

**The Inscrutable Question: Interpretation: Conservative Hermeneutics: Literal vs. Letterism;
Illumination: GAP, 1 Cor 2:9-14**

- 16) The second important concept to know about conservative hermeneutics is its principle of “literal interpretation.” First of all *literal* interpretation must first be distinguished from *letterism* a problem found in the rabbinical system of hermeneutics.

Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 47-48:

The major weakness of their system was the development of a hyperliteralism or a *letterism*. This was based on a belief that *nothing* in Scripture was superfluous. Further, because the Bible was given of God the interpreter could expect numerous meanings in the text. The combination of these two principles led to the fantastic interpretations of the rabbis. The errors were then compounded by the enormous authority given to tradition.

Each letter of a word was made to stand for another word. They endowed words with numerical values which became grounds for arbitrary and odd associations of verses. Let the modern student who wishes to play with the numbers of the Bible first read what the Jews did and so learn moderation and restraint.

There is one major lesson to be learned from rabbinical exegesis: the evils of *letterism*. In the exaltation of the very letters of the Scripture the true meaning of the Scripture was lost. The incidental is so exaggerated as to obscure the essential.

- 17) The concept of *literal* interpretation is often assumed by its critics to mean *letterism* applied by conservative theologians to the New Testament Scripture. Dr. Ramm, however, gives a clear explanation on pages:

Ibid. 119-122:

We use the word “literal” in its dictionary sense: ‘... the natural or usual construction of a writing; following the ordinary and apparent sense of words; not allegorical or metaphorical’ (*Webster’s New International Dictionary*). It was particularly the allegorical use of the Old Testament that the Reformers objected to, and the manner in which Roman Catholic dogma was re-enforced by allegorical interpretation. Hence the “literal” directly opposes the “allegorical.”

The accusation so frequent in current theological literature that Fundamentalism is a *literalism* is not at all what we have in mind when we use the word “literal.” The word is ambiguous. To some scholars the word “literal” means “letterism” and this is really what they mean when they say Fundamentalists are literalists. Ordinarily we think that the word “bear” means an animal in its literal sense; and that a speculator in the stock market who is called a “bear” is a bear by metaphor. But if the population uses the word “bear” three times more frequently for the stock speculator than for the animal then the literal meaning of “bear” is the stock speculator.

Associating certain words with such things as nouns, verbs, and adjectives is called *designation*. Every language represents a certain system of designation. Language also reflects several levels of designation. Ordinarily conversation reflects several levels of designation. Ordinary conversation reflects popular, ordinary, common-sense designation; a learned lecture on physics represents a technical designation; a poem represents metaphorical designation. The word “literal” in the theory of hermeneutics implies an understanding of this process of designation. It takes as the primary range of designation the customary, the usual, the socially-acknowledged designations. Thus the literal meaning of a word is its designation in the common stock of the language.

The spiritual, mystical, allegorical, or metaphorical usages of language reflect layers of meaning built on top of the literal meanings of a language. To interpret Scripture literally is not to be committed to a "wooden literalism." Rather, it is to commit oneself to a starting point and that starting point is to understand a document the best one can in the context of the normal, usual, customary, tradition range of designation.

This is not *letterism* which fails to recognize nuances, plays on words, hidden metaphors, or figures of speech. Nor is it the alleged "wooden literalism" which is supposed to characterize orthodox, Fundamentalist, or conservative hermeneutics. This is a continuation of the hermeneutics of the Reformers.

- 18) Finally this point on the principle of biblical interpretation. It is supplied by Angus and Green in their *Cyclopedic Handbook to the Bible*:

The Spirit does not communicate to the mind of even a teachable, obedient, and devout Christian, any doctrine or meaning of Scripture which is not *contained already in Scripture itself*. The Spirit makes men wise *up to* what is written, not beyond it.

- 19) **Illumination**: This is the activity and administration of the Holy Spirit during the Church Age in which He teaches the supernatural information of divine revelation to the individual He indwells and fills.
- 20) Illumination is the ministry of the Holy Spirit under the Grace Apparatus for Perception. This spiritual system of didactics for the Church Age is the subject of:

1 Corinthians 2:9 - As it stands written, "Things which the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard [**knowledge gained through empiricism**], also those things which have not entered into the mind of man [**knowledge gained through rationalism**], are those things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

v. 10 - But to us God has revealed them through the Holy Spirit. For the human spirit [**imputed at salvation to process divine thought**] investigates all things, even the deep things of God.

v. 11 - For what man understands the things of man except man's spirit within him [**human systems of perception that attain academic understanding of the mundane**]? Even so the things of God [**supernatural information unknown to man and imperceptible by the human mind**] no one has known except the Holy Spirit.

v. 12 - But we have not received the world's spirit [**human IQ**] but the human spirit from the source of God in order that we might have a permanent knowledge [**οἶδα / oida** : **to discern spiritual phenomena**] of things that have been graciously given to us under the authority of God.

v. 13 - Which things we teach, not by teaching from the source of man's wisdom but by teaching [**διδασκός / didaktos** : **the Divine Academy of Grace Didactics**] from the source of the Holy Spirit, bringing together spiritual truth [**πνευματικός / pneumatikos** : **masculine, biblical truth**] to a spiritual system [**πνευματικός / pneumatikos** : **neuter, GAP**].

v. 14 - The soulish man [ψυχικός / *psuchikos* /: the dichotomous unbeliever with a soul but no human spirit] does not accept things from the Holy Spirit for to him they are foolishness, furthermore, he is not able to even acquire academic understanding [γνῶσις / *gnosis* /: academic understanding of biblical truth] because they are spiritually discerned [ἀνακρίνω / *anakrino* /: the Holy Spirit sheds light for the believer to examine, scrutinize, and decide, i.e., illumination].

- 21) From this passage we developed the visual, the Grace Apparatus for Perception: www.gdcmedia.org/visuals/gap.rtf

The Bible, Λόγος / *Logos* / provides divine thought thorough **inspiration**. The pastor, through conservative hermeneutics, **interprets** what the Holy Spirit has directed the human authors to write. He then communicates this to his assigned flock.
- 22) The Holy Spirit takes the information and teaches, διδάκτος / *didaktos* /, the truths of the Logos to the believer's human spirit which investigates the information by consulting his frame of reference, vocabulary, and doctrinal storage. The information taught and being processed is called spiritual phenomena, πνευματικός / *pneumatikos* /.
- 23) Once spiritual phenomena have been discerned in the human spirit, οἶδα / *oida* /, it is transferred to the soul's mentality for evaluation. The staging area for learning divine truth is the νοῦς / *nous* /, which is translated in the English by the words "mind" and "understanding."
- 24) This is academic understanding, γνῶσις / *gnosis* /, of spiritual phenomena. The soul has been **illuminated** to a certain principle of divine thought. The information is coordinated with the association cortex of the brain where short-term memory enables the believer to examine, evaluate, and scrutinize the information.
- 25) He has clear and lucid academic understanding of the truth and its veracity can be spiritually discerned, ἀνακρίνω / *anakrino* / enabling him to make a decision to believe or reject what has been taught.
- 26) When any spirit-filled believer places his faith in the content of the message communicated under this system, the doctrine is supernaturally transferred by the Holy Spirit into the division of soul's mentality called the καρδιά / *kardia* /.
- 27) It is here that academic understanding is retained in the seven compartments of the stream of consciousness as ἐπίγνωσις / *epignosis* /, cognizance of divine thought. The Holy Spirit retains the information in the memory center of the stream of consciousness.
- 28) In addition the Holy Spirit also creates a memory trace, or wheel-track of righteousness, in the cerebral cortex of the brain where the believer retains the information in long-term memory for recall and application at a future time.
- 29) **Illumination** results in enlightenment regarding God's Word and contributes to the believer's spiritual growth which enhances the life and energy to the believer's spiritual walk.