

## 5

# DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND SCIENCE

The similarities between the historical-critical revolution and revolutions in natural science might make us wonder whether sheer obtuseness has prevented Evangelicals from accepting the whole historical-critical package. It is important, however, that a significant number of people reject the historical-critical method. There is a reason for this rejection, however illogical and irrational it may appear to people who adhere to the reigning method.

### WHAT COUNTS AS SUPERIOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION?

We may assess what makes a particular disciplinary matrix superior by following the logic of Kuhn's analysis of scientific revolutions. Kuhn does not merely assert that a revolution happens when a new disciplinary matrix displaces an old one. He shows why and how this revolution takes place in a community of scientists. First, a growing number of anomalies arise that are seen as important, and a growing number of researchers devote their energies to solving the anomalies within the existing disciplinary matrix. As attention is concentrated on anomalies, more and more are discovered. If repeated attempts to deal with the anomalies produce solutions that are

less than satisfactory, some researchers begin to explore more radical alternatives. Variants of the disciplinary matrix arise. Then some researcher, typically one new to the field, finds a fundamentally new way of looking at some of the anomalies. Even though this new way is incompatible with parts of the reigning disciplinary matrix, it seems to have some promise. As it is developed into a full-blown theory, it eventually proves superior in explaining the anomalies, is able to explain most of the phenomena explained by the old theory, and above all suggests a whole pattern of research that shows promise of uncovering and explaining large bodies of additional phenomena that the old theory could not handle. When the new theory begins to show itself superior in this way, more and more scientists in the field get on the bandwagon.

However, Kuhn notes that, in the earlier stages of the revolution, the new theory may not allow quantitative explanation any better than the old one did. Copernicus's sun-centered astronomy did not at first provide quantitative predictions any more accurate than Ptolemy's. At the beginning it is not easy to decide which approach is superior, because people are trying to guess how well the alternative approaches will solve problems in the future. Typically there is no one point in time when one can say that now, and not before, the new theory is decisively proved and the old one refuted.<sup>1</sup>

Now let us take this approach to the revolution introduced by the historical-critical method. Was this method, as a disciplinary matrix, superior to the older approach of reading the Bible as a harmonious source of doctrine? In what way is it superior? What problems did it promise to solve better?

The proponents of the historical-critical method might have listed the following benefits:

1. It offered the promise of superseding the old doctrinal disputes by providing an objective standard for interpretation.

<sup>1</sup>See the similar observations in Lakatos, *Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*.

2. It abandoned belief in the supernatural, which was an embarrassment in the age of reason.
3. It promised to explain, rather than gloss over, differences, tensions, and "contradictions" between parallel passages.
4. It promised to give insight into the history of each text's origin.

The last point is particularly important, because the cultural atmosphere was moving toward the view that, in human affairs, historical explanation was the correct, satisfying type of explanation to seek.<sup>2</sup>

Point (2) and, in part, point (4) touch on philosophical and cultural influences that did not affect all biblical interpreters equally. Similar philosophical influences can be found during scientific revolutions. In times of extraordinary science, people's evaluations of anomalies and alternative theories are often influenced by philosophy and other cultural forces.

From the standpoint of theologians who were firmly committed to the supernatural, point (2) made the historical-critical method inferior, not superior. But why were some people firmly committed to the supernatural, and why should this commitment be any different than firm commitments that some scientists have to elements within the old, prerevolutionary disciplinary matrix?

Here we touch on at least one important difference between natural science and biblical interpretation. Biblical interpretation has things to say more directly about human life and about the life of the individual practicing interpreter as a whole person. Religious commitments are some of the deepest commitments that people have. People have emotional investments in their religion that often exceed the investments they have in a vocational interest such as doing research or doing science. Hence they more vigorously resist giving up these commitments.

<sup>2</sup>See James Barr, "The Interpretation of Scripture, II. Revelation Through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology," *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 193-205.

How, then, do we rate the relative potentials of various approaches to studying the Bible? Evidently one factor in our evaluation should be a requirement that biblical interpretation say something about what we should believe and not merely do research on the Bible and on ancient religion. The historical-critical method, within the twentieth century, has now come under criticism from within for its failure to produce from its researches anything preachable. Many opponents as well as a few proponents of the historical-critical revolution saw this problem from the beginning.<sup>3</sup>

The requirement, then, that research on the Bible eventually relate to the needs of the church was unlike the requirements within a discipline of natural science. Not surprisingly, more radical representatives of the historical-critical method called for a complete separation from the church in order to achieve scientific status. But too many biblical scholars were interested in the Bible partly because of its personal, existential value. The pure separation may have been an ideal for the historical-critical method, but it was never achieved.

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD: A FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND SCIENCE

But we have still not penetrated quite to the heart of the matter. The Bible claims to be what God says.<sup>4</sup> Within the

<sup>3</sup>Opponents of the historical-critical method were, of course, well aware of the antisupernatural bias of the method and saw that it would leave us without a supernatural gospel. But even some proponents like Troeltsch saw the implications: the method guaranteed the dissolution of orthodox doctrinal Christianity as it had existed up to that time (see Troeltsch, "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode").

<sup>4</sup>This claim is, of course, disputed by many adherents to the historical-critical method. Occasionally, however, one can find critics admitting that some parts of the Bible do have similar claims. The critics, on their part, simply disagree with the claims. See F. C. Grant, *Introduction to New Testament Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950), p. 75; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948), pp. 115, 175-77, 423-24.

precritical disciplinary matrix, people heard God speaking to them as they read the Bible. All of the Bible testified that what God said could be trusted and that it ought to be trusted, even in situations that seemed to throw doubts on it. God was the Lord. Obedience to Him, including trusting what He said, was a supreme religious duty. Whenever conflicts arose, the apostles' priority was clear: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). This commitment ruled out sifting, criticizing, doubting, or contradicting any part of what the Bible said. Moreover, it ruled out rejecting miracles or the supernatural aspects of the world, to which the Bible clearly testified. In a word, it ruled out the historical-critical method from the beginning. Conversely, the historical-critical method ruled out true biblical religion from its beginning.

Two things must be noticed about this process. First, the Bible made supreme claims about its own authority. People adhering to biblical religion had religious and emotional investments in it in ways formally similar to the emotional investments of non-Christians in non-Christian religions or the investments of Enlightenment secularists in humanism or rationalism. But biblical religion (and ultimately non-Christian religions and secularist idolatries as well) requires supreme loyalty and supreme emotional commitment. Hence the refusal to give up one's religion, seen from the outside as stubbornness in the face of facts, is, from the inside, loyalty in the face of temptation to treason. By their very nature, supreme loyalties or basic commitments are supreme. They do not tolerate rivals.<sup>5</sup> The Bible requires adherents to biblical religion, if necessary, not merely to suffer intellectual puzzlement and dissatisfaction at not having key answers, scorn for being unscholarly, or loss of vocation by being ostracized, but to submit even to torture and death for the sake of being loyal to God. In short, the commitments to biblical religion are more serious than any scientific commitment could be.

<sup>5</sup>For elaboration, see John M. Frame, "God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. John W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 159-77.

Second, people really did hear God speaking in the Bible. Or (as a skeptic would say) they thought that they did. The historical-critical method ignored from the outset the heart of the Bible, because it ignored, and in effect denied, this experience. But not everyone who read the Bible had this same experience. Different people, looking at the same Bible, heard different things. Naturally this discrepancy produced a division within scholarship. Scholars who heard God refused to follow the historical-critical method. Whatever its other advantages, the historical-critical method had a crucial disadvantage: it falsified the whole nature of the field to be investigated. Scholars who did not hear God embraced the historical-critical method because, whatever its current unsolved problems, it approached the Bible at last without the old dogmatic commitments.

Of course, things were a bit more complex. Some people who once thought that the Bible was God's Word and that they heard God speaking to them in its words later came, under the influence of the debate, to reinterpret their experience. Some people who once did not hear God in the Bible, under the same influences, later came to realize that He was speaking those words.

What do we make of this situation? I agree with the explanation found in the Bible itself. Two forces, two persuasive powers, are at war with one another in human hearts.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes the forces exert themselves in the clamor of popular debate, sometimes in the cultural atmosphere and world view of a society, sometimes in the careful arguments of scholars, sometimes in the appeals of orators, and sometimes in the quietness of individuals alone, weighing their own desires and hunches. God the Holy Spirit is one force, testifying to the truth. The sinful human heart is the other force, desiring to be like God, to reach its conclusions independent of all other

<sup>6</sup>Christians and non-Christians participate in spiritual war in fundamentally different ways, since they belong to opposite kingdoms (1 John 5:19). But neither Christians nor non-Christians are consistently loyal to their own side. Christians give in to sin and Satanic temptation, while non-Christians do not escape the knowledge of God and of good (Rom. 1:20, 32).

authority. And this sinfulness is the platform for the seductions of Satan and his preternatural assistant demons.

Some people, but not all, come to new birth by the Holy Spirit. When their hearts are enlightened, they see and hear in a way that other people, bound in sin, do not see and hear. In principle, this change may affect all of life, because all of life belongs to God. But obviously some areas and aspects of life touch more closely on people's obedience to God or to Satan. Studies of humanity are, on the average, closer to the issues of the heart than are studies of subhuman nature. Studies of the Bible, the Word of God, are typically closer to the heart of the matter than studies of economics or sociology.

#### KUHN'S RELEVANCE IN THE MIDST OF THE DIFFERENCES

It would seem, then, that biblical interpretation is different from natural sciences. Some of its differences it shares with social sciences, or with any kind of research that studies some aspect of human experience. Other differences arise because it touches on basic commitments and on the heart of the spiritual conflict in this world.

In spite of such differences, Kuhn uncannily describes the situation in a scientific revolution in a way reminiscent of religious conversion. Revolutions are "changes of world view," which "cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently."<sup>7</sup> To demonstrate this claim, Kuhn finds it useful to distinguish between "stimuli," the physical forces impinging on the human body, and "sensations," the items we are actually aware of. The stimuli are the same, but the sensations are the same only for people who have had the same upbringing and education. Changes in world view affect the manner in which we interpret the stimuli. To this observation I might add that most people, myself included, do not experience sensations either, if this word connotes in a

<sup>7</sup>Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 111. See further pp. 111-35, 191-207.

narrow way bits of experience associated each with a single sensory apparatus, cleanly isolated from everything else. Only people influenced by an empiricist world view learn to isolate sense bits from a holistic human experience of wholes. Others with a different world view know that we experience a unified world. We experience God as well, since created things testify to Him (Rom. 1:21; Ps. 19:1-6).

Whatever one might say about world views in general (and it is worth reflecting on Kuhn's views on this subject), Kuhn's observations fit the situation introduced with the rise of the historical-critical method. Practitioners of the method and opponents of the method did not see the same thing when they examined the Bible. One saw a human product of the social evolution of religious ideas. The other saw God speaking. Their methods of investigation were correspondingly different.

Actually, in the history of interpretation there are not merely two interpretive positions, one a thoroughgoing historical-critical method and the other a thoroughgoing belief in all the Bible's claims because of its divine authority. Many people struggled to find intermediate positions that accepted the historical-critical method as one means of attaining a more accurate knowledge of a uniquely "inspired" but fallible biblical message. Others claimed to follow the historical-critical method wholeheartedly but introduced extra religious or philosophical assumptions of their own. Others in the Fundamentalist camp maintained the full authority of the Bible but denied the profitability of scholarly reflection. In a sense the anomalies generated by the Enlightenment crisis of Christian faith and autonomous reason generated not two disciplinary matrices but a whole spectrum.

## 6

# DISCIPLINARY MATRICES IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

It is time now to take stock of what we have observed about biblical interpretation as an academic discipline.

## THE DYNAMICS OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

I note first that there are communities and subcommunities of people engaged in intensive intellectual reflection concerning biblical interpretation. I am not thinking here of the community of all members of a church or a denomination, whose concerns and interests are usually different from those interested in solving intellectual problems in biblical interpretation. I focus on communities consisting of scholars working on some common concerns and communicating with one another. A disciplinary matrix in biblical interpretation consists of the "constellation of group commitments" of such a community.<sup>1</sup> Unity within interpretive communities depends on just such a disciplinary matrix, a network of shared assumptions, methods, standards, and sources. Sometimes a particularly outstanding work in theology may set the pace for the future of theological reflection. Augustine's theology became the exemplar for the

<sup>1</sup>Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 181.

medieval period, and Calvin's theology became the exemplar for one post-Reformation school (Calvinism). At some times and places in the history of the church, a great deal of unity has existed; at other times, a number of competing schools have vied for dominance, each offering a somewhat different version of a preferred disciplinary matrix.

Over time, it is possible for one disciplinary matrix to be replaced by another. Such an event might be labeled an interpretive revolution or a theological revolution. The Reformation and the rise of the historical-critical method are examples of revolutions. The description of such revolutions can to a great extent follow the lines of Kuhn's description of scientific revolutions. In fact, Kuhn indicates that his own idea of revolution is originally borrowed from the history of other fields:

Historians of literature, of music, of the arts, of political development, and of many other human activities have long described their subjects in the same way. Periodization in terms of revolutionary breaks in style, taste, and institutional structure have been among their standard tools. If I have been original with respect to concepts like these, it has mainly been by applying them to the sciences, fields which had been widely thought to develop in a different way.<sup>2</sup>

We might expect this commonality simply because human communities interested in giving explanations in a field and solving the problems of the field are bound to behave in similar ways, whatever the field. If one line of explanation (one exemplar) seems promising, they stick with this line of explanation until they start having problems with it. Anomalies multiply. Then some more adventuresome souls tinker with the existing disciplinary matrix. If a resolution is not found, more radical alternatives are tried. If one of these seems to promise success, more and more people convert to the new alternative. A revolution thus begins. We have applied this analysis to both science and biblical interpretation.

I note, however, that revolutions in biblical interpretation

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

never seem to be as successful as those in science. A generation after Einstein's work, it is impossible to find a pure Newtonian. But it is still possible to find Augustinians, Thomists, and people who reject the historical-critical method.

### TYPES OF DISCIPLINARY MATRICES IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Revolutions in biblical interpretation, or changes in disciplinary matrix, can be more or less major, or radical, in character. Changing from medieval theology to Calvinism, or from Calvinism to Arminianism, represents a major change. But through the change some things remain similar. All three theologies agree that the Bible is God's Word. What the Bible says, God says. The historical-critical revolution, in challenging the common assumption of all three of these theologies, represented a more radical revolution than a change from one to another of the three. Since the Bible was the primary source for theology, changing the status of the Bible and the way that it was investigated would radically change theology as a whole.

Moreover, the disciplinary matrix of a theological community includes a network of many different kinds of assumptions and values. We have summaries of theological truths in confessions and doctrinal statements. We have assumptions about the source of theological authority, whether authority is ascribed to the Bible, to experience, to doctrinal standards, to church tradition, or to some combination of these. We have assumptions about the methods to be used in interpreting the Bible, the relation of human authors to God, the relation of the Old and New Testaments, and so on. We have standards for the kinds of argumentative procedures to be used, such as the *Sic et Non* of Abelard, the syllogisms of Aristotle, or the logic of Petrus Ramus. We have assumptions about the responsibility of biblical interpreters to the church. We have assumptions about human nature and its ability to penetrate theological truth.

Conceivably, a minirevolution in biblical interpretation might touch one of these areas more than the others. Thus we might distinguish between hermeneutical revolutions, doctrinal

revolutions, and revolutions in authority. But since many revolutions in practice have touched to some degree on several of these areas at once, any classification is likely to be artificial.

It might be more fruitful to think of the size of the community that is revolutionized by a particular change. Today we can distinguish, at least in a rough and ready way, the subcommunities of Old Testament scholars, New Testament scholars, systematic theologians, church historians, homiletics, specialists in Christian education, specialists in counseling, missiologists, and the church at large. A change that was revolutionary within a given field might cause minor changes, but not revolution, in sister fields. Kuhn notes that the same is true in natural science.<sup>3</sup> Finally, we must remember that the change of a single individual from one disciplinary matrix to another is a kind of revolution for that person. For example, a Calvinist might become an Arminian, or an adherent of orthodox theology might turn to the historical-critical method. Kuhn calls this kind of personal revolution a conversion.<sup>4</sup> Obviously this type of conversion does have some epistemological similarity to religious conversion in the ordinary sense. But for the sake of clarity I will call this type of personal revolution an alternation.<sup>5</sup>

A religious conversion to Christianity is the most radical possible change. Such conversion affects one's whole world view. Even from a sociological or anthropological point of view, the change is more radical than changes of theology within the Christian faith. Moreover, we must say that the change is not merely intellectual, or even primarily intellectual. It involves a new set of beliefs, but it also involves a new life. Theologically speaking, we are dealing here with the religious root of human existence. Is a person for God or against Him? Is a person reconciled to God or still alienated? This question points to roots deeper even than a change of world view, since

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>5</sup>The term is from Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Society of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 157-61.

changes of world view can take place in a conversion from one non-Christian religion to another, or a transition (by either a non-Christian or a Christian) from tribal to modern Western culture.

The next most radical change is a change in world view. By *world view* I mean the network of assumptions, values, customs, and ways of coping with the world that are common to one's culture or subculture, held largely unconsciously. The final qualification here is important, for a world view is not simply a self-consciously adopted philosophy or theory of the world. It is what one assumes without realizing that one is even assuming it. A change from the supernatural world view of medieval society or the world view of a tribal society to the naturalistic, mechanistic world view of the modern West is such a change. It involves changes in self-consciously held beliefs, to be sure. But it involves changes also in things that one thought were impossible to change.

Less radical than changes in world view are changes of theological systems. Changes in theology from Roman Catholic to Protestant or from Arminian to Calvinist are examples. Such changes represent revolutions for a systematic theologian. For specialists in exegesis, changes in one's view of the historical setting or one's view of the author's genre and purpose would often have a sweeping effect analogous to a systematic theologian's change of dogmatic system. Changes in hermeneutical method might result in revolutions in either systematic theology or exegesis or both. In my opinion, exegesis and systematic theology belong together, in one large-scale project of understanding the Bible better. But in current scholarly practice, the two disciplines have their own distinctive subcultures, so that an analysis of patterns of development and revolution must to some extent treat the disciplines separately.

After changes in theological systems come changes in views on individual points—for example, changes in points of doctrine if one is a systematic theologian, or changes in interpretations of individual texts if one is an exegete. Many of these changes will not seem revolutionary. But many do still involve a kind of change of perspective, in which all the parts

get rearranged and are seen in a new way. For instance, consider someone who changes from interpreting the subject of Romans 7:14–25 as a regenerate person to interpreting it as someone who is unregenerate. Such a change involves a simultaneous alternation in one's understanding of nearly all the verses, of the verses' relations to one another, and of the relation of the passage to neighboring passages.

A similar kind of classification has already been suggested in the philosophy of science. After the appearance of the first edition of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Margaret Masterman endeavored to clarify Kuhn's multiple uses of the word *paradigm*.<sup>6</sup> Masterman distinguishes not less than twenty-one different senses. They all refer to clusters of beliefs of one kind or another, but she observes that they fall into three main categories.

In the first, broadest category are "metaphysical paradigms." These are the unquestioned presuppositions about the nature of the world. They are analogous to what we have called world views. A second, narrower category consists in "sociological paradigms," roughly what Kuhn later called disciplinary matrices. These are the specific assumptions and values in the background of a specific discipline. They are analogous to theological systems in systematic theology or hermeneutical systems in exegetical disciplines.

Third, there are "artifact" or "construct" paradigms, what Kuhn later calls exemplars. These are the specific scientific achievements, embodied in crucial theoretical advances and crucial experimental results supporting the theories. This third category is in some ways the most important for Kuhn, and it is also the one that tends to distinguish science from other academic disciplines. Exemplars that have been accepted as

<sup>6</sup>Margaret Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 59–90. See also the reflections in Douglas Lee Eckberg and Lester Hill, Jr., "The Paradigm Concept and Sociology: A Critical Review," in *Paradigms and Revolutions: Appraisals and Applications of Thomas Kuhn's Philosophy of Science*, ed. Gary Gutting (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp. 117–36.

models by an entire community of scientists have a key role in the puzzle-solving process that characterizes normal science.

Biblical interpretation has no exact analogy. Standard theological answers in specific areas of doctrine (such as the ancient creeds provided) and standard exegetical answers on specific texts are similar to exemplars in at least some ways. They are results to which people often refer back. However, they do not usually serve as a model for future research. The creedal formulations with respect to the doctrine of God have for the most part functioned as decisive formulations of a given point of doctrine, not as models of how theology is to be done in other areas. Each area of doctrine needs its own solution, and it is not clear how the solution in one area could serve as a model.

In a very few cases, however, one may find examples that come closer to being exemplars in a Kuhnian sense. Within the historical-critical method, the classic four-document hypothesis about the sources of the Pentateuch became something of an exemplar for how source criticism ought to be done on any book of the Bible. Scholarly work on the Pentateuch was expected to make advances by solving puzzles about particular texts on the basis of the overall framework provided by the four-document hypothesis. The work of Evangelicals was virtually excluded from this scholarly community of historical-critical scholarship in the Old Testament because Evangelicals would not work on the basis of this paradigm. Within the twentieth century, of course, we have seen the paradigm begin to break up under the weight of anomalies.

### KNOWLEDGE AS CONTEXTUALLY COLORED

Do all the types of changes considered above really have anything special about them? Why not just talk about changes in people and in their views? Kuhn would not have had anything original to say if he claimed only that science changes with time and that the views of scientists change. What makes Kuhn so interesting, and potentially fruitful, is his claim that knowledge does not always change by piecemeal additions and



subtractions. Human knowledge is not to be viewed as so many bits, added to the total sum of knowledge like so many marbles to a pile. Rather, what we know is colored by the framework in which we have our knowledge. This framework includes assumptions, values, procedures, standards, and so on, in the particular field of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Even what we see, or what seem to be the most elementary steps in knowledge or data that provide a basis for knowledge, are things seen and already to an extent organized in a way conditioned by our education, background, and experience. Kuhn discusses at some length a psychological experiment with anomalously marked playing cards (e.g., a black seven of hearts or a red three of spades).<sup>8</sup> When allowed to look at a card only for a short time, subjects saw what they thought were normal cards. When longer exposures were used, subjects often became emotionally upset or uneasy without becoming aware of the actual source of their unease. Another experiment with special glasses that inverted the visual field showed that, after a time of adjustment, subjects saw the world normally once again (even though their retinal images were the reverse of normal). Such experiments suggest a much more general principle, already anticipated in Gestalt psychology: understanding a part is influenced by understanding the whole. The influence may be subtle or radical. Knowledge is contextually conditioned.

This contextual conditioning easily explains why it is so notoriously difficult to argue someone into an alternation of the type considered in the previous section. For instance, as is well known, arguments aiming at religious conversion often do not succeed. Failures occur not merely because potential converts have deep emotional investments in religious views that they already hold but because they have difficulty integrating any particular argument offered them into their own full-fledged

<sup>7</sup>Kuhn is aware of the potentially radical character of his viewpoint; he speaks of anomalies within the "epistemological viewpoint that has most often guided Western philosophy for three centuries" (Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 126).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-64.

framework of knowledge, assumptions, standards, values, and the like. Judged by *their* standards, or by what they suppose that they know, the argument does not seem plausible.

For instance, to the modern materialist, as to the ancient Greek, claims about a resurrection from the dead are ludicrous (Acts 17:32). To the pantheist or animist, claims that the natural world reveals its Creator are missing the point. I do not say that no communication is possible, only that substantive communication takes discipline and patience.<sup>9</sup> One must make explicit the hidden assumptions behind the rejection of the Christian message.

Similarly, arguments between Arminians and Calvinists may easily become ineffective. To someone with an Arminian framework, the Calvinist claim that God decrees all things sounds like fatalism. Passages that appear to teach or imply God's decretal control must be interpreted otherwise, in view of the clear passages about human choice and responsibility on which Arminianism feels itself to be solidly based. Conversely, Arminian appeals to the passages on human responsibility do not move the Calvinist. Since clear passages on divine sovereignty have confirmed the Calvinist position, the passages on human responsibility must be understood as speaking of such responsibility within the framework of divine control. If we cannot resolve the relation of the two in our own mind, it does not mean that such a resolution is impossible for God.

As theological debaters have found out, appeal to a proof text does not always persuade the opponent. From the advocate's point of view, the implications of the proof text seem to be clear. But the opposing position, *as an entire framework for analysis and synthesis*, provides standard resources for handling problem texts.

### SEEING PATTERNS

We can illustrate some influences of contextual knowledge even at the level of interpreting an individual text. Let us return

<sup>9</sup>See analogous remarks in *ibid.*, pp. 200-204.

again to Romans 7:14–25. Historically, a large part of the debate has centered on two alternatives, the regenerate interpretation and the unregenerate interpretation. Behind this debate lurked an assumption commonly made by both sides, namely, that these two interpretations are the only alternatives. Such an assumption seems natural. Every person is either regenerate or not; hence, the passage must be speaking about one or the other. This assumption, then, functioned as part of the disciplinary matrix for reflection on the meaning of Romans 7:14–25. It was part of the context of knowledge informing the discussion of any details of the passage. Hence to establish one's own alternative, one had only to refute the other alternatives. One can see this pattern in commentaries up to this day. John Murray, for example, lists five main points in favor of the regenerate interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Four out of the five points include a remark to the effect that a given aspect of Romans 7:14–15 is impossible for an unregenerate person. These four points in effect presuppose the assumption that, if Romans 7:14–25 is inconsistent with an unregenerate person, it must be dealing with one who is regenerate.

Consider now the effect of introducing the second-blessing interpretation. This interpretation introduces a third option, and suddenly it is no longer so easy to establish one's own alternative. The alternatives that appeared to cover the field now no longer do. To say that a regenerate person is in view in Romans 7:14–25 is no longer enough. Murray, in fact, notes the existence of a third alternative, but then does not address the possibility that it may be correct.<sup>11</sup> Technically, the third alternative agrees with Murray that the passage considers one who is regenerate. But instead of being the regenerate person in general, it is more specifically a regenerate person who has lapsed from an ideal that is possible in this life. Hence, an argument that beforehand appeared to establish a solid case now reveals some crucial holes.

<sup>10</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:257–59.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 1:257 n. 19.

We can make the situation still more complicated by introducing still another view. According to D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the person of Romans 7:14–25 is “neither unregenerate nor regenerate.”<sup>12</sup> Lloyd-Jones's claim sounds contradictory, but what he actually has in view is perfectly sensible. He refers to “awakened sinners,” people who, under the influence of preaching, Bible reading, or other forms of contact with the Christian faith, have come to realize that they are guilty before a holy God. But these people have not yet understood the work of Christ and have not come to an assurance of forgiveness and death to sin. In theory, of course, such people would still be either regenerate or unregenerate in an absolute sense. But when we meet such people, we may not be able to tell which is the case. Moreover, such people do not match what we know of the typical unregenerate or the typical regenerate person.

Now suppose that one returns to Murray's commentary after hearing Lloyd-Jones's position. Murray's arguments, which before appeared solid, now seem dubious. Murray's interpretation may still be right in the end. But his whole argument is going to have to be rethought, because it apparently does not anticipate the possibility of Lloyd-Jones's interpretation. Murray's argument in effect assumes that Romans 7:14–25 cannot be describing personal characteristics intermediate between typical regenerate and typical unregenerate cases.

The alternative interpretations produced by second-blessing theology and by Lloyd-Jones are interesting because of the way in which they break up a previously established pattern of looking at the passage. People using this old pattern could not see that any other alternative was possible.

The second-blessing alternative presents, in a sense, a relatively mild challenge to the pattern. It says, “There indeed are regenerate and unregenerate people. The person spoken of in Romans 7:14–25 must be one or the other. But there may be further subdivisions within these basic types.” The arguments

<sup>12</sup>D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 4:256.

will then no longer proceed the same way in detail. A tension between Romans 7:14–25 and Romans 8, for example, has more than one solution if the former may be describing one type of regenerate person, and Romans 8, another type.

Lloyd-Jones's approach is more radical, because it partly denies the relevance of the regenerate/unregenerate contrast itself. According to Lloyd-Jones, Paul is not asking himself whether the person in question is regenerate or unregenerate. Paul is describing a psychological and spiritual state that cuts across the old categories. Its symptoms are intermediate between the symptoms usually characterizing regenerate people and those characterizing unregenerate people. Lloyd-Jones, one might say, is asking us to focus on a different question altogether. We should not ask, "Are they regenerate or unregenerate?" but, "What spiritual symptoms do they show in response to the law?" Lloyd-Jones has changed the debate by focusing on a cluster of spiritual symptoms rather than on the root of the process, namely whether or not the Holy Spirit has worked regeneration.

For a theologian, it seems so natural to go to the root of the matter immediately and ask about regeneration. Regeneration is the theologically important watershed, and so surely it must be the right question to ask here. To construe theological texts against the background of regeneration is, or was, part of the disciplinary matrix of doing theology.

But Lloyd-Jones did not take this step. Why not? One might wonder whether Lloyd-Jones discovered an alternative partly because of his previous experience in medicine. In medicine, the distinction between symptom and cause is common. Did Lloyd-Jones, then, find it natural to apply this distinction in a new field?<sup>13</sup> Kuhn points out that people coming from another discipline are more likely to make innovative steps.<sup>14</sup> They are not fully assimilated to the reigning disciplinary matrix.

<sup>13</sup>Lloyd-Jones's book, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), shows signs of the author's medical background.

<sup>14</sup>Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 90.

Despite Lloyd-Jones's paradoxical language ("neither unregenerate nor regenerate"), his distinction is not really a third category alongside regenerate and unregenerate. Rather, it superimposes another plane of discussion, the plane of spiritual symptoms in response to the law. This tack subtly alters the entire nature of the discussion and the use of Romans 7. Romans is not first of all a theological treatise or a classification; it is a kind of handbook for pastoral care.

People usually do not realize that this kind of shift of viewpoint is possible until they are shown. The whole history of interpretation may miss an important alternative interpretation simply because it includes a framework of assumptions in which some questions are asked (regenerate or unregenerate) and others are not (which symptoms does the spiritual patient show?).

The experience of interpreters of Romans 7 is indeed reminiscent of the psychological experiments with human vision to which Kuhn refers. To some extent, people see what their past experience has trained them to expect to see. The subjects in the psychological experiments, having been trained by experience to see red hearts and black spades, typically do not notice that a different category, a red spade, is before their eyes. They may even become emotionally upset over seeing a red spade. Similarly, interpreters of Romans 7 think only of the categories of regenerate and unregenerate even when other categories are possible in principle. And possibly, like the subjects in the psychological experiments, they become emotionally upset over the controversies that ensue in interpretation.

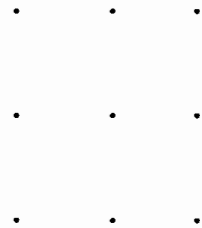
Some puzzles and riddles also offer suggestive analogies. In one riddle, people are told that Jim's father died in a car accident in which Jim was seriously injured. When Jim arrived at the hospital, the surgeon looked at him and said, "I cannot operate on him, because he is my son." People do not solve the riddle until they question the underlying assumption, based perhaps on generalization from their past experience, that the surgeon is a man, not a woman.

In another puzzle, a gardener is given the assignment of

planting four trees so that each tree is equidistant from each of the other three trees.<sup>15</sup> People do not solve the problem unless they question the assumption that the trees are planted on level ground. The problem can be solved by planting three trees on level ground at the vertices of an equilateral triangle and the fourth tree on a hill in the middle of the triangle.

As a final example, try to connect all nine dots of figure 2 by placing a pencil on one dot, and then drawing four straight lines without once raising the pencil from the paper. People solve the puzzle only when they question the natural (but unjustified) assumption that the line segments are not allowed to extend beyond the outermost dots.

Figure 2. Drawing Puzzle



In general, we may not see a possible solution to a riddle or a puzzle until we abandon a way of thinking that has become a rut. Likewise, in Bible study we may not see a possible interpretive alternative until we abandon familiar ways of thinking.

We are still not through with Romans 7:14–25. Herman Ridderbos advocates still a fifth approach to interpreting the passage.<sup>16</sup> According to Ridderbos, the basic contrast here is

<sup>15</sup>This and the following example are taken from Edward de Bono, *Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 94–95.

<sup>16</sup>Herman Ridderbos, *Aan de Romeinen* (Kampen: Kok, 1959).

not regenerate versus unregenerate, neither is it a contrast of symptoms of spiritual patients (for example, unawakened vs. awakened vs. at-home-with-Christ). It is the contrast of two ages, pre-Pentecost and post-Pentecost. Prior to the resurrection of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal power and presence, the people of God were bound under the law of Moses. Now they are “released from the law so that [they] serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom. 7:6).

Paul is not talking here merely about the general fact that God in His holiness passes judgment against everyone who sins, and that in this sense they are under His standards (or “law”). The law is concretely a “written code” (*grammatos*, Rom. 7:6)—the law of Moses. It is the law in its full particularity, including food laws and ceremonial sacrifices. Historically only the Jews, as God’s people in special covenant with Him, were under its provisions. And now those who have died with Christ have been released.

Ridderbos introduces another dimension to reading Romans 7. All of the previous interpretations shared a common assumption: that Paul was making statements about the common condition of all people, irrespective of the historical circumstances. All were sinners, all fell short of the glory of God, all were condemned by God’s righteous standards, all who were saved were saved by faith in Christ, all were justified by faith and so freed from the curse of God’s condemnation, and so on. The preceding set of assumptions is nothing less than the common disciplinary framework of assumptions about Paul, Romans, and the New Testament.

Ridderbos does not disagree with any of the doctrines of this theology as such. But he maintains that here Paul was focusing not just on the biography of individuals standing before God but on the history of the race and of the Jews as the people of God uniquely set apart from all other peoples. Paul was writing about *historia redemptionis* (history of redemption),

not simply or primarily about *ordo salutis* (steps in the salvation of an individual).<sup>17</sup>

The categories that Ridderbos uses cut across the conventional categories unregenerate and regenerate. Ridderbos is saying that Paul focuses not on the spiritual state of the individual in abstract terms (unregenerate vs. regenerate), nor on the symptoms of response to the law (unawakened vs. awakened), but on the systematic differences in life created by the objective transition between two orders of existence (under the law of Moses vs. under the realm of union with the resurrected Christ).

It is interesting that people within the same doctrinal tradition can advocate different interpretations of this chapter. Calvin, Lloyd-Jones, and Ridderbos, all adherents of Reformed theology, advocate respectively the regenerate interpretation, the awakened-sinner interpretation, and the pre-Pentecost interpretation of Romans 7:14–25. The differences between them must accordingly be viewed not as differences between systems of theology but as differences affecting only the interpretation of a single passage.

But we should note that the differences are capable of becoming differences of theological style of an extensive kind. Followers of Calvin have traditionally made it a point to read many other passages with the regenerate/unregenerate distinction in mind. Followers of Lloyd-Jones might also read many other passages in terms of the questions of spiritual symptoms. Followers of Ridderbos might make it a policy to read many other passages in terms of the transition of ages between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In fact, Ridderbos participates in the redemptive-historical tradition within New Testament biblical theology that has adopted precisely this emphasis. This tradition claims consistently to arrive at more accurate interpretations of texts within the redemptive-historical framework. The transition to this framework from a preceding framework of reading passages in terms of just-

<sup>17</sup> See also the discussion in Douglas J. Moo, "Israel and Paul in Romans 7:7–12," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 122–35.

ification and *ordo salutis* might possibly be analyzed in terms of the categories of revolution.

### WHY LIMITED VISION DOES NOT IMPLY RELATIVISM

Some readers may ask whether my analysis above leads to relativism. Does it mean that a text such as Romans 7:14–25 has no fixed meaning but that the meaning depends on the framework (disciplinary matrix) that one uses to look at the text? Does it mean that systems of theology (e.g., Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, or Arminianism) are neither right nor wrong, but all are right depending on the disciplinary matrix one uses in systematic theology? Similar questions were addressed to Kuhn in the wake of his book on revolutions in science.<sup>18</sup>

Kuhn's answer is complex. He is not a nihilist or a relativist in the sense of believing that the choice between systems is irrational. Theists, however, are bound to be dissatisfied with Kuhn's answer, because they do not believe that human beings are the only standard for truth. The proper standard for truth is not found in human beings corporately or individually but in God who is the source of all truth.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly one must say that there is a right and wrong in the interpretation of Romans 7, and a right and wrong in a theological system. However, it is not necessarily easy for human beings to arrive at what is right. Larger frameworks or disciplinary matrices have an influence. In part, the influence is a good one. An effective, fruitful disciplinary matrix regularly steers researchers toward fruitful ways of looking at a passage and fruitful ways of analyzing and solving theological difficulties. But any disciplinary matrix, by suggesting solutions primarily in one direction, can make people almost blind to the possibility of solutions in another direction. Such, surely, is one of the lessons to draw from the history of interpretation of Romans 7.

<sup>18</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, pp. 205–7.

<sup>19</sup> On this question, see further my discussion in Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

## 7

# MODELS IN SCIENCE AND IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

We need now to look at one major factor in the disciplinary matrices of natural sciences, namely, the use of models. It is important to consider models because of their influence on what investigators see or fail to see. Models are detailed analogies between one subject and another. The subject needing explanation or visualization is called the "principal" subject, while the one used to do the explaining is called the "subsidiary" subject.<sup>1</sup> In the billiard-ball model of a gas, for example, a gas is represented as a large number of billiard balls moving in all directions through an enclosed space. The gas itself is the principal subject, while the moving billiard balls are the subsidiary subject.

As a second example, consider Newton's theory of gravitation. Newton's equation  $F = GmM/r^2$ , along with Newton's laws linking force and motion, is a mathematical model for motion in a gravitational field. The mathematical equations are the subsidiary subject, while the moving physical objects are the principal subject.

Models can be of many kinds, depending on the type of

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<sup>1</sup>The terminology is taken from Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 44. Black's book forms one of the principal backgrounds for our discussion.

subsidiary subject chosen and the relations between the subsidiary subject and the principal subject. Thus we may speak of mathematical models, mechanical models, electrical models, scale models, and so on.

### INFLUENCE OF MODELS IN SCIENCE

In science models play the role of illustrating theories already considered established. A scale model of the solar system makes the astronomical theory of the solar system clearer to the neophyte. More important, models play an important role in the discovery and improvement of new scientific theories. The billiard-ball model of a gas was crucial to the development of the kinetic theory of gases and its predictions about gas pressure, temperature, and the like. Similarly, James Clerk Maxwell developed his theory of electricity and magnetism by creative use of analogy between electricity (principal subject) and an ideal incompressible fluid (subsidiary subject). Today physicists would be likely to say that Maxwell's equations are the real model (a mathematical model) and that we can dispense with the fluid. But in Maxwell's own day people were still thinking in terms of an ether that was a real physical object and that might have properties analogous to a fluid.<sup>2</sup>

A properly chosen analogy thus suggests questions to be asked, lines of research, or possible general laws. Mathematical equations known to hold for the subsidiary subject can be carried over to the principal subject, albeit sometimes with slight modifications. The analogy needs to be used flexibly, because the principal subject is usually not analogous to the subsidiary subject in all respects.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone agrees that models have a decisive role in *discovery*. But what happens after the theory is drawn up? Philosophy of science in the positivist tradition would like to say that models are dispensable when it comes to assessing the

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 226–28.

<sup>3</sup>See Maxwell's discussion, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 226.

justification of theories and their truth content. Others, Max Black included, think that some models are an integral, indissoluble part of the finished theory.<sup>4</sup> Even a mathematical model consists not merely in a mathematical formula but also in rules of thumb for relating the mathematics to the phenomena. These rules of thumb cannot be completely formalized without losing some of the potential of the model to suggest extensions to other phenomena. Thomas Kuhn does not address directly this question about models in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. But from what he says about the role of exemplars and disciplinary matrices in directing further lines of research, one can infer that he agrees with Black about the indispensability of models.

Is biblical interpretation analogous to science in its use of models? To be sure, some models are to be found within the Bible itself. Adam, for example, is a model for Christ with respect to his role in representing humanity (Rom. 5:12–21). But analogies in biblical interpretation seldom have the detailed, quantitative character of mathematical models or physical models in science. Perhaps we had better talk about analogies rather than models.<sup>5</sup>

Now let us ask whether models (analogies) are dispensable in biblical interpretation. Even if we granted that in theory they were dispensable in natural science, it would be difficult to present an analogous argument for biblical interpretation. The less-than-exact character of models in biblical interpretation means that they are most often not dispensable.

As an example, take again Romans 5:12–21. Can we eliminate the comparison with Adam and still retain the

<sup>4</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 219–43.

<sup>5</sup>For a further exploration of the use of models, analogies, and metaphors, see Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); and Sallie McFague TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). Barbour and TeSelle presuppose a non-Evangelical view of biblical authority. Evangelicals will find in their works a combination of stimulating insights and the effort to displace biblical teaching by analogically projecting biblical language into the framework of modern culture.

theological substance of the passage? We could, to be sure, paraphrase a good deal of the main points in order to eliminate specific reference to Adam. But even if we studied such a paraphrase for a long time, we would miss something. Romans 5:12–21 has a suggestiveness about it that is characteristic of metaphor.<sup>6</sup> It invites us to think of many ways in which Adam and Christ are analogous (and dissimilar). Once we eliminate completely any reference to Adam, we thereby eliminate the possibility of exploring just how far these analogies extend.

### ANALOGY IN ROMANS 7

Do analogies really make a difference in interpretive controversies? Sometimes, at least, they do. Ridderbos, for example, argues that Romans 7 has in view primarily the contrast between two ages, before and after the resurrection of Christ and the day of Pentecost. Romans 7:14–25, we might say, is analogous to the statements elsewhere in Scripture about the resurrection of Christ, the coming of the kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the ages. The model that Ridderbos assumes is the model of two ages and a redemptive transition between them. By contrast, the model that the regenerate and the unregenerate interpretations assume is the model of the individual soul and its life. Using such a model, Romans 7:14–25 is viewed as analogous to the statements about individual experiences of being saved.

These two models are not tight-knit and mathematically describable structures like models in natural science. They are more like generalizations or clusters of patterns derived from a loose collection of biblical texts. Ridderbos shows us common patterns linking much of what Paul (and other New Testament writers) say about the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the coming of the Spirit, the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, and events representing a global transition of redemptive epochs. Against this background he invites us to see Romans 7:14–25 as an embodiment of the pattern. Likewise the

<sup>6</sup>See Black, *Models and Metaphors*, pp. 38–47.

regenerate interpretation collects verses describing the situation of individuals who are Christian and who are not Christian and invites us to see the same passage as embodying a pattern corresponding to the passages that describe Christians.

Both of these models do not so much exploit a particular analogy (say, with the resurrection of Christ or with the conversion of Cornelius) as they use generalized patterns. They are less like a metaphor than like a generalization. Moreover, to a large extent these models describe what we may bring to any text whatsoever when we study it.

But we may also ask whether a particular text introduces its own analogies. For example, Romans 7:2–4 clearly invokes an analogy using marriage as the subsidiary subject, in order to elucidate a principal subject, namely, our responsibilities toward the law and toward Christ. What analogies, then, are operative in verses 7–25? It is difficult to decide whether there is any dominant analogy. But when interpreters come to the passage, they may have an analogical framework in which they understand biblical descriptions of sin. In the Bible as a whole there are a number of basic analogies or metaphors for explaining, illustrating, and driving home to readers the power of sin.

First, sin is viewed as a sickness. Using this analogy, one can emphasize the power of sin by arguing that this sickness has infected every part of the body (e.g., Isa. 1:5–6; James 3:8). Second, sin is like darkness. One can stress sin's power by pointing out that every part of people is dark (e.g., Eph. 4:18; Luke 11:33–36). Third, sin is like fire. One points out the power of sin by affirming that it is unstoppable (James 3:6). Finally, sin is like the relationship of a master to a slave. In this analogy, one points out the power of sin by showing that, however the slave may struggle to become free, the master will subdue him. Romans 6 uses this analogy in describing the situation before having died with Christ.

Which analogies are operating in Romans 7:14–25? If we have the analogy with sickness or darkness, we expect to find affirmations about the pervasiveness of sickness or darkness in the unregenerate. What is actually said in the passage appears to be inconsistent with such a pervasive sickness. Hence the



regenerate interpretation appears to be more attractive. On the other hand, if the analogy is with master and slave (as it appears to be in v. 14), the struggles of the enslaved person to become free may have been introduced to make the point about sin's power more effectively. Hence the mention of the struggles of the "mind" in verse 23 might still be compatible with the unregenerate interpretation. When we use this perspective the unregenerate interpretation appears more attractive, inasmuch as similar points about sin's mastery over the unregenerate are made in Romans 6. One's preference for the regenerate or unregenerate interpretation (or still some other interpretation) may therefore be influenced by what one sees as the governing analogy here.

Perhaps, however, the problem is still deeper. Do we come to Scripture expecting to find a single, uniform theory of sin, accompanied by a single, fixed, precise vocabulary to designate the various states of sin and righteousness? If so, we are predisposed to see difficulties in harmonizing Romans 7:22–23 with statements elsewhere about unregenerate people. Hence the regenerate interpretation wins our allegiance.

Suppose, however, that we approach Scripture expecting to find a number of analogies making complementary points. Since each analogy is partial, the various analogies may sometimes superficially appear to be at odds with one another. For example, the analogy with slavery may appear to be at odds with the analogy of sickness. In the slavery analogy, the slave may attempt rebellion only to illustrate how inescapable is the master's dominion. But the slave's rebellious activity appears to contradict what the sickness analogy says about the pervasive penetration of the disease. We reconcile the two only by recognizing that each is a partial analogy about the nature of sin. Using this approach, we are then able to harmonize the unregenerate interpretation of Romans 7:22–23, which uses a slave analogy, with the texts elsewhere in Paul using the analogy of sickness or darkness.

We may extend our example in another direction. Our reading of Romans 7:14–25 depends on the kind of exposition of sin that we expect. Do we anticipate a colorful, imaginative,

dramatic characterization? Then sin can be personified as the master, the individual as the slave, and the subsequent imaginary confrontation traced out. Or do we expect a careful, scientific exposition analyzing the ontological relations of the various human faculties, as these are touched by sin? In the latter case we are predisposed to find verses 22–23 consistent only with what is said of the regenerate mind, because words like *mind* and *flesh* must always designate the same fixed aspects of human beings. In the former case, we are predisposed to allow that these two verses might simply be making a different point by dramatization. Hence even if these verses referred to an unregenerate person, it would not contradict the point made elsewhere when the unregenerate are characterized as dead and unresponsive to God.

#### A ROLE FOR ANALOGY IN THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES

What difference does it make that biblical interpretation employs analogies? First, some people could say that this leads to the conclusion that biblical interpretation and, with its resulting theology, is "mere" analogy, hence not really true to the facts, and that knowing objective truth is impossible.

But such a conclusion misunderstands the power of analogy. Analogies at their best are aids to the truth rather than hindrances. Remember that sciences use analogies in the form of models, and the Bible itself uses analogies. We need to say that, when we read a passage of the Bible, the analogies or models that we have in mind influence what we see and influence our judgments about which competing interpretations are plausible. Becoming aware of some of the analogies that we are using and some of the alternatives that might be possible may help us to understand the Bible better.

For example, in interpreting Romans 7, is it better to be aware of the several alternative approaches? Knowing that there are several alternatives could wrongly make us think, "There is no right answer. Any answer is O.K., because any answer can be achieved if we start with the right analogy."

But I would disagree. One answer is right. Of course, there can be overlapping partial answers, more than one of which could be right as far as it goes. But the major alternatives in interpreting Romans 7 are mutually exclusive, unless we claim that Paul was intentionally ambiguous (which is not plausible here). Hence one of the alternatives is right. But we can properly judge the relative claims of the alternatives only when we view each one of them in its strongest form and compare it with the others. As long as we are unaware of the possibility of using an alternate analogy (one that Paul himself may have had in mind in writing), we are not in as good a position to make an accurate judgment.

The same holds true when we consider theological doctrines or theological systems rather than individual passages of the Bible. Consider, for example, the doctrinal dispute between creationism and traducianism. Creationism says that God, by an immediate act, creates the soul of each new human being who comes into the world. On the other hand, according to traducianism, the soul of the child derives by providential processes from the soul of the parents.

Each of these two views appeals to various biblical passages. Each passage must be studied and weighed in its own right. We can never eliminate this step in theology. But we should also be aware that each view is made plausible partly by the use of a governing analogy. For traducianism, the key analogy is between generation of the soul and generation of the body. After the initial direct creation of Adam in Genesis 1-2, the propagation of the race takes place by providence. The bodies of children are formed providentially from substance deriving from their parents. The traducianist claims that the generation of the soul is analogous. In addition, a realist view of human nature sometimes enters into traducianism, and such realism rests on an analogy between human souls and parts of a whole. The souls are related to human nature as parts are to a whole.

For creationism, on the other hand, the principal analogy is between the generation of the soul and the creative acts of God in Genesis, which create new beings. Both of these acts of

making new things contrast with the later providential acts of God, in which He sustains what He has already made.

Being aware of these analogies does not by itself tell us which of these two positions is right. (Or perhaps some combination of the two or a third alternative could be right.) But such awareness can alert us to some of the reasons why both positions are attractive and why both have had their advocates.

Next, consider classic dispensationalism and classic covenant theology as examples of theological systems. Each system gives an important role to a certain key concept. For covenant theology, that concept is the covenant of grace; for dispensationalism, it is the dispensations, that is, epochs marked by distinctive arrangements in God's government of human beings. Covenant theology naturally leads to a concentration on the salvific purposes of God. Such purposes are embodied in the covenant of grace and form a main strand to which other purposes of God are linked. Dispensationalism, on the other hand, has classically been interested in the purpose that the dispensations serve by showing success or failure of human beings under different governmental arrangements. Salvation of individuals runs alongside this purpose.

Dispensationalism and covenant theology are both complex systems. They cannot simply be reduced to some one analogy. And yet analogy has an important role. In covenant theology, the covenant of grace is understood as embodied in (and therefore analogous to) the concrete covenants mentioned in the Bible, which in turn are analogous to treaties or contracts made between human beings (except that God sovereignly lays down the conditions). In dispensationalism, the governing analogy in understanding dispensations is the analogy between God the great King and a human ruler who inaugurates a new form of government.

### TYPES OF ANALOGIES

We have already uncovered a considerable diversity of analogies used in biblical interpretation, many of which occur in

the Bible itself. Here we may distinguish six distinct uses of analogy.

First, a one-line comparison, a small-scale analogy, in the form of a simple metaphor or simile. For example, Psalm 23:5, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," compares God's provision with that of a host.

Second, an extended analogy, constituting a controlling force in a whole passage. Most of the parables of Jesus (the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the great banquet, the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the wheat and the tares, and so on) use an analogy in this way. But analogies can also be used in direct exposition of theological truths. For example, analogies with dying and slavery control the extended discussion in Romans 6. The analogy between Adam and Christ controls Romans 5:12-21. Sometimes the use of an analogy may be more subtle than in these instances. For example, the interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 partly turns on the question of whether Paul is here using a sort of dramatic, theatrical analogy between sin and a human being, on the one hand, and two personal opponents striving with one another for mastery, on the other. Because Paul does not say, in so many words, "Now let us compare one thing to another," it is more difficult to assess what he is doing.

Third, an analogy used repeatedly in different passages in the Bible, so that it constitutes a biblical theme. For example, comparisons of God with a king or a father frequently form a biblical theme, as do comparisons between God's relations to human beings and agreements, or covenants, between human beings.

Fourth, an analogy used to help interpret a passage, even though it is not the governing analogy for the passage itself. For example, in discussing Romans 7, if we wanted to defend a dramatic understanding of what Paul is doing, we might appeal not only to an analogy with drama in general but also to an analogy with other passages of the Bible that present moral conflict in more dramatic terms: for example, the personifications of wisdom and folly in Proverbs 7-9. Neither drama in general nor Proverbs 7-9 in particular is a governing force in

the actual structure of Romans 7. Both of these analogies, however, might make it easier for someone to see that Paul perhaps is speaking in a more dramatically colored, semipersonified way about sin in its relation to human beings.

Fifth, an analogy used in formulating a particular doctrine. For example, the analogy between generation of the soul and generation of the body is used by traducianism.

Sixth, an analogy used as a key element in a theological or hermeneutical system. For example, the covenant of grace, analogous to covenants between human beings, is a key element in classic covenant theology.

To a certain extent, these different types of analogies are related to the different types of disciplinary matrices that were discussed in chapter 6. Just as in science, so also in biblical interpretation, a disciplinary matrix within a given field is likely to make use of some controlling analogy. Some analogies function as master analogies and thus control a larger field. The idea of covenant, for example, analogous to human treaties or agreements, influences the whole system of covenant theology. Other analogies function as useful analogies only within the smaller area of a single doctrine or of the interpretation of a single text.

We should note, however, a certain uniqueness to the largest disciplinary matrix or context for biblical interpretation. As I argued in chapter 6, the deepest factor influencing biblical interpretation is the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Without this work of the Spirit, a person cannot understand what the Spirit teaches in Scripture (1Cor. 2:6-16). This work of the Spirit affects the heart and mind of people in the deepest and fullest way. We cannot fully describe the Spirit's work by saying, for instance, that regeneration is merely making available to a person in an intellectual way some new analogy. Doubtless the Holy Spirit enables the person involved to see the relevance of certain relations and analogies, not only analogies in the Bible itself, but relations between the biblical teaching and the person's own life and experience. But it would be false to say that the work of the Holy Spirit is exhausted in making clear any one analogy. Nor could we say that an unregenerate

person would in principle be unable to use a particular analogy. The use of particular analogies is a salient characteristic of less comprehensive disciplinary matrices, but regeneration has a more comprehensive character.

## 8

### ANALOGIES AS PERSPECTIVES

At any one point in our study of the Bible, must we use only one analogy or one type of analogy? To answer this question, let us first look at the situation in natural sciences.

#### ANALOGIES AS COMPLEMENTARY

In science we are accustomed to seeing one model used as the key element in a particular theory. Other proposed models are discarded when one model gains dominance. For example, the Ptolemaic model, with the earth at the center of the solar system, was discarded after the Copernican model, with the sun at the center, gained dominance. If biblical interpretation is analogous to science at this point, we should expect that the currently favored interpretation would supersede all previous interpretations and would invoke one dominant model.

To some extent, the use of a single dominant model has indeed characterized some theological controversies. The historical-critical method, for example, used as its main analogy the example of historical investigation of secular history. The Bible had to be treated like any other book from the ancient past. This model virtually defined the historical-critical method and gradually gained dominance in academic circles. In these

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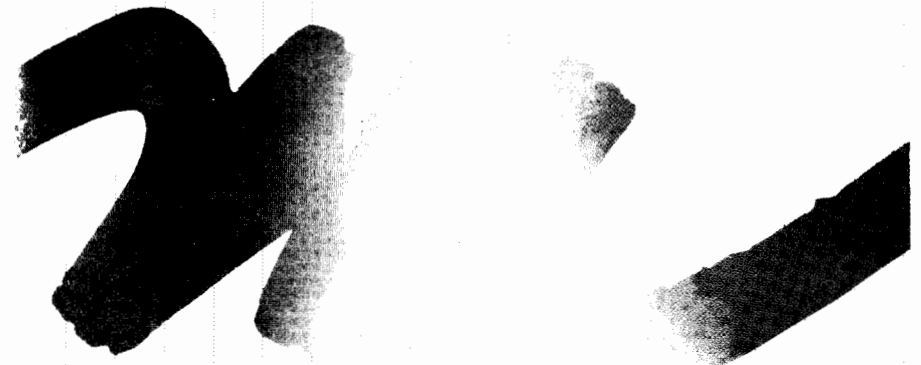


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