

Principle Faith: Genesis One

Part 1

Our Purpose: Following the directives of the great commandments, our purpose is to honor and glorify God through heart, soul, strength and mind, and to do so in a way that demonstrates love for others and self and the same time.

Our study will focus specifically on honoring God by reading, studying and grasping salient principles within its message that will help us understand the Bible, understand our relationship to God and others, and, more importantly, help us love, honor and glorify God more diligently in our lives.

Our Goal: To examine the first eleven chapters of Genesis during the quarter, looking for, explaining, and applying the principles we find.

Introduction: (1) Types of Commentaries

There are several types of commentaries that we usually consult in our study of God's word.

First, are those commentaries that are usually a verse-by-verse, thought-by-thought study of the biblical text. They typically explain the thought processes, lessons and applications present in a specific passage, often in light of, and through comparison with, the context of other books, chapters and verses in the biblical text.

Second, are specialized commentaries that address specific sub-disciplines of biblical studies. These commentaries might be background commentaries, studies of people places and events discussed within the Bible text itself, but presented in such a way that no attempt is made at explaining the thought processes and lessons as presented in traditional commentaries following the biblical text. Others specialized commentaries might address the geographical background of the text, and yet others might examine the political, economic and cultural milieu.

Third, there are specialized commentaries that provide an in depth investigation of the lexical and grammatical structure of the biblical text. Words studies, usually addressing finer points of origin, etymology and usage in contemporary literature of key biblical terms, as well as grammatical and syntactic studies are presented in these commentaries.

As valuable as these commentaries are, our approach will be vastly different. Our attempt is to analyze *principles* that lie behind the biblical text, that give the biblical text the meaning that we can, and often do, derive through an implicit (and sometimes unconscious) understanding of the principles themselves. It is not necessary to examine a traditional commentary, a specialized commentary on the Bible background, or one focusing on the original language analysis in order to grasp these principles.

To some extent, in fact, in large measure, these principles are axiomatic. An axiom is "a statement or proposition that is regarded as being established, accepted, or self-evidently true." To say that some principle is axiomatic is to assume that it is unquestionable, or self-evident. In mathematics, for instance, we find many such principles/axioms:

If equals are added to equals, the sums are equal.

If equals are taken from equals, the remainders are equal.

The whole is greater than any of its parts.

The whole is equal to the sum of all its parts.

Our study will involve reading, thinking and studying our way through specific sections of the biblical text, in this case the early chapters of Genesis, in order to find these principles. What we want to do, as we will presently note, is to find those principles that are essential to the meaning of the biblical text as the text itself presents them, not as we attempt to impose them on the text.

Introduction: (2) The Pentateuch & The Existence of God

Every conscientious bible expositor knows that you must not attempt to get a meaning out of the text that was never there. What it meant determines what it means. Examining the writings of Moses in light of arguments for the existence of God, for example, can become somewhat of a dubious enterprise, not because the Pentateuch does not address the issue, but rather because it addresses the matter in a way foreign to our contemporary apologetic methods.

The apologetic assumption we operate under colors, sometimes even blurs, distorts and obscures, how we should do apologetics. Peter instructs us to be ready to give an answer (*apologia*, 1 Pet 3:15), but this does not demand that we must be *experts* in defending and proving God's existence, biblical inspiration or Christ's deity. Nor does it demand that our readiness to answer be *limited* to those areas. Though our understanding of the nature and purpose of apologetics always seems to exclusively connect those topics to the enterprise, it need not be exclusively understood that way. And, more often than not, this overly narrow perspective does not square with the apologetics anticipated within the biblical text itself. Apologetics, biblically speaking, must be much more generally, and naturally, understood.

And so it is with the first five books of the old testament, often styled the Torah (i.e., law or instruction). Moses did not specifically write Genesis through Deuteronomy to provide Christian-evidence-type instruction for contemporary Christians. Nor did he write to provide apologetics, as we often depict it, for the existence of God and the integrity of the biblical text for his contemporary audience. This does not mean that Mosaic writings do not address these matters. They do. But the *primary* purpose behind the law was not the type of apologetic that we often envision.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy were first written by Moses to, and for, his contemporaries. Though they have application for future generations, even for us today (cf. Rom 4:24), their design was to connect the nation of Israel with God's grandest purpose. That purpose centered in Christ and was ultimately designed to manifest itself in both mankind's salvation and God's glorification. How that purpose and plan unfolded occupies the entire old testament, not just the first five books. But those first books were essential to establish the beginning and the connections for what would be the greater story. The Genesis accounts of how it all started, though filled with information that relates to our narrower apologetic viewpoint, were recorded to *show Israel their place in the divine system*. That system, including the seed promises, Abraham covenant and Mosaic law, all culminated in the Christ, the solution to the problem of sin.

In another setting, the Athenians needed to know about God's existence and nature. It's not surprising, then, that Paul started there (cf. Acts 17). But, like Peter in Acts 2, Moses did not need to provide arcane arguments for the existence of God to his Jewish audience. This does not demand that we know nothing about traditional apologetics from Genesis through Deuteronomy. It simply means that their apologetic perspective does not square *exactly* with ours. The primary apologetic, or purpose, as noted earlier, was to show their place in God's divine system. That purpose assumed elements of our contemporary apologetic enterprise, but it is always secondary, not primary to Israel's needs.

Introduction: (3) Thinking About Principles

1. What is (a) principle?
 - a. A principle is a foundational truth or premise upon which we build beliefs, practices and explanations.
 - b. “Principle Faith: Genesis” will be a study of key biblical principles in light of how they generate and strengthen faith, reflect God’s nature and glory and build a case for all things spiritual.
 - c. Biblical principles:
 - i. reflect the existence/nature of God
 - ii. indicate God’s connection with the overall biblical theme
 - iii. demonstrate divine providence
 - iv. illustrate how tightly organized the “scheme” of redemption really is

2. How do we recognize (a) principle?
 - a. Examine the context
 - b. Determine whether or not the it “assumes” (presupposes) an underlying principle, stated or unstated.
 - c. Is there something that the context absolutely demands we understand prior to, and in order to, understand the context itself?

3. Starting Principles
 - a. The existence of the Bible itself, assumes several foundational principles, even before we read the first verse.
 - b. It assumes that the existence of the Bible is a “given” (i.e., self-evident)
 - c. It assumes that someone exists to read it
 - i. it assumes basic principles of communication theory (A → B with referent C in mind; see below)
 - ii. it assumes that it can be read, and to some extent at least, be understood
 - d. it assumes that it came from somewhere/someone
 - i. its existence must be accounted for
 - ii. it assumes, given its claims, that God communicates, cares, reveals, shares, loves, etc.
 - iii. it assumes that God has a “plan” (purpose)
 - e. concerning communication specifically, the Bible assumes that:
 - i. God can communicate
 - ii. God has communicated
 - iii. God communicates with something (man)
 - iv. God’s communication is intelligible/understandable to man (because God made man for this purpose)
 - v. God’s communication has something to say to man
 1. that is beneficial to man
 2. that is beneficial to man
 3. that directs, instructs man
 4. that relates to God’s existence
 5. that relates to God’s nature
 6. that relates to God’s purpose

Class Assignment:

Before the next class, read through the first chapter of Genesis several times looking for key principles that are “built in” to the text itself. List as many of those principles as you can and be prepared to discuss them at the beginning of the class.

After class discussion next week, we will examine some core principles from the text in a more “formal” way.