DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

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PRIOR LESSON: Translation of Scripture

God inspired the original Hebrew and Greek scriptures, which remain our final authority for faith and life. Bible translation is warranted by its intended global audience, our needs and duties, and apostolic example. Modern translations normally start with the Masoretic Text (for OT) and the NA/USB critical text (for NT). Translations can vary by philosophy, interpretive details, stylistic aims, theological assumptions, and more.

<u>evaluating English Bible translations</u>

a. many translations are sound, and good for different purposes; you're not picking "the right one"
b. having a default translation (ideally, the one your church uses) can aid familiarity and memory
c. paraphrases cannot be used for detailed study; God inspired the "jots and tittles" of the original
d. on the other hand, absolutely "literal" translations are neither possible nor desirable
e. beware "amplified" versions that imply an "all of the above" or "as you choose" interpretation
f. all translations are interpretive, so know who your translators are—but don't be paranoid

THIS LESSON: Interpreting Scripture

A. Clarity of Scripture
1. not every passage is equally clear (2 Peter 3:16)
2. not every interpretation is equally valid (e.g.: Matthew 22:29)
3. main things are plain things (WCF 1.7)
    a. plain enough for the salvation of a sincere reader (Psalm 19:7-11)
    b. not only for the learned but the unlearned (Psalm 119:130)
    c. in a due use of ordinary means (Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Psalm 119:125)
4. illumination is necessary (Ephesians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6)
5. Christian creeds, confessions, books, and pastors can help, despite fallibility (e.g.: Acts 8:30-31)

B. Interpretive Principles
1. analogy of Scripture (Scriptures interprets Scripture: plain, plentiful parts interpret obscure)
2. analogy of faith (follows from Scripture's is unity, inerrancy, and ability to be systematized)
3. meaning is "not manifold but one" (WCF 1.9)
    i. in contrast to the medieval quadriga (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical meanings)
    ii. but some prophecies and types get fulfilled partly or provisionally (cf. mountain ranges)
    iii. but some promises or prophecies may get enlarged or repurposed (e.g.: church as Israel)
    iv. but eschatology tends to follow an "already/not yet" pattern with Christ's dual advents
    v. but the divine author's intent can exceed the human author's (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12)
        this is no license for allegory, numerology, secret codes, superficial coincidences, etc.
4. interpreting passages in their literary and historical context
5. distinguishing imperative from indicative (cf. law and gospel)
6. grammatical-historical exegesis in a redemptive-historical context

C. Genres of Scripture
1. importance of understanding and distinguishing genres (versus misplaced "literalism")
2. note, some books (and even individual passages) are mixed genre

3. common genres in Scripture

HISTORY:	• theological, not just informative; reveals God and his work, and teaches us to trust him • the Hebrews did not care about chronological precision or plagiarism as much as we do
LAW:	• moral laws are enduring principles of righteousness, summarized in Ten Commandments • ceremonial laws (sacrificial rituals, food laws, etc.) prepared for Christ in pictorial ways • judicial laws are historic, practical applications of moral principles to Israel's national life
POETRY:	• uses figures of speech, repetition, dense or indirect language, etc. to make a point • communicates emotion more easily than logic; helpful for prayer, praise, and reflection • Hebrew poetry rhymes ideas, rather than sounds, using couplets (sometimes triplets)
WISDOM:	• instructions for successful godly living, based on a worldview shaped by the fear of God • may also ponder puzzles, including the seeming failures of wisdom (as in Job, Ecclesiastes) • poetic, general, aphoristic—not to be confused with commandments or promises
PROPHECY:	• prophets were spokesmen for God who prosecuted his covenant via threats and promises • true prophets could predict the future but did more "forth-telling" than "fore-telling" • prophetic books tend to be keenly concerned about spiritual loyalty and social justice
GOSPEL:	• authorized biographies of Jesus from apostolic sources based on eyewitness testimony • each gospel has its own agenda; Matthew, Mark, Luke are "synoptic"; John starts anew • all four gospels record Jesus' life and teachings, but build up to his death and resurrection
EPISTLE:	• simply letters from apostles to others, modified from Greek and Roman style • each was written for a reason—rebuke, warn, thank, plead—and is usually making a case • they go deeper than gospels into the <u>meaning</u> of Christ's work, and connect life to doctrine
APOCALYPSE:	• symbols and numbers describe spiritual (or future) realities, usually to help sufferers • older apocalypses (as in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah) shed light on the newer (Revelation)

D. Interpretive Pitfalls

1. sarcasm (e.g.: Job 38:4-5; Jeremiah 44:25)
2. rhetorical questions (e.g.: Isaiah 40:18; Matthew 7:9; Romans 8:31)
3. quotation for rebuttal (e.g.: Mark 9:23; 1 Corinthians 7:1, *passim*)
4. quotation of uninspired sources (Book of Jashar, Aratus, Epimenides, Book of Enoch, etc.)
5. apparent disclaimers ("not the Lord but I" in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12; "my rule," etc.)
6. temporary or intentional errors (e.g.: Psalm 73:15; cf. also Job's friends)
7. parables