

Take the Guesswork Out of Biblical Interpretation – Part 3

“Getting the Big Picture”

If we work from the premise that the Bible is the final authoritative source of the revelation of our Creator-God, then we have common ground with evangelical Protestantism from which to understand what it says and means. We also share time-tested principles about how to understand what God has revealed. Perhaps the most important principle is “**context**” and the second is “**let the Bible interpret itself.**” Applying these two principles to guide us, there is also another common ground we share as the goal: finding “**a unifying center.**” Let me quote from a popular graduate-level textbook on biblical hermeneutics or principles or methods to determine an author’s original meaning:

“It must be stated at the outset that the very assumption of most biblical theologians that **a unifying center should be sought** is a tacit recognition that the goal of the discipline is to forge unity out of the diversity of the biblical witnesses.” ¹

In other words, we agree on the necessity of finding a unifying theme that will help us make sense out of the many parts of the Bible. But then, we expose the unsolved problem of **how to find that unifying theme** as admitted below:

“However, **it is very uncertain whether any single theme or concept stands at the apex of biblical theology.**” ²

Translation: It is still a mystery to biblical theologians about what that unifying biblical theme is and how to find it. We agree that unless that unifying theme is understood, the original meaning of the many diverse parts of the Bible is nothing more than a guessing game.

The Whole vs. the Parts

Biblical theologians’ approach to trying to grasp this unifying theme consists of trying to find it in the many parts of the Bible. They try to employ time-tested principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) from gathering those many parts.

The Bible consists of 66 books. These are divided up into the Old Testament and the New Testament. These two divisions are further divided up into:

Old Testament: Historical books Prophetic books Poetic books

New Testament: The Gospels Acts the Letters Revelation

Bible school and seminary courses are likewise divided up into the above parts in order to try to put it altogether to determine the whole.

This can be likened to the medical school approach in health science. Medical students are taught that the body is divided up into parts and systems. Thus, we now have specialists like: Cardiologists, Pulmonologists, Dermatologists, Gastroenterologists, and so forth. There are over 200 medical specializations. The problem is medical doctors are not taught how each body part, system, and function relates to one another. The current medical model is failing to help people restore their health and heal because there is no unified understanding of how the body works. People are sicker than ever in this disease management model based on pharmaceutical drugs, surgery, and radiation.

In the same way, **conventional Bible study begins with isolated parts trying to make sense of a comprehensive unified whole**. Is that the reason that there are thousands of branches and denominations reflecting highly fractured Protestantism? (The Catholics are right on this point.)

Coming up: In the next part of this series, we will look at some more examples of the whole vs. the parts.

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PS Book One of the Covenant Heritage Series, [*Discover the Story of Your Biblical Heritage*](#), will help you get the big picture of what the Bible is about and who it's for. You'll never see the Bible in the same way again!

Footnotes:

¹ Grant R. Osborne *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 371

² Ibid.