just as we do today when we write novels, poetry, letters, editorials, etc. Much research has been done to help us become aware of the structures of the day. However, much of what needs to be known about how the biblical authors structured their material can simply be learned from observing consistent patterns in all the books of a similar kind, such as the prophets or the early church letters.

       Types of literary composition designs (genres) in the Scriptures:
- Narrative
- Prophetic
- Apocalyptic
- Wisdom
- Hymnic
- Gospel
- Epistle

    b.   Design a literary outline which reflects the design of the entire book to show its general shape and structure, being careful to allow the literary genre to show its natural structure and beauty rather than forcing it into a typical three point outline.

       Note: Three resources:
- *The Modern Preacher and the Biblical Text: Interpreting and Teaching Biblical Literature*, by Sidney Greidanus
- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
- *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, by Elliott Johnson

3. *Carefully examine the key parts of the book (sections, passages, paragraphs, sentences, and words), paying attention to any particulars which seem to make a significant contribution or create problems.*

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    a.   Expand the literary outline in the section or passage you are examining in order to give you enough shape and specificity to record and visualize how the particulars (paragraphs, sentences, phrases and words) fit into the overall intended meaning and structure of the book. Note: If done well, this will come close to being adequate for a teaching or preaching outline.

    b.   Examine in detail all the key parts of the section or passage that you are studying, being careful to fit each particular logically into the author's overall intended meaning for the book. In the traditional grammatical-historical method, which has been dominant since the Reformation, all the particulars are examined in a very methodical manner, which includes sentence diagramming

and looking up all the words. This can often be very time consuming and leads to frustration, because you can't see the forest for the trees. We are recommending that your skills be sharp in all types of analysis that can be brought to bear on the text and then, use a reasoning process that avoids examining the obvious, but focuses on particulars (paragraphs, sentences, phrases or words) that seem to be rich in meaning, pivotal in the argument, or difficult to understand.

To determining the meaning of a "particular," use what E.D. Hirsch calls "genre-logic," following the simple formula listed below:

- If the author's overall intended meaning is _____, and
- if the literary, grammatical, lexical, historical or cultural and antecedent theological research and analysis adds a possible range of meaning for the textual particular (paragraph, sentence, phrase, word),
- then the author's intended meaning for that particular must be_____ .

Types of research and analysis:
- Literary research and analysis: This analysis looks at smaller literary forms rather than the broad compositional design genres, which primarily include:
    (Note: Some of these literary forms will be quite extensive, yet they will fit in one of the larger biblical literary composition design genres listed in the previous section.)
    a. Ancient Near Eastern law and covenant forms
    b. Hebrew poetry and parallelism
    c. Types of Hebrew psalms
    d. Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature
    e. Hebrew prophetic sermon
    f. Parables
    g. Allegories
- Grammatical research and analysis: This analysis and research looks at the relationship of paragraphs to passages, of sentences to paragraphs, of phrases to sentences and of words to phrases. Key to this research: coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.
- Lexical research and analysis: This research and analysis looks at the semantical range of words, in other words, how many meanings does a dictionary list for this word and which one makes the most sense in this context.
(Note: This is complicated by the fact that the Old Testament is written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek; therefore, the range of options in the English equivalent may be quite different from the range on any given Hebrew or Greek word. Most decisions, however, can be made from the author's intended

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meaning of the book along with the section or passage context, while relying on a good translation of the Bible in one's own language. There are also many good Greek and Hebrew dictionaries (lexicons) and word study books now available for the English reader.

- Historical and cultural analysis: This research and analysis looks at historical and cultural references in the text and examines them first from any data given in the text, and then from any research and analysis tools such as Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, commentaries and any general reference works.

    (Note: While a study of the culture and historical setting of a given text can be of enormous value in understanding the text, one must be very careful not to reshape the meaning of the text from a fabrication of a historical and cultural issue not addressed or alluded to in the text.)

- Theological research and analysis: This research and analysis looks at any biblical passages, people, or events which are alluded to or quoted in the text (antecedent theology), which are necessary for understanding the text. One of the most common occurrences involves the use of a term which has taken on a specific theological meaning to the people of God who are being addressed in the text, and which has grown progressively in previous biblical texts. For an excellent treatment of this antecedent theological research and analysis see Walter Kaiser's "Theological Analysis," chapter six in *Toward An Exegetical Theology.*

c. Record all significant data in your expanded literary outline. This data will become the body of interpretive material that you can use to teach or preach the passage. Three criteria can help you decide what material to record in the outline:
- Is it rich in meaning?
- Is it pivotal in the argument?
- Is it difficult to understand or easily misunderstood?

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4. *Relate the message to a contemporary audience by using key insights, principles, and normative truths that are designed to guide the life of the church or believer.*

a. Note any changes between the audience originally addressed in the text and the contemporary churches or believers who are applying the message today. Has the change in covenants changed any ways that the passage might be applied?

b. Write all of your conclusions of how this text applies to churches or believers in a particular culture and era in statement form. Keep it to one long sentence, or at the most two to keep the propositional and guideline tone.

Types of propositional statements:
- The main message that lines up most closely with the author's overall intended meaning.
- Corollary (sub) messages that logically grow out of the main message and are addressed in the text.
  Theological truths that are reinforced or expanded from antecedent texts.
- Issues, contemporary subjects and problems which are not directly addressed in the text but are implicit in the stated messages of the text.
- Specific warnings or corrections that address things generally true of churches or believers in a particular culture or era and fall under the range of the author's intended meaning, yet are not specifically addressed as problems in the text but are of the same type as those addressed in the text.
- Apologetic data that helps reinforce and strengthen faith, as well as convince the unbelieving.

(Note: These statements become a significant part of what you preach or teach. If done well, the transition to leading a class discussion or preaching a sermon will be relatively easy. Explaining and expanding on a statement can easily make up half of a sermon and greatly add to its relevance