

# **Reformed University Fellowship**

## **Leading Bible Studies Conference**

### *Session 3: How To Study The Bible*

- I. The Universal Study Process.
  - A. Three basic parts.
    - 1. Observation.
      - a. What is there? What does it say?
      - b. Gathering the facts.
    - 2. Interpretation.
      - a. What do these facts mean?
      - b. Understanding the facts.
    - 3. Application.
      - a. What can/should we do now?
      - b. Profiting from our study.
  - B. Used in any field of study.
    - 1. Science.
    - 2. Literature.
    - 3. Farming.
    - 4. Construction.
    - 5. etc.
  - C. Real examples.
    - 1. Genetics.
      - a. Observe characteristics of human genes.
      - b. Interpret the data to find which gene produces insulin.
      - c. Apply this gene to a bacterium to produce large quantities of insulin for human consumption.
    - 2. Literature.
      - a. Observe all the ways Jane Austin portrays the clergy in her novels.
      - b. Interpret the data to draw conclusions about her view of the clergy.
      - c. Apply your finding to a senior thesis so you pass the course.
    - 3. Daily life.
      - a. Observe that the traffic light is red.
      - b. Interpret that to mean you should stop.
      - c. Apply your foot to the brake.
  - D. OIA is not so much a Bible study method, or even less the “RUF Bible Study Method” as it is a description of how we successfully relate to the world around us.
- II. Observation – What does it say?
  - A. Literary genre.
    - 1. Narrative (story).
      - a. History.
      - b. Parable.
      - c. Narrative is a series of events; the event is the main structural element.
    - 2. Discourse (command).
      - a. Epistles.
      - b. Sermons.
      - c. Proverbs.
      - d. Discourse is a series of propositions; the proposition is the main structural element.
    - 3. Poetry.
      - a. Psalms.
      - b. Prophets.
      - c. Song of Solomon.
      - d. Poetry is a series of images; the image is the main structural element.

- B. Observing narratives.
    - 1. Focus on the events.
    - 2. Look for the facts.
    - 3. Details: who, what, when, where, how.
    - 4. Clearly grasp the sequence of events.
    - 5. Notice the *stated* purpose or reason behind events.
    - 6. Notice the manner and method by which events occur.
  
  - C. Observing discourse.
    - 1. Focus on the propositions.
    - 2. Look for the literary relationships.
    - 3. Repetition of words and concepts.
    - 4. Contrast of words and concepts.
    - 5. Cause and effect.
    - 6. Progression of general to particular, particular to general.
    - 7. Note the particular words chosen.
    - 8. Note the structure of the sentences and the whole passage.
  
  - D. Observing poetry.
    - 1. Focus on the images.
    - 2. Look for the parallelism.
    - 3. Repetition.
    - 4. Contrast.
    - 5. Comparison.
    - 6. Notice the use of metaphors, similes, and personification.
    - 7. Note the canonical use of the images.
    - 8. Note how the images are arranged to create the whole picture.
  
  - E. General observation.
    - 1. Each genre will make some use of the characteristic elements of the others.
      - a. Narratives will contain repeated and contrasted words and ideas, and will use metaphors to describe people and events.
      - b. Discourse passages will use events and poems to illustrate and reinforce propositions.
      - c. Poetry will have historical events and propositions as their subjects.
    - 2. The basic genre of a passage is determinative in interpreting it.
      - a. Exodus and Numbers, not Psalm 106, determine the sequence of events in Israel's departure from Egypt.
      - b. Psalms determines how we ought to respond to that event.
    - 3. Always note the author and original audience, including their cultural setting.
    - 4. Always note references to other parts of scripture.
- III. Interpretation – What does it mean?
- A. The goal of interpretation.
    - 1. To discover the main point of the passage.
    - 2. Not to decode secret messages or to clear up all possible ambiguities.

- B. Examine the parts: events, propositions, images.
    - 1. What is the overall meaning of this event, proposition, or image?
    - 2. Narrative interpretation.
      - a. Why did he do \_\_\_\_\_?
      - b. Why did \_\_\_\_\_ happen?
      - c. Why were \_\_\_\_\_ involved?
      - d. Was this event good or bad?
      - e. Why did the author include this event?
    - 3. Discourse interpretation.
      - a. Why was this word used?
      - b. Why was the sentence written this way?
      - c. Why did the author include this statement?
    - 4. Poetry interpretation.
      - a. Why is this metaphor/simile/personification used here?
      - b. What does the parallelism show us?
      - c. What response does this image evoke?
      - d. Why did the author include this image?
  - C. Examine the relationship between the parts (within the passage).
    - 1. How are these events/statements/images connected to each other?
      - a. Repetition? Contrast? Intensification? Conclusion? Progression?
    - 2. What is the meaning of this repetition/contrast/etc.?
    - 3. Narrative: what events caused other events?
    - 4. Discourse: what propositions implied other propositions?
    - 5. Poetry: how do these images create a whole picture?
  - D. Draw conclusions about the whole (passage).
    - 1. What is the meaning of the whole passage?
    - 2. Make a tentative conclusion.
    - 3. Test it against your initial conclusions (See III. A. and B.)
    - 4. Modify tentative conclusion.
    - 5. Test it again.
    - 6. Adopt final conclusion about the meaning of the whole passage.
    - 7. This is the author's *main theme* of the passage.
- IV. Application – How does it apply to me?
- A. New things to believe and remember – about God, man, the world, the church, etc.
  - B. New things to do.
  - C. Specific plan of obedience.
- V. Last words.
- A. Narrative passages tell us what other people did; they do not tell us what to do – we must figure out from the story which principles to apply to our lives.
    - 1. Luke 10:29-37 – What happened: Samaritan cared for the wounded traveler.
    - 2. Possible application – Help those stranded along the road.
  - B. Discourse passages tell us in general what to do – we are left to decide the specifics of applications.
    - 1. Romans 13:1 – General command: obey authorities.
    - 2. One specific – Pay your taxes.
  - C. Poetic passages paint pictures; they are more evocative than instructive, yet they do contain some commands – we must think about where we fit into the picture.
    - 1. Psalm 1 – Picture: The righteous are a strong tree, the unrighteous are chaff.
    - 2. Application – Are you righteous or unrighteous; fruitful or worthless?