

Following Jesus



Reading the Bible Like Jesus

Framing the Problem

How not *What*



To deal seriously with *what* the
Bible says we have to deal
seriously with *how* we read it



Meaning has BOTH a past and a
present



Author
Text
Community
Reader



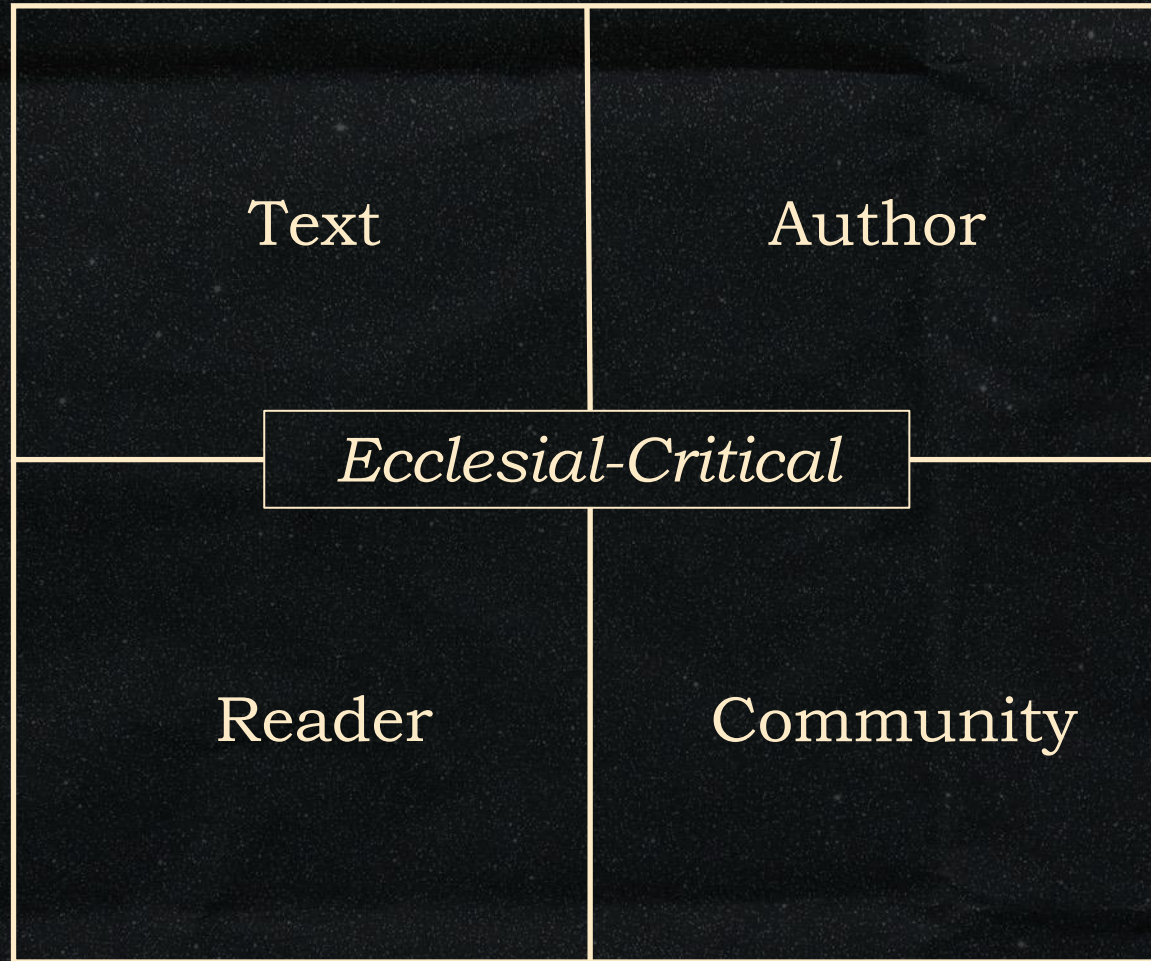
Critical

Text	Author
Reader	Community

Non-Critical



Critical



Non-Critical



Jesus employed critical tools to
serve non-critical goals.



Non-critical goals are supplied by
the faith community who
encountered Jesus in space and
time and reimagined faith
accordingly.



Perceiving God Rightly

“Rule of Faith”

Living Rightly

Love of God and Neighbor



What do we do with texts that seem to violate the Rule of Faith, don't easily promote growth in love, or are clearly inconsistent?



We absolutely do not read them
literally



Early interpreters recognized all of
these issues



"But where in the narrative the accomplishment of some particular deeds, which had been previously recorded for the sake of their more mystical meanings, did not correspond with the sequence of the intellectual truths, the scripture wove into the story something which did not happen, occasionally something which could not happen, and occasionally something which might have happened but in fact did not. Sometimes a few words are inserted which in the bodily sense are not true, and at other times a greater number."

Origen; *On First Principles* (4.2.9).



"But hasty and careless readers are led astray by many and manifold obscurities and ambiguities, substituting one meaning for another; and in some places they cannot hit upon even a fair interpretation. Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness."

Augustine; *De Doctrina Christiana* (2.6.7)



They saw the primary problem not that scripture contained these "errors" or "obscurities" but that many interpreters stumbled over them because they read them literally



"Now the reason why all those we have mentioned hold false opinions or make impious and ignorant assertions about God appears to be nothing else but this, that scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter."

Origen; On First Principles (4.2.2)



“..nothing is more fittingly called the death of the soul than when that in it which raises it above the brutes, the intelligence namely, is put in subjection to the flesh by a blind adherence to the letter.”

Augustine; *De Doctrina Christiana* (3.5.9)



The non-critical solution was to see layers of meaning in the Bible, especially in those obscure or ambiguous passages that posed moral/ethical challenges.



"For just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation."

Origen, *On First Principles* (4.2.4)



John 7:21-24



The primary strategy employed for discerning a text's deeper meaning was to read passages figuratively



"Those things, again, whether only sayings or whether actual deeds, which appear to the inexperienced to be sinful, and which are ascribed to God, or to men whose holiness is put before us as an example, are wholly figurative, and the hidden kernel of meaning they contain is to be picked out as food for the nourishment of charity."

Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*; (3.12.18)



"In the first place, then, we must show the way to find out whether a phrase is literal or figurative. And the way is certainly as follows: Whatever there in the word of God that cannot, when taken literally, be referred either to purity of life or soundness of doctrine, you may set it down as figurative."

Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (3.10.14)



What are some potential problems
with figurative exegesis?



Doesn't address modern concerns
Doesn't take the text seriously
Allows for too much flexibility



We need a critical insight that can deal seriously with what the text actually says, but also coordinates with the rule of faith and the transformation of the reader in love.



Principle of Accommodation;

"God's adoption in inscripturation of the human audience's finite and fallen perspective. Its underlying assumption is that in many cases God does not correct our mistaken human viewpoints but merely assumes them in order to communicate with us."

Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words* (230-231)



"Just as when we are talking to very small children we do not assume as the object of our instruction any strong understanding in them, but say what we have to say accommodating it to the small understanding of those whom we have before us...so the Word of God seems to have disposed the things which were written, adapting the suitable parts of his message to the capacity of his hearers and to their ultimate profit."

Origen, *Against Celsus* (4.71) in Sparks p 237



"If the trouble is that the moral precepts under the old law are lower and in the Gospel higher, and that therefore both cannot come from the same God, whoever thinks in this way may find difficulty in explaining how a single physician prescribes one medicine to weaker patients through his assistants, and another by himself to stronger patients, all to restore health."

Augustine, *Of True Religion* (17) in Sparks p 240



Return to Matthew 19:1-12



Case Studies

- Sacrifice
- Slavery
- Women teachers

Where else might we apply the principle of accommodation in biblical interpretation?



Why is the principle of accommodation so important?



God's infinite wisdom simply cannot be
communicated in any other way than through
imperfect human wisdom and words



Accommodation is "the rationale that allows us to choose one text over another without charging the error to God." (Sparks, 239)



"Accommodation is simply an explicit theological rationale for what we already do." (257)

Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*



“...one of the gravest calamities to the intellectual history of Christianity.”

Roland Frye, “A Literary Perspective for the Criticism of the Gospels,” in *Jesus and Man’s Hope*, ed. Donald G. Miller and Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Press, 1971); 204.



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