

# Making Scripture Accessible to Every Christian

## Introduction

- Growing up in the church, Bible-reading encouraged and modeled – but methods never taught.
- At seminary, “hermeneutics” courses tend to focus on grammatical and historical analysis.
- There are dangers in over-emphasizing these factors:
  - Grammatical and historical analysis is important, but not inerrant,
  - It undermines the “interpretive confidence” of ordinary believers,
  - Can tend toward a moralistic (non-gospel) interpretation of the Old Testament, *and*
  - Does not appear to be the way the New Testament writers interpreted the Old Testament.
- Question: What if the New Testament itself taught us how to read all of Scripture?
  - Leaving seminary with this question in 2012, I spent many years fumbling toward answers.
  - Synthesizing what I was learning, I developed initial versions of a “compass” (2017-2019).
  - In 2023, I spent time in a deep dive study of the hermeneutics of Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430).
  - I discovered Augustine had found answers from Scripture itself... roughly 1,600 years ago!
- Goals:
  - 1) See what the Bible itself teaches us about how to interpret the Bible.
  - 2) Show how to put these principles together as a “compass” for interpretation.
  - 3) Walk through how to use the compass in real Bible reading.

## Core Principles

### 1) The aim or goal of all Scripture is love for God and neighbor.

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Mt 22.37-40)

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Tm 1.5)

→ Interpretation moves from the Bible’s details to its doctrines to doxology and discipleship.

### 2) This love enters history through the big story of all Scripture: God’s eternal gospel plan.

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Lk 24.25-27)

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Lk 24.44-47)

→ We should interpret all texts of Scripture in light of the “deep context” of the gospel of Jesus.

### 3) Salvation’s central truth: Jesus is united to his people as Head to body and members.<sup>1</sup>

...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world... (Eph 1.4)

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom. 6.5)

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12.27)

Now as [Saul] went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (Acts 9.1-5)

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea... and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10.1-4)

→ Interpretation sees the Head wherever it sees the body (or its members), and vice versa.

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<sup>1</sup> “Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.” (John Murray)

## Building the Compass

### 1) Expand love of God and neighbor into four questions to ask any passage of Scripture.

- Love of God → What does it teach/imply about **God**'s character, power, etc?  
 → What does it teach/imply about **Christ** as God's ultimate self-revelation?
- Love of Neighbor → What does it teach/imply about **Man** as a creature and/or as a sinner?  
 → What does it teach/imply about the **Church/Christians** as Christ's body?

### 2) Use God's eternal gospel plan to draw lines of connection between the four questions.

	God	Man	Christ	Church/Christians
God		Contrast	Incarnation	Adoption
Man	Contrast		Substitution	Regeneration
Christ	Incarnation	Substitution		Union
Church/Christians	Adoption	Regeneration	Union	

God the Creator **contrasts** with man as both creature and sinner, yet God **adopts** his redeemed people.  
 Man the sinner **substitutes** himself for Christ the Lord: man tries to be his own god.  
 Christ reveals God by **incarnation** and **substitutes** himself for sinners: where man fails, Jesus prevails.  
 By **regeneration**, the sinner is converted and joined to the church as a member of Christ's body.  
 By the Holy Spirit, Christians experience **union with Christ**, the union of head and body and members.

### 3) Activate our answers into love of God and neighbor by attaching four types of prayer.

#### Using the Compass

#### 1) As you read any text, ask, "Which question on the compass is most immediately in focus?"

Do I most immediately see something about God? About man? About Christ? About Church/Christians?  
 To which of the four big questions can I most immediately see some answer in the text before me?

#### 2) After answering the first question, follow the lines of connection to answer the others.

If my first insight shows me God's infinite wisdom... then by contrast, I see man's finite understanding...  
 By incarnation, I see Jesus (Col 2.3)... and by adoption, I am reassured of my Father's wise care (Rom 8.28).

#### 3) Remembering Christ's union with his people, look and listen for Jesus – even in the OT.

Since there is only one body (1 Cor 12.12-13), even OT believers were united to Jesus (Heb 11.24-27).  
 Since Jesus is with his body (Acts 9.4), he must be with his people even in the OT – before his incarnation!  
 He is with us in our trials and triumphs, and he prays with our praises, laments, and petitions (cf. Psalms).  
 Even prayers of confession reveal temptations he faced for us, and our transgressions for which he paid.  
**Learn to read the Bible with a trifocal lens:** Where Christ is, the church is, and there too are Christians.

Wherever we see/hear the body of Christ, we should also see/hear Christ our Head (Col 1.18, 3.1-3).

#### 4) Compare your results to the overall teaching of the Bible and the gospel.

Does my interpretation match the teaching of Scripture in other places that speak more clearly?  
 Does it contradict anything we confess in the *Apostles' Creed*, or the teaching of the *Shorter Catechism*?  
 Always ask the ultimate gospel question: **How is this good news about Jesus and his promises?**

#### 5) Activate love of God and neighbor by praying the insights you are discovering.

We **praise** God for what we learn of his character, power, etc.  
 We **confess** to God what we discover about ourselves as finite creatures and broken sinners.  
 We **thank** God for what Scripture shows us about the goodness and promises of Christ.  
 We **petition** God to renew our minds, retrain our desires, and empower our lives to follow Jesus.

#### Practicing the Compass

- Exodus 20: How does the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment show us God's desire for us to know him truly?
- Genesis 20: How does the failure of Abraham show us the faithfulness of Jesus to his bride?
- Psalm 16: How do we read this first as a prayer of Christ, then of the church, then of a Christian?