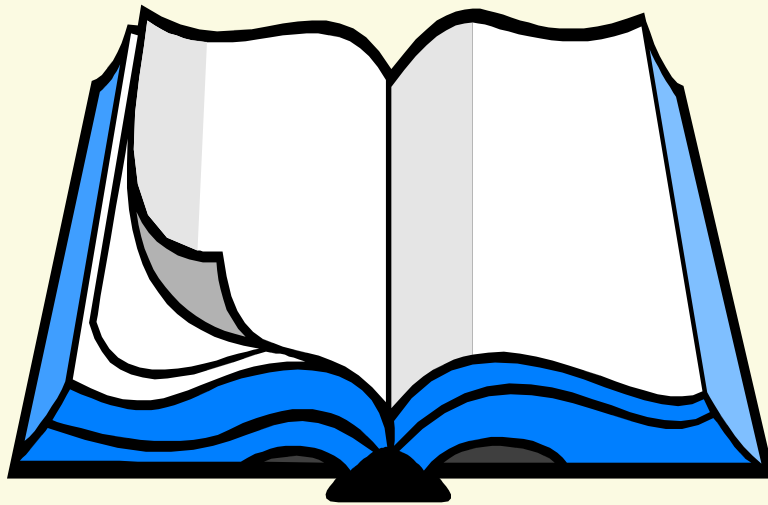


# How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth



*An Outline of  
Reformed Biblical  
Hermeneutics*

**Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima**  
**Calvin Theological Seminary**  
[weimje@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:weimje@calvinseminary.edu)

A silver metal spiral binding is visible on the left side of the page, looping through a series of holes.

# **Major Elements of a Reformed Hermeneutic**

# *Major Elements of a Reformed Hermeneutic*

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1. *The Holy Spirit Element*
2. The Grammatical Element
3. The Literary Element
4. The Historical Element
5. The Theological Element

# The Holy Spirit Element

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John 14:26

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

John 16:13-15

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth ...he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

# The Holy Spirit Element

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## 1 Corinthians 2:10-11

“God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one *knows* (e[gnwken]) the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

# The Holy Spirit Element

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## 1 Corinthians 2:14

“The person without the Spirit does not *accept* (devcetai) the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot *understand* (ouj duvnatai gnw`nai) them because they are discerned only through the Spirit”

# The Holy Spirit Element

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## Issue:

Does the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit cause believers to **KNOW** or to **ACCEPT** the will of God as revealed in the Bible?





Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*  
“... no man perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he has the Spirit of God. All men have a darkened heart, so that even if they can recite everything in Scripture, and know how to quote it, yet they apprehend and truly understand nothing of it... For the Spirit is required for the understanding of Scripture, both as a whole and in any part of it.”



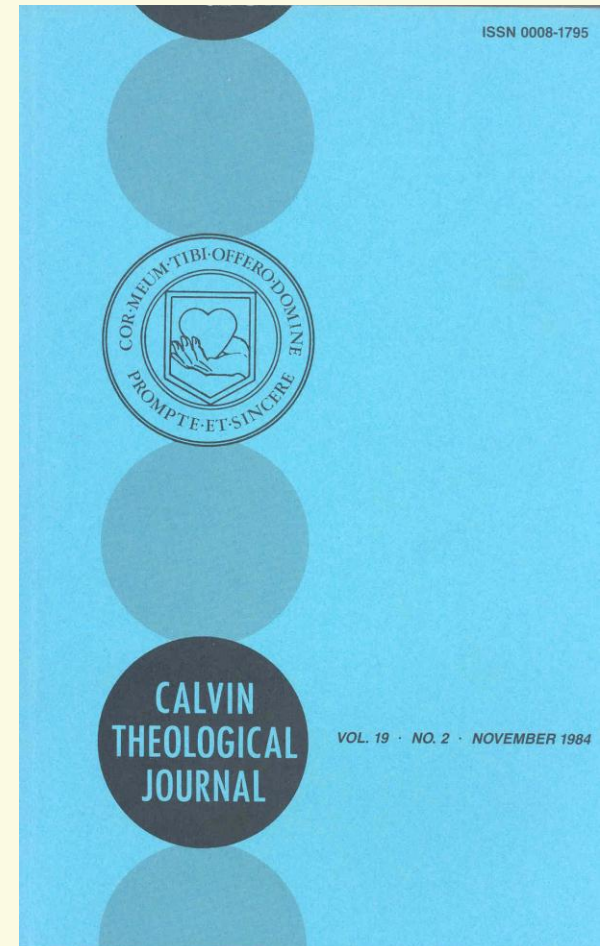
John Calvin (in a sermon on 1 Timothy 3:8-10):



“When we come to hear the sermon or to take up the Bible, we must not have the foolish arrogance of thinking that we shall easily understand everything we hear or read. But we must come with reverence, we must wait entirely upon God, *knowing that we need to be taught by his Holy Spirit, and that without Him we cannot understand anything that is shown to us in his Word.*”

Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 19.2 (1984): 121-152.

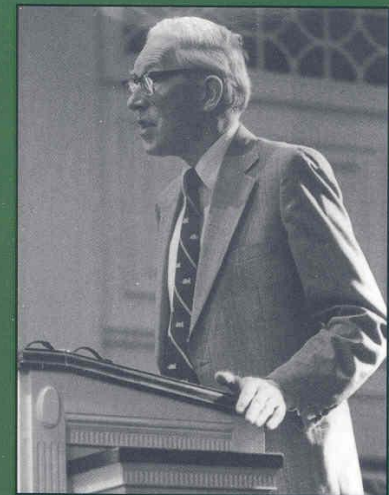
“Finally, if we want to come to a truly biblical hermeneutics, we must realize with the Reformers that the Word of God cannot be understood without the illumination of the Spirit of God ... The final key to the hermeneutics of the Reformers is the confession ‘Spiritus Sanctus est Verus Interpres Scripturae’ (the Holy Spirit is the true interpreter of scripture). Therefore the beginning and end of all biblical hermeneutics is the humble prayer ‘Veni Creator Spiritus’ (Come, Creator Spirit)” (pp 151-152).



J. I. Packer, “Understanding the Bible: Evangelical Hermeneutics,”  
*Honoring the Written Word of God* (Paternoster, 1999) 3.147-160.

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“The characteristic procedures and techniques of evangelical hermeneutics are now before us, and it remains only to add that the evangelical way of practicing them involves radical dependence on the Holy Spirit, a dependence that is expressed by prayer for wisdom and insight before, during, and after the hermeneutical exercise itself. Evangelicals do not forget that sin, as an inbred anti-God perversity of the soul, disables minds from understanding God no less than it disables wills from obeying him, so that divine help is needed at every stage of the process of receiving the divine message” (page 158)

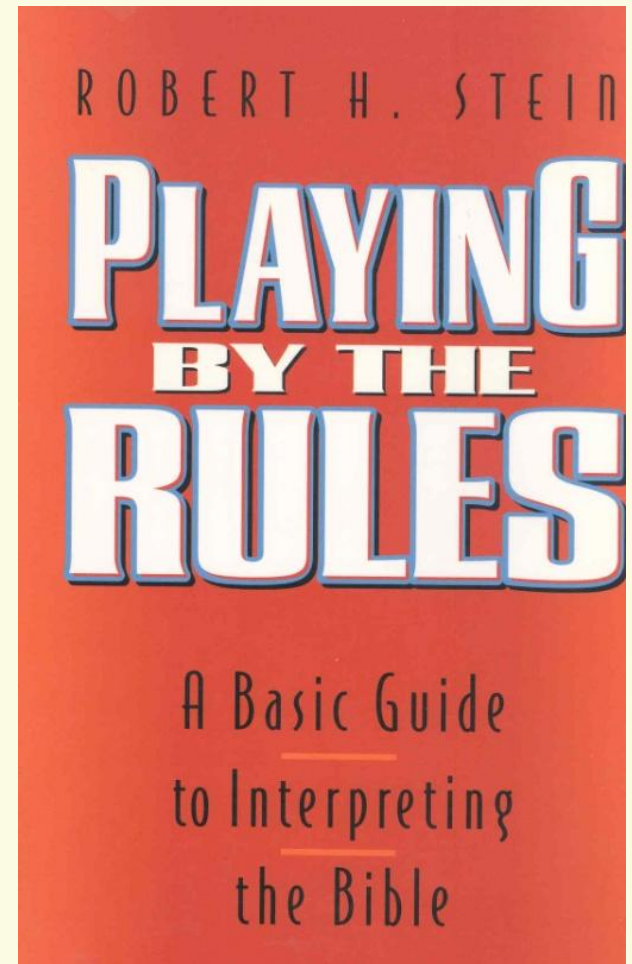


J.I. Packer is Board of Governors' Professor of Theology at Regent College, Vancouver. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers and apologists for Christianity in the twentieth century. He is the author of numerous books including *Knowing God*, *Rediscovering Holiness* and *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*.

Robert H. Stein, *Playing by the Rules. A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

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“... it would appear that what the Reformers called ‘illumination’ refers to understanding the meaning of the text, ‘conviction’ to the attribution of a positive significance to the text. In other words, the Spirit helps the reader understand the pattern of meaning that the author willed and convinces the reader as to the truth of that teaching” (page 64)



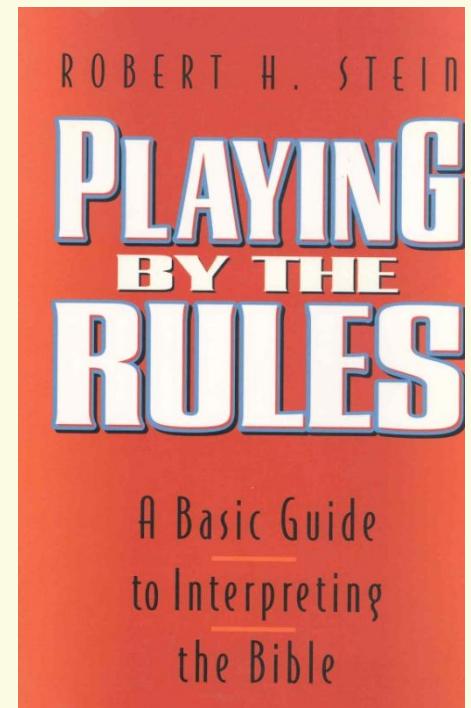


# Consequences of the Holy Spirit Element:

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1. The need for humility before scripture
2. The need for careful study of scripture

“The role of the Spirit in interpretation is not an excuse for laziness ... To pray that the Spirit would help us understand the meaning of a text because we do not want to spend time studying or using the tools that have been made available to us (such as commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, etc.) may border on blasphemy, for it seeks to ‘use’ the Spirit for our own ends. The Holy Spirit brings to the believer a blessed assurance of the truthfulness of the biblical teachings, but he cannot be manipulated to cover for laziness in the study of the Word of God” (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994: 71)



# Consequences of the Holy Spirit Element:

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3. The need to keep the Holy Spirit and scripture connected together:

- “If we live by the word alone, we dry up.”
- “If we live by the Spirit alone, we blow up.”
- “But if we live by the word and the Spirit, we grow up!”

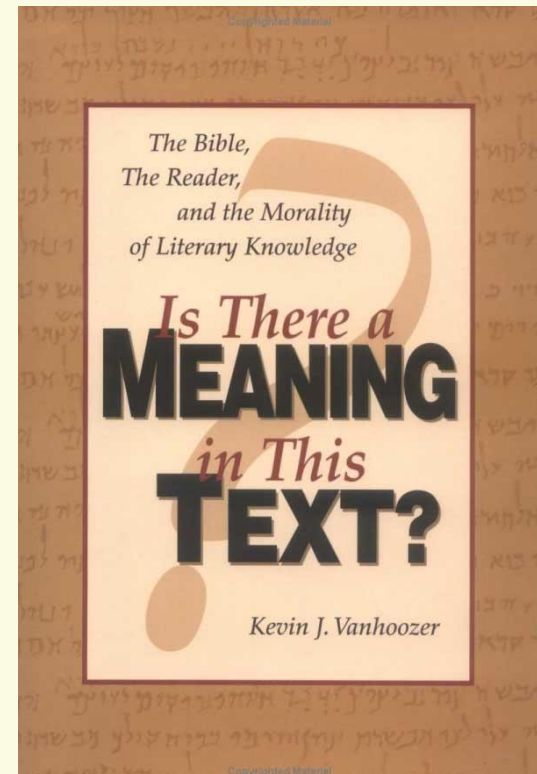


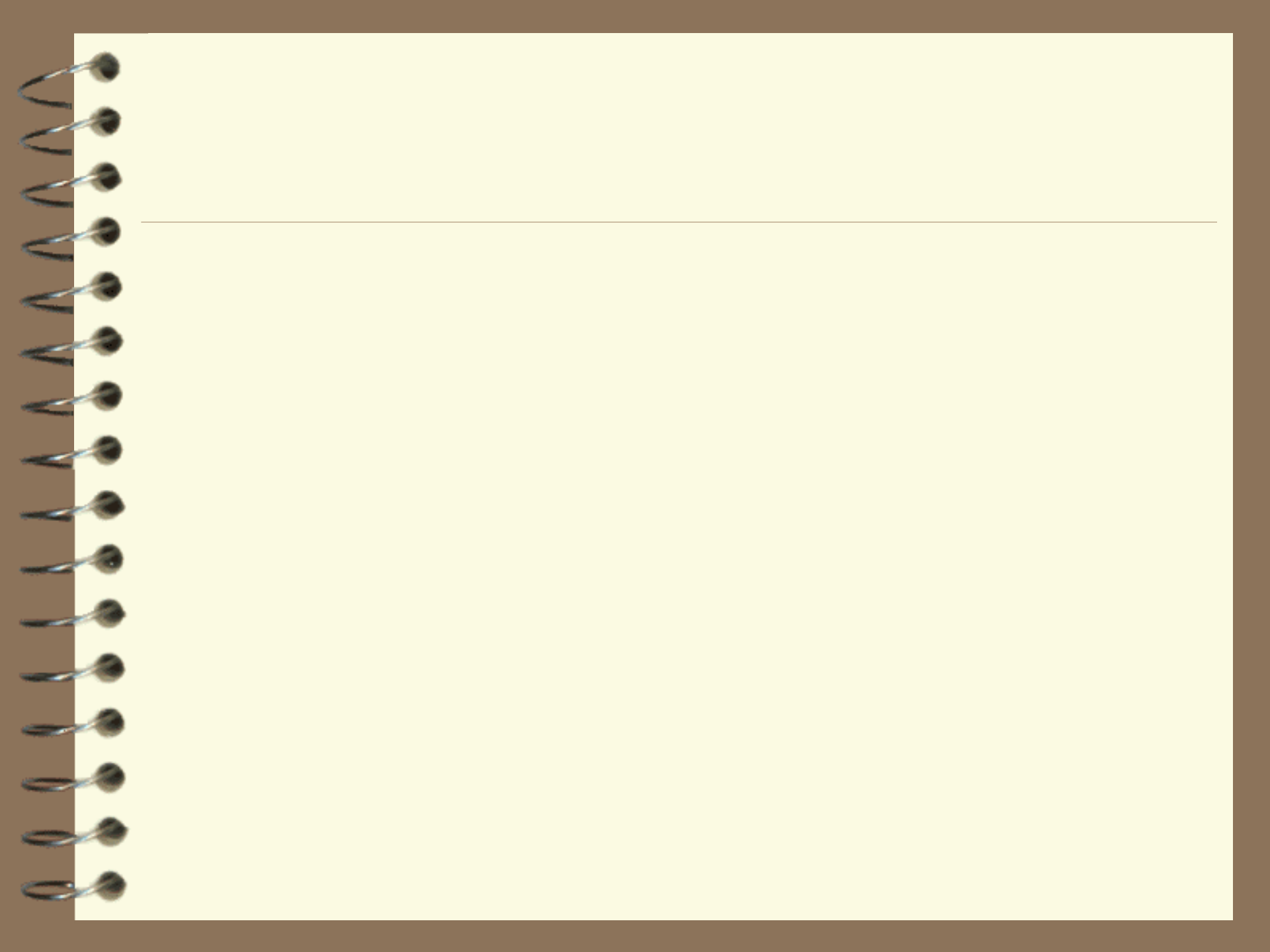
# Consequences of the Holy Spirit Element:

3. The need to keep the Holy Spirit and scripture connected together:

“The Spirit may blow where, but not *what*, He wills”

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 429.





# *Major Elements of a Reformed Hermeneutic*

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1. The Holy Spirit Element
2. *The Grammatical Element*
3. The Literary Element
4. The Historical Element
5. The Theological Element

# The Grammatical Element

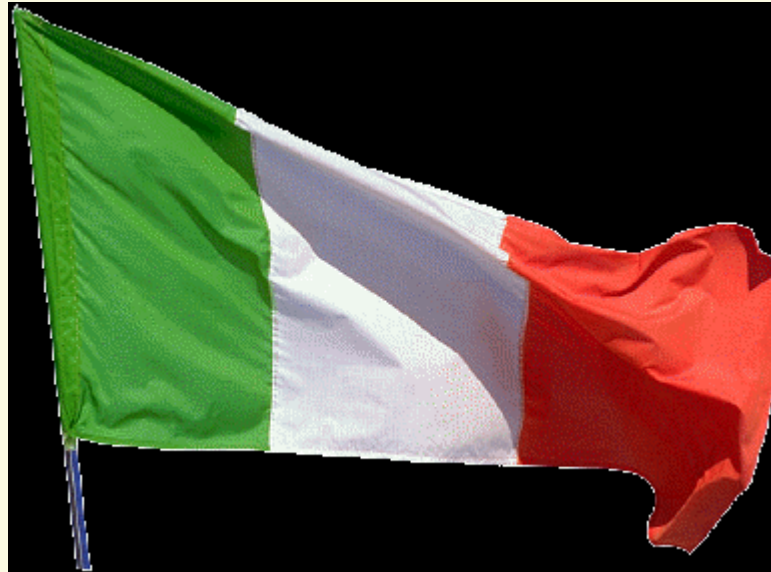
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📄 Thesis: “*Every translation involves interpretation*”

# The Grammatical Element

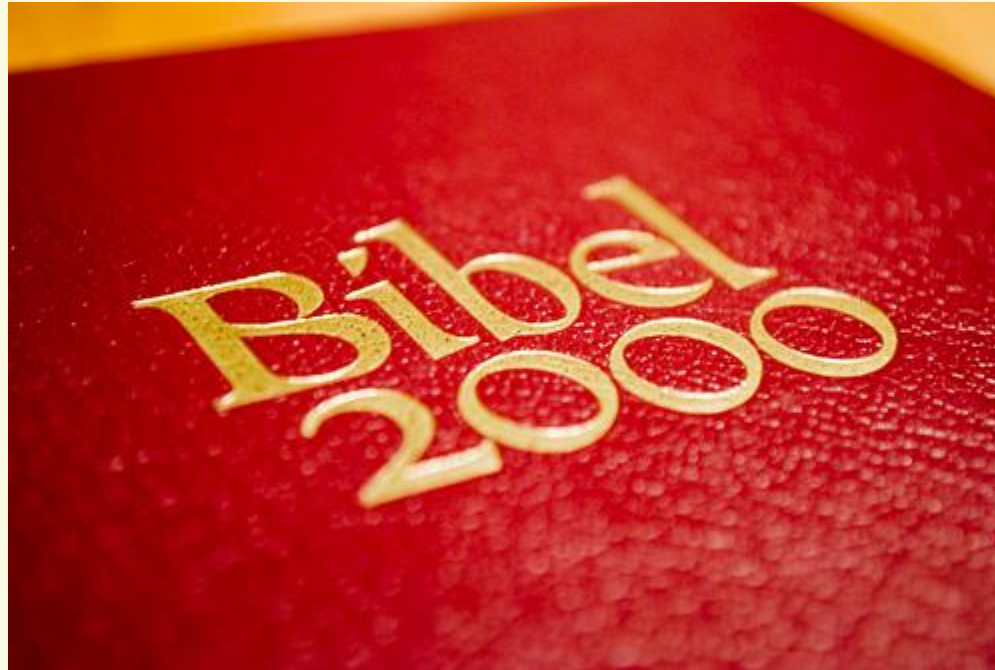
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 ***Italian Proverb:*** “Traduttore traditore”  
 (“The translator is a traitor”)

# The Grammatical Element

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 *Swedish Bible Translation Committee:*

“The art of translation is the art of compromise”



# The Grammatical Element

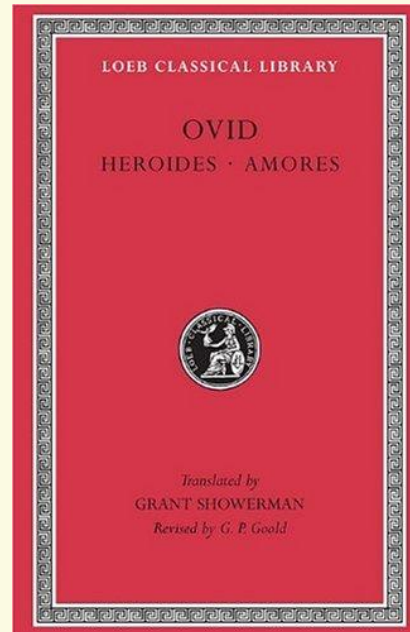
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📄 ***Haim Nachman Bialik*** (1873-1934: Jewish poet):

“Reading the bible in translation is like kissing  
your bride through a veil”

# The Grammatical Element



 ***Grant Showerman*** (1870-1935; Prof. of Classics, Univ. Wisconsin; translator of classical works):

“Translation is sin”

Example 1: Luke 11:5-8 “Parable of the Friend at Midnight”



<sup>11:5</sup>Then he [Jesus] said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,  
<sup>6</sup>because a friend of mine on a journey has come ...

... to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’<sup>7</sup> “Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’<sup>8</sup> I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s *boldness* [marginal reading: *persistence*] he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ” (NIV)

ajnaivdeian (*anaideian*) = “boldness”

ajnaivdeian (*anaideian*) = “persistence”

Example 2: Luke 11:9

“So I say to you: ‘Ask (*aijtei'te/aiteite*) and it will be given to you; seek (*zhtei'te/zêteite*) and you will find; knock (*krouvete/krouete*) and the door will be opened to you” (NIV)

Present Imperatives =  
ongoing, continuous action

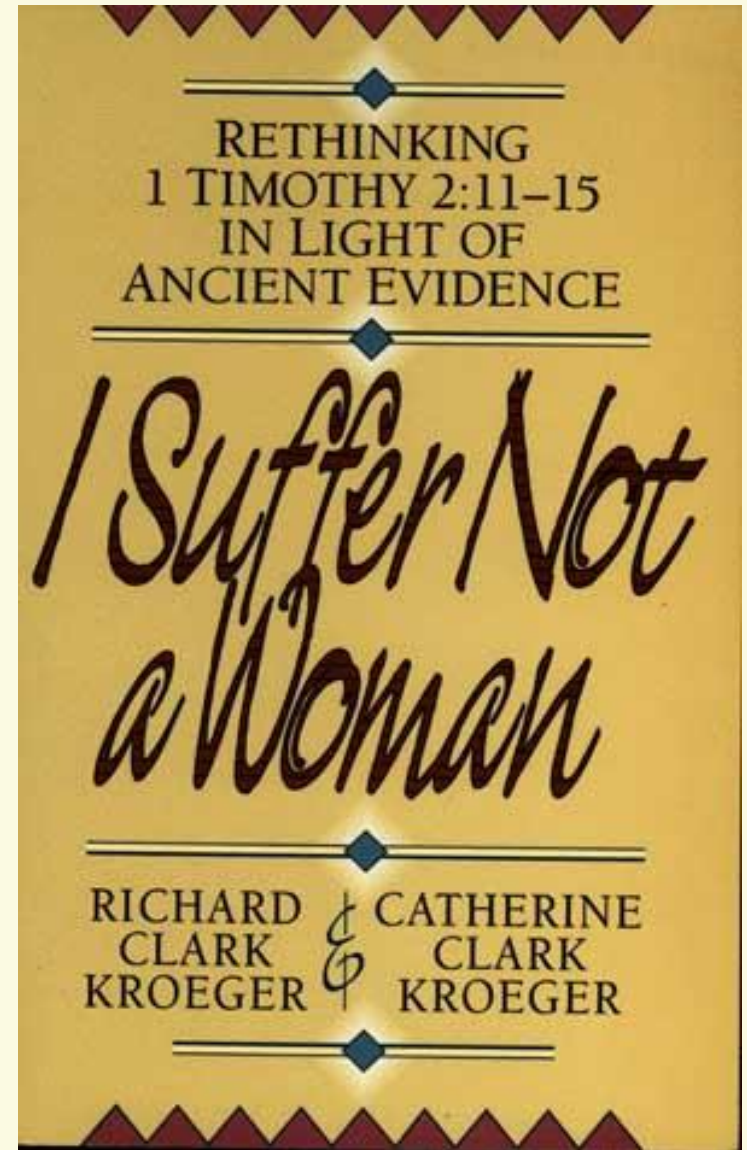


Example 3: 1 Timothy 2:12

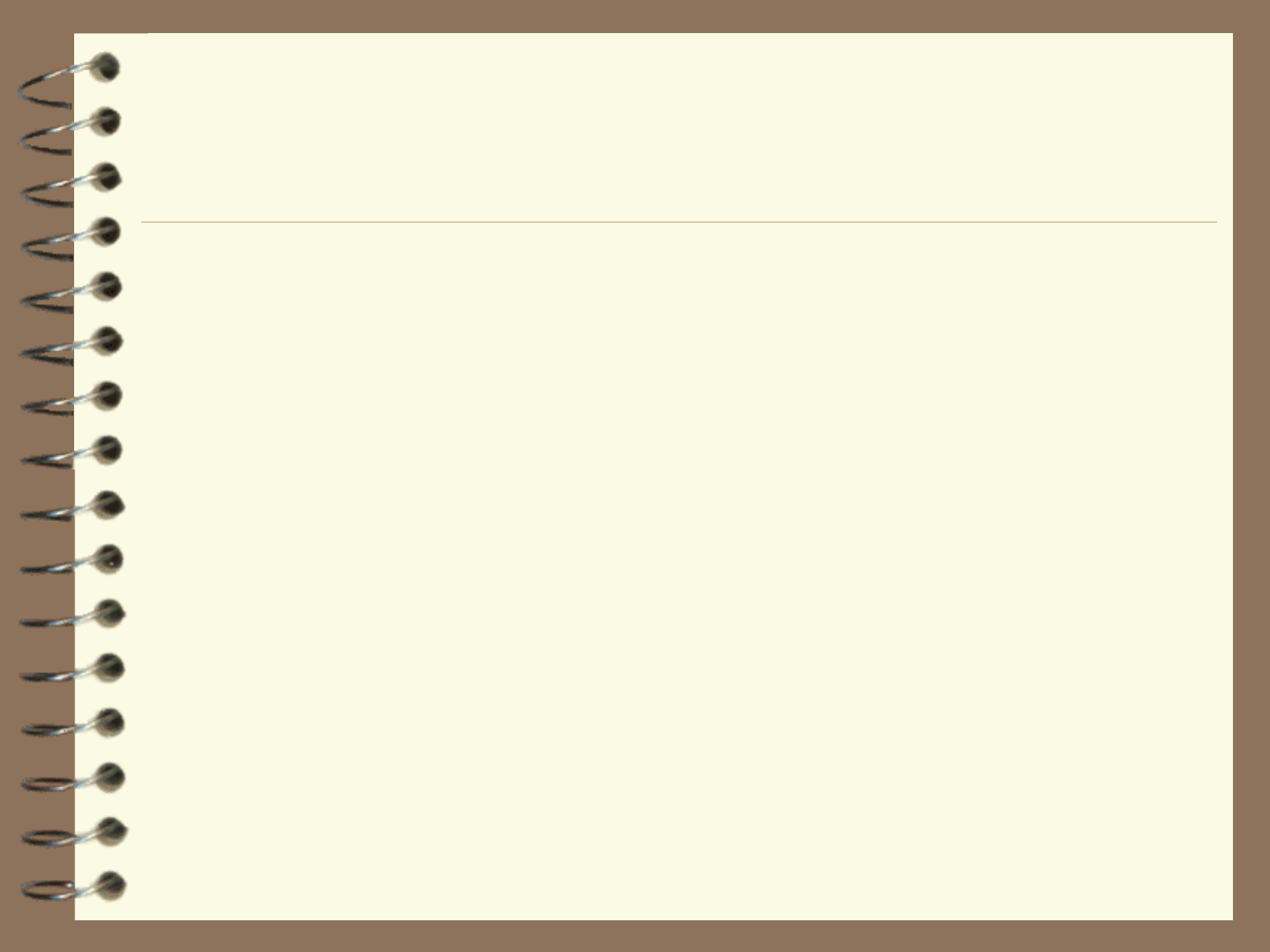
12 “I permit no woman to  
teach or to have authority  
(*aujgentei`n/authentein*)  
over men” (NIV)

1. Traditional View: “to have  
authority over”

2. Challenging View: “to  
represent oneself as originator  
of”








# *Major Elements of a Reformed Hermeneutic*

---

1. The Holy Spirit Element
2. The Grammatical Element
3. *The Literary Element*
4. The Historical Element
5. The Theological Element

# The Literary Element

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 **Genre:** A technical term for different types of writings or categories of literature



# The Literary Element

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## *Types of Genres in Scripture:*

### History:

Genesis, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Acts

### Letters:

Paul (13), John (3), Peter (2), James, Hebrews, Jude, Revelation 2-3

### Poetry:

Psalms, Song of Songs, much of prophetic material

# The Literary Element

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## Wisdom:

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, some Psalms, James

## Apocalyptic:

Revelation, Daniel 7-12, Zechariah, parts of Ezekiel,  
Mark 13

## Legal:

parts of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

# The Literary Element

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## Gospels:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

## Parables:

Four Gospels, parable of Nathan to David (2 Samuel 12:1-4)

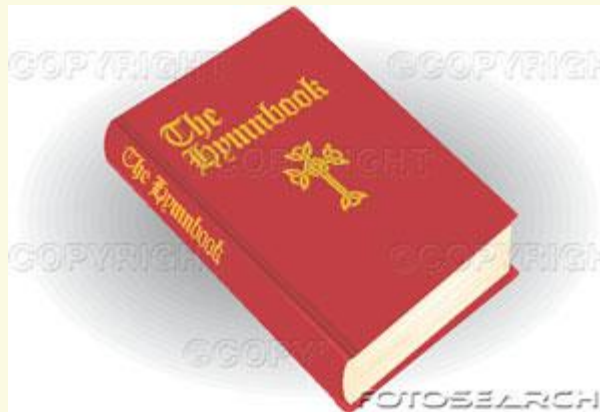


# The Literary Element

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## Psalm 92:1-2 (Poetry: “Merismus”)

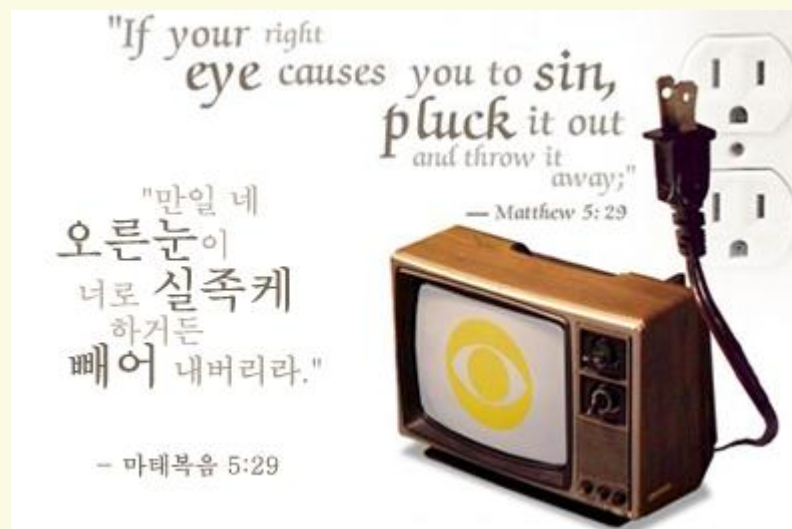
“It is good to praise the Lord  
and make music to your name, O Most High,  
to proclaim your love in the morning  
and your faithfulness at night.”



# The Literary Element

## Matthew 5:29 (Hyperbole)

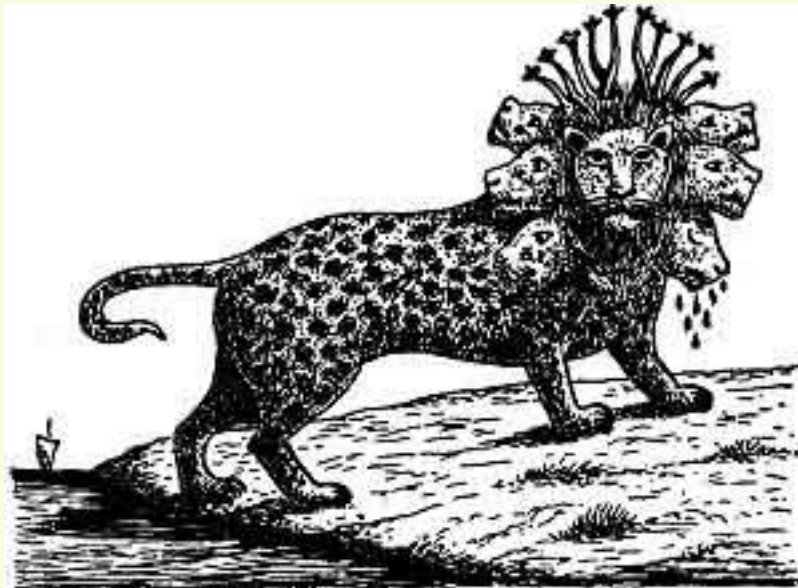
“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away.”



# The Literary Element

## Revelation 13:1 (Apocalyptic)

“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads.”



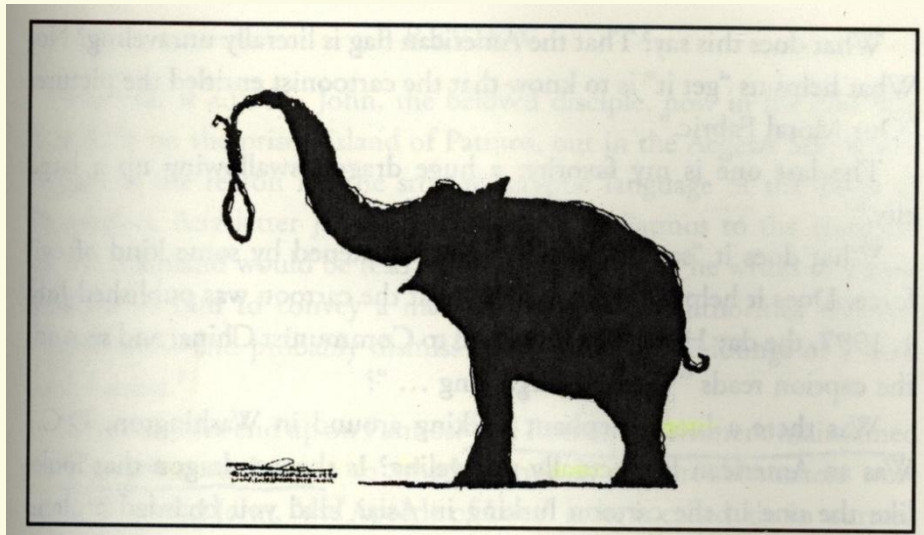
# The Literary Element

## Revelation 13:1 (Apocalyptic)

“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads.”

Elephant = ?

Noose = ?



1998

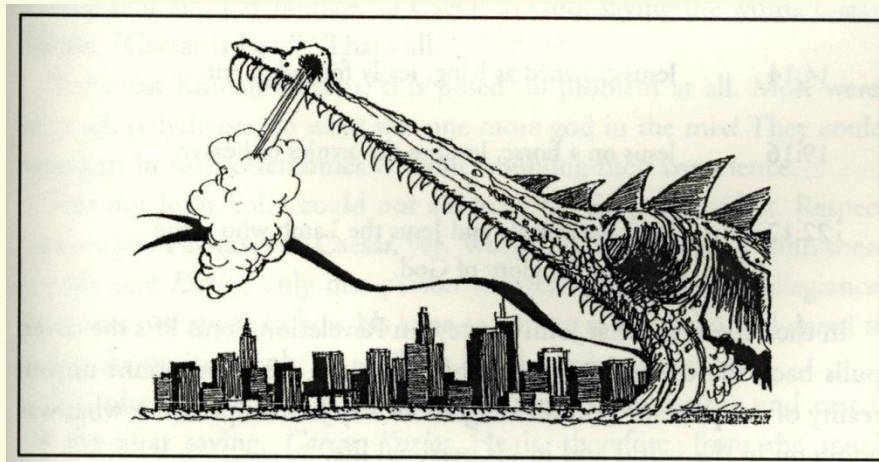
# The Literary Element

## Revelation 13:1 (Apocalyptic)

“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads.”

City = ?

Dragon = ?



“Today, Hong Kong ...?  
(July 1, 1997)”

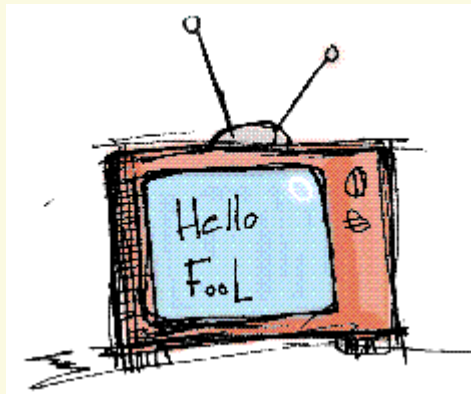
# The Literary Element

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## Proverbs 26:4-5 (Wisdom)

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
or you will be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly,  
or he will be wise in his own eyes.”

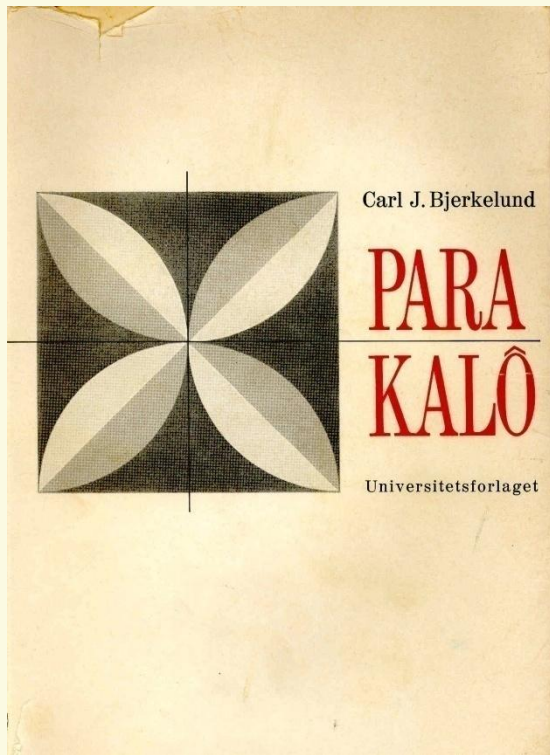




# The Literary Element

## 1. Literary Devices in **Letters**:

### Example: The “Appeal” Formula



Carl J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalô: Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalô-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967).

# The Literary Element

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## Example: The “Appeal” Formula

### A. **Form:** 4 main parts

1. Verb “I appeal” (parakalevw) or its synonym “I ask” (ejrwtauvw) in the first person
2. The recipients of the appeal
3. Prepositional phrase indicating source of sender’s authority to appeal (this element typically occurs only in official correspondence and not in private letters)
4. Content of the appeal: introduced by a “that” (oJtiv or i{na) clause

# The Literary Element

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**Paul's letters:** Four basic elements

Example: *Romans 12:1*

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”

1. The verb: “I appeal”
2. The recipients: “to you, brothers”
3. Prepositional phrase: “by the mercies of God”
4. The content of the appeal: “that you present ...”

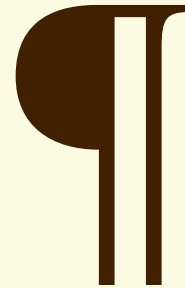
Other examples: Rom 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:15-16; 2 Cor 2:8; 10:1-2; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 4:1, 10b-12; 5:14; 2 Thess 3:14; Eph 4:1

# The Literary Element

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## B. Function

- Primary function:
- to indicate a major transition in the text
- formula marks transition either from the end of the thanksgiving to the beginning of letter body (1 Cor 1:10; Phlm 8-9) or, as more typically happens, a transition within the body of letter (Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:7; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 10:1; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 4:1; Eph 4:1)

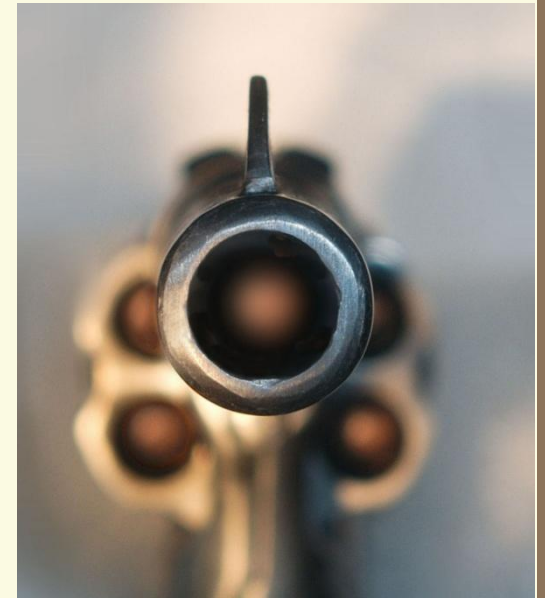


**New  
Paragraph  
Sign**

# The Literary Element

## B. Function (cont)

- Secondary function:
- appeal formula used in official correspondence when writer had a good relationship with recipients and confidently expected them to do contents of letter
- Appeal formula thus expresses a *more friendly, less heavy-handed tone*
- Paul uses the appeal formula in this nuanced manner, where his authority is not in question and he can make a request rather than a command in the confidence that his appeal will be obeyed



**DO IT OR ELSE!**

# The Literary Element

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## C. Appeal Formula in Philemon

“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and command you to do what you ought to do, more because of love I *appeal*—I, Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—I *appeal* to you concerning my child, to whom I gave birth in prison, Onesimus...” (vv 8-10)



# The Literary Element

## 2. Literary Devices in **Hebrew Poetry**: Example: Inklusio

- *inclusio* (sometimes referred to as bracketing or envelope structure): the repetition of a key word, phrase or sentence at the beginning and ending of a literary unit, thereby functioning as bookends and marking the boundaries of that unit



# The Literary Element

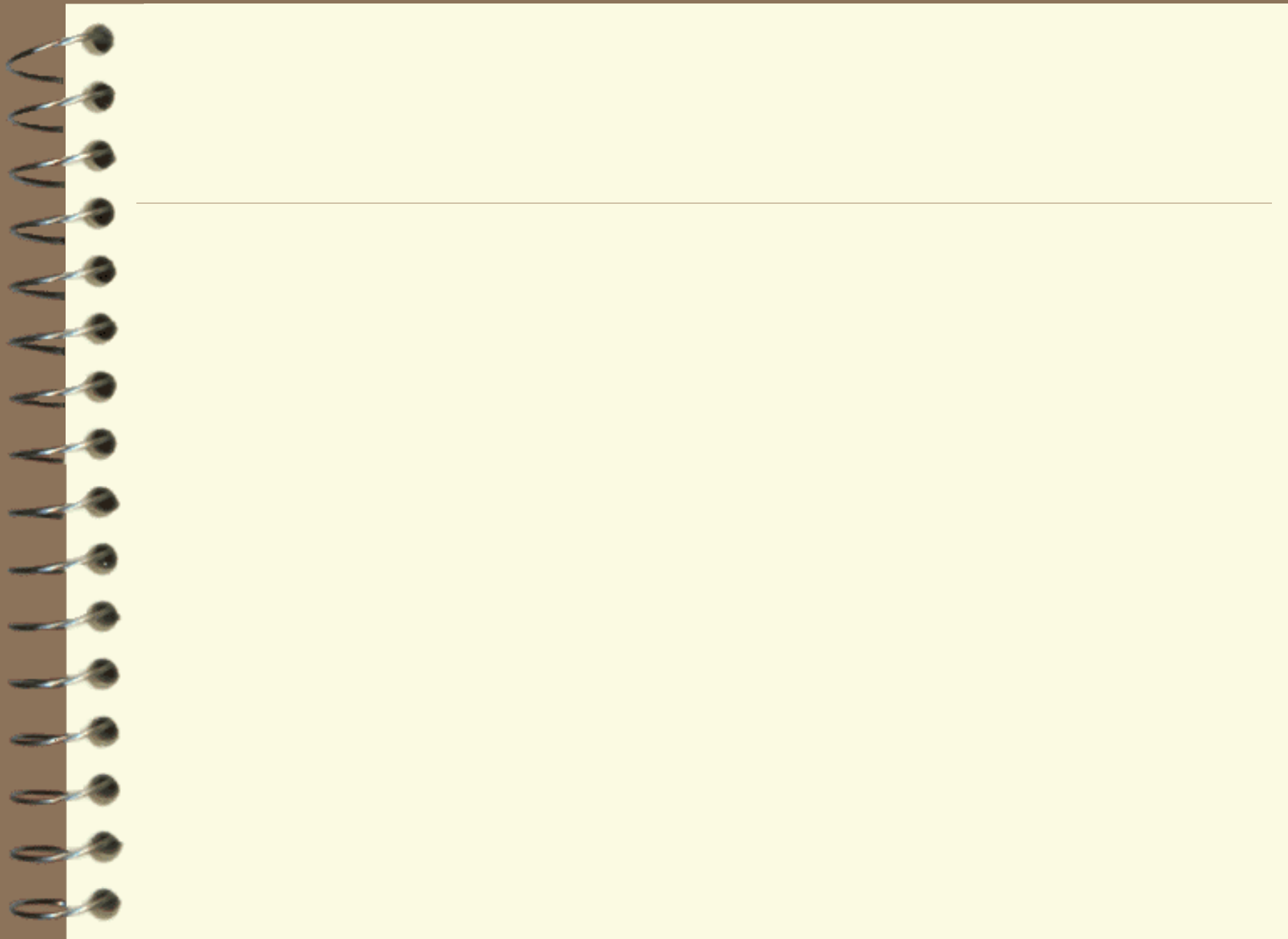
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## 2. Literary Devices in **Hebrew Poetry**: Example: Inclusio

Psalm 118:1-29

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his love endures forever” (verse 1)

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his love endures forever (verse 29)



# *Major Elements of a Reformed Hermeneutic*

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1. The Holy Spirit Element
2. The Grammatical Element
3. The Literary Element
4. *The Historical Element*
5. The Theological Element

# The Historical Element

📄 Importance of the Historical Context

📄 Example: Luke 10:25-37

—Parable of the Good Samaritan



*The Good Samaritan, Rembrandt*



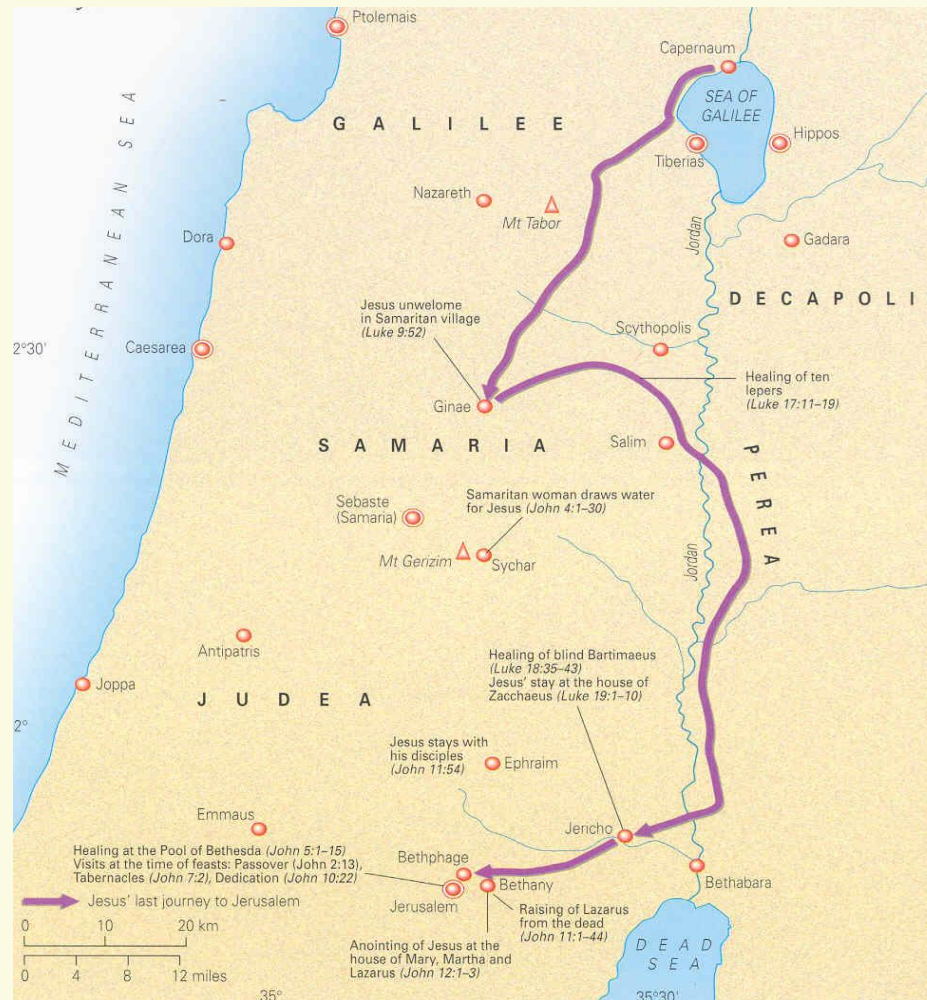
# Parable of the Good Samaritan



Samaritans = Decendants of 10 Lost Tribes of Israel



# Parable of the Good Samaritan



# Parable of the Good Samaritan

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*Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman  
at a Well. Catacomb Mural, 4th/5th AD.*

**John 4:9** “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’”

# Parable of the Good Samaritan

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<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

# The Historical Element

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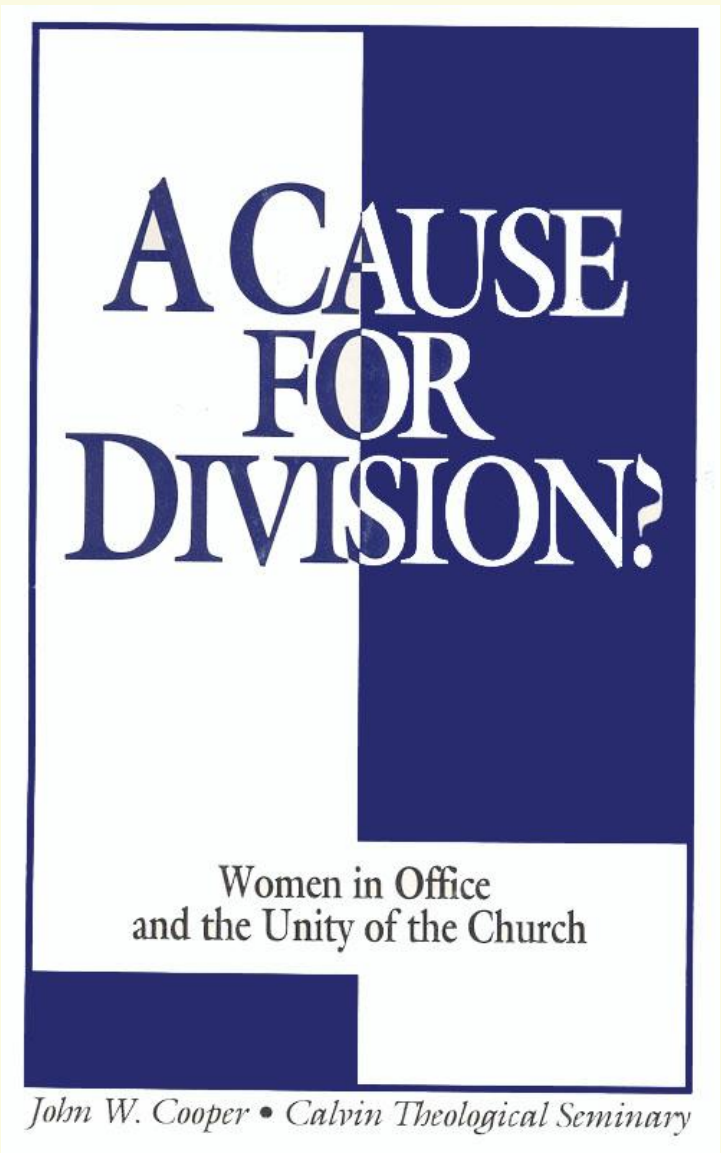
 Problem of the “Historical Gap”

 Scripture as “Culturally Conditioned”

 Scripture as “Culturally Bound”

John Cooper, *A Cause for Division*, 1991:

“But first it is crucial to reiterate that all of the Bible is authoritative and normative for today. The issue is not *whether* the Bible is normative or *which parts* are normative, but *how* it is normative for today.” (p. 26)



# A CAUSE FOR DIVISION?

Women in Office  
and the Unity of the Church

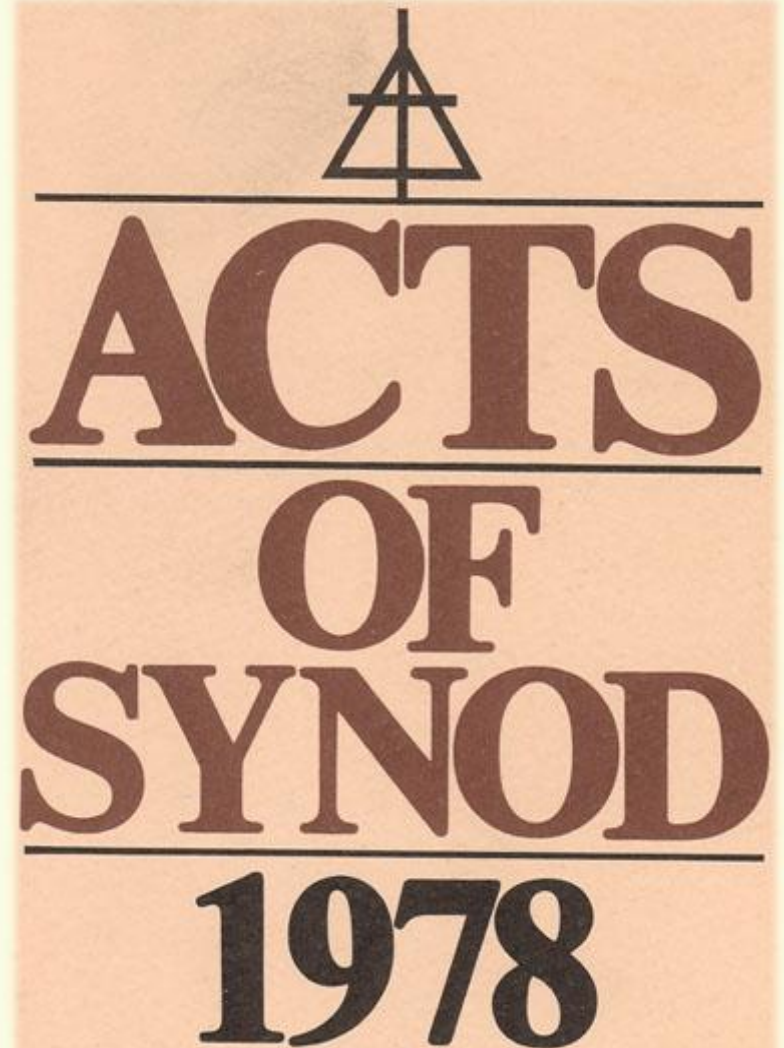
*John W. Cooper • Calvin Theological Seminary*



## Acts of Synod, 1978

“Hermeneutical Principles  
Concerning Women in  
Ecclesiastical Office”:

“A distinction must be made between a moral principle and the application of that principle. The former is normative for the Christian life today, the latter is not necessarily so.” (p. 500)





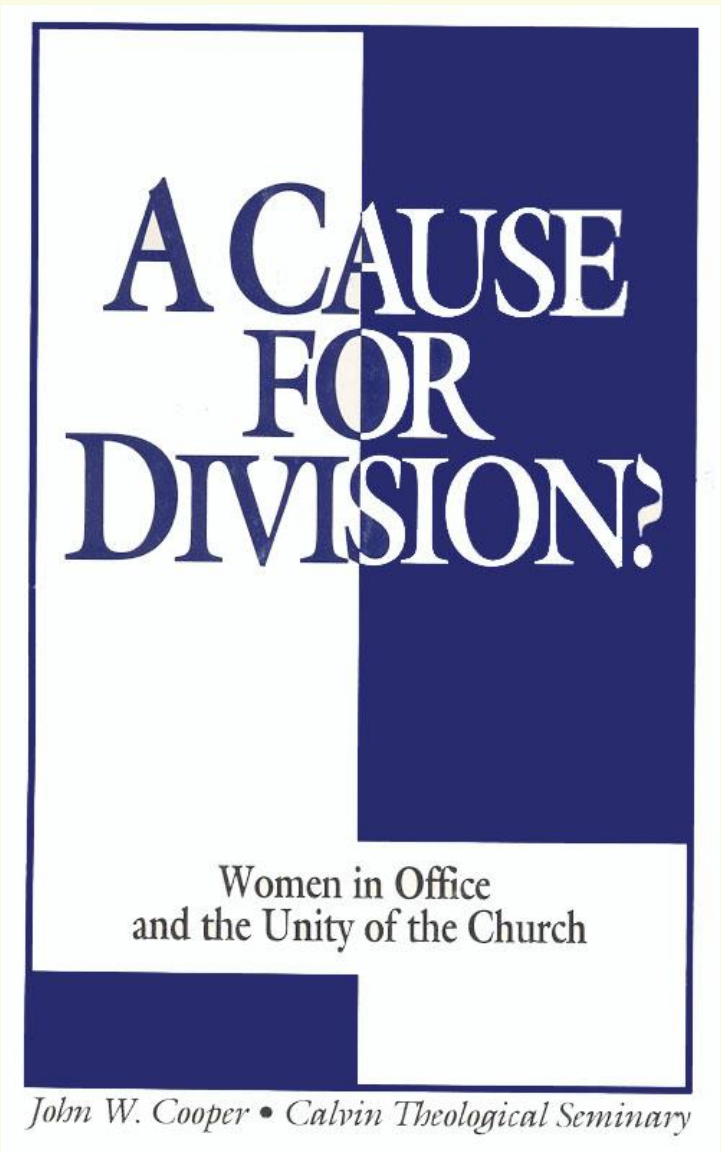


Louis Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932; 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, 1941): 174-175

“Sometimes we may have to come to the conclusion that, while certain laws no more apply in the form in which they were cast, yet their underlying principle is just as binding today as it ever was.”

John Cooper, *A Cause for Division*, 1991:

“Reformed hermeneutics recognizes the difference between a principle and the application of that principle. A principle states God’s abiding will for our lives, but how that principle is applied may vary according to time and place.” (p 29)



# A CAUSE FOR DIVISION?

Women in Office  
and the Unity of the Church

John W. Cooper • Calvin Theological Seminary

J. I. Packer “Understanding the Bible: Evangelical Hermeneutics,”  
*Honouring the Written Word of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999)  
3.157 (originally published in *Restoring the Vision: Anglican  
Evangelical Speak Out* [1990]: 39-58).

“So, just as it is possible to identify in all the books of Scripture universal and abiding truths about the will, work and ways of God, it is equally possible to find in every one of them universal and abiding principles of loyalty and devotion to the holy, gracious Creator; and then to detach these from the particular situations to which, and the cultural frames within which, the books apply them, and to reapply them to ourselves in the places, circumstances, and conditions of our own lives today”  
(page 157)

**Honouring the Written Word of God**

The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer  
Volume 3

James I. Packer



# Differing Degrees of Cultural Influence in Scripture

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## **Minimal Cultural Influence: Col 3:1-3**

“Since (literally ‘if’), then, you have been raised with Christ, set your minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”

Step 1: Discover the abiding principle or underlying moral truth claim (exegesis)

Step 2: Apply that abiding principle to today’s new and contemporary situation (homiletics)

# Differing Degrees of Cultural Influence in Scripture

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## **Some Cultural Influence: Eph 2:11-22**

Division between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians over the issue of circumcision.

Step 1: Discover the abiding principle or underlying moral truth claim (exegesis)

Step 2: Apply that abiding principle to today's new and contemporary situation (homiletics)

# Differing Degrees of Cultural Influence in Scripture

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## **Great Cultural Influence: 1 Cor. 16:20b**

“Greet one another with a holy kiss”

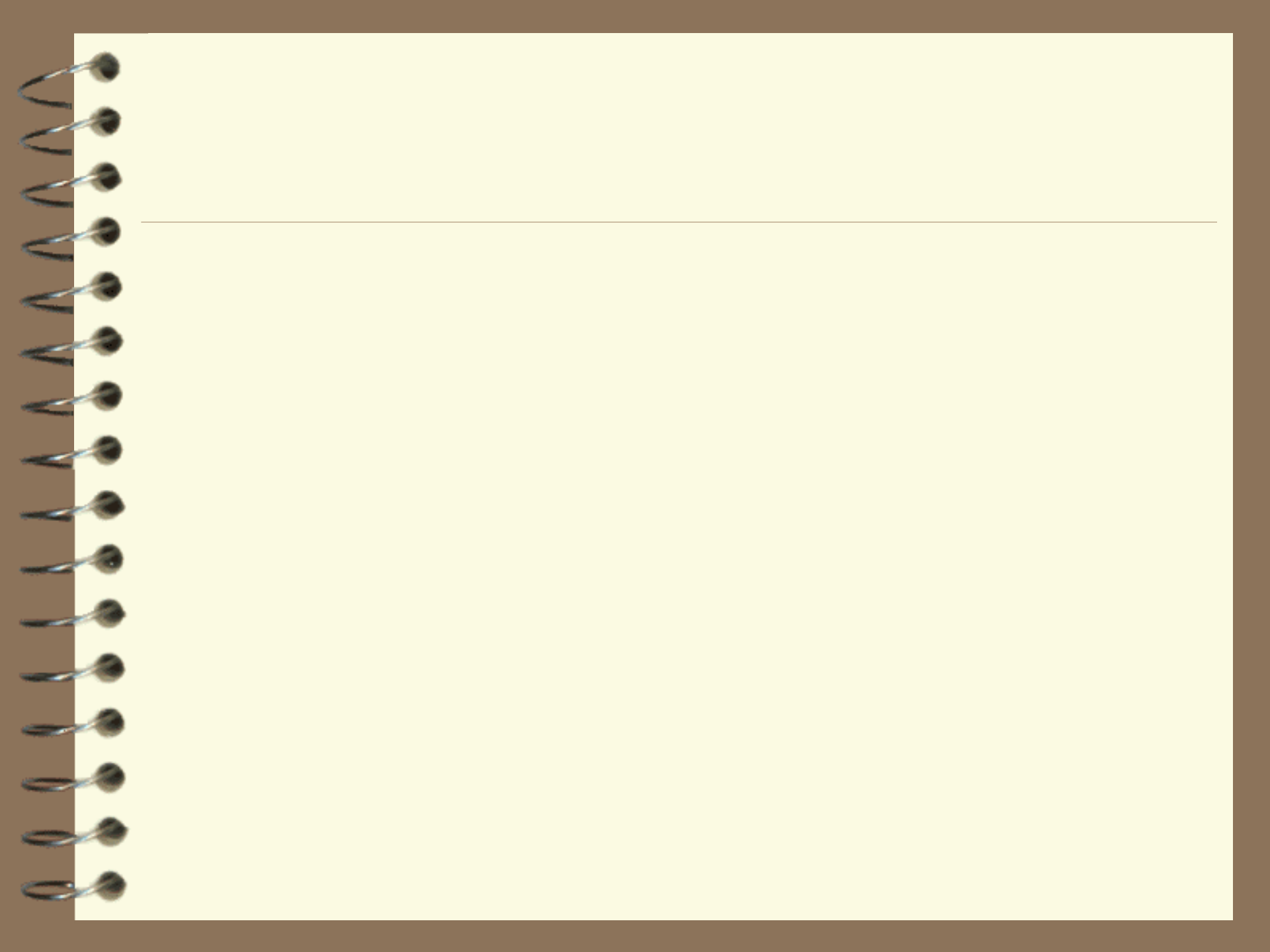
Step 1: Discover the abiding principle or underlying moral truth claim (exegesis)

Step 2: Apply that abiding principle to today’s new and contemporary situation (homiletics)



# Holy Kiss





# *Major Elements of a Reformed Hermeneutic*

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1. The Holy Spirit Element
2. The Grammatical Element
3. The Literary Element
4. The Historical Element
5. *The Theological Element*

# The Theological Element

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Herman Bavinck,  
*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*  
(Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1906):

“... “Holy Scripture has a purpose that is religious-ethical through and through. It is not designed to be a manual for the various sciences. It is the first principle only of theology and desires that we will read and study it *theologically*” (p 471).

# The Theological Element

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## Meaning of the Term

- God is the primary author of the bible





Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950):

“Scripture contains a great deal that does not find its explanation in history, nor in the secondary authors, but only in God as the *Auctor Primarius* ... In view of all this, it is not only perfectly warranted, but absolutely necessary, to complement the usual grammatical and historical interpretation with a third. The name “Theological Interpretation” deserves the preference, as expressive of the fact that its necessity follows from the divine authorship of the Bible”  
(pp 133-134)



# The Theological Element

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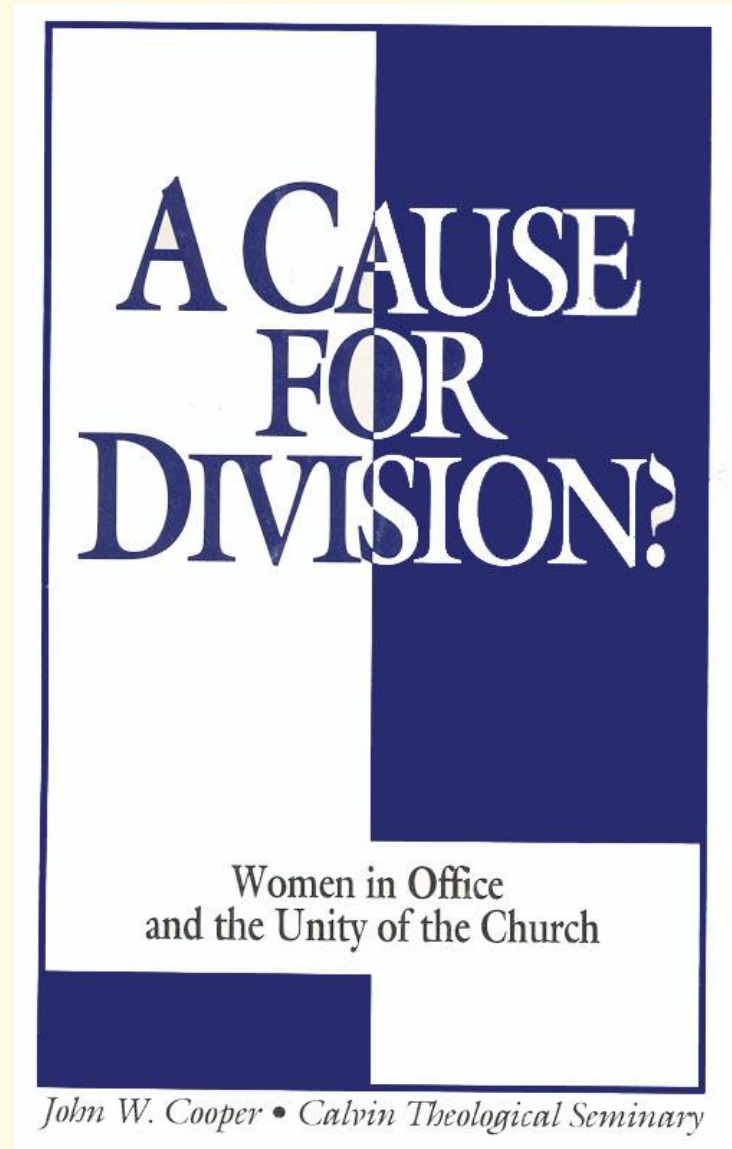
 The Bible as a Unity

 Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

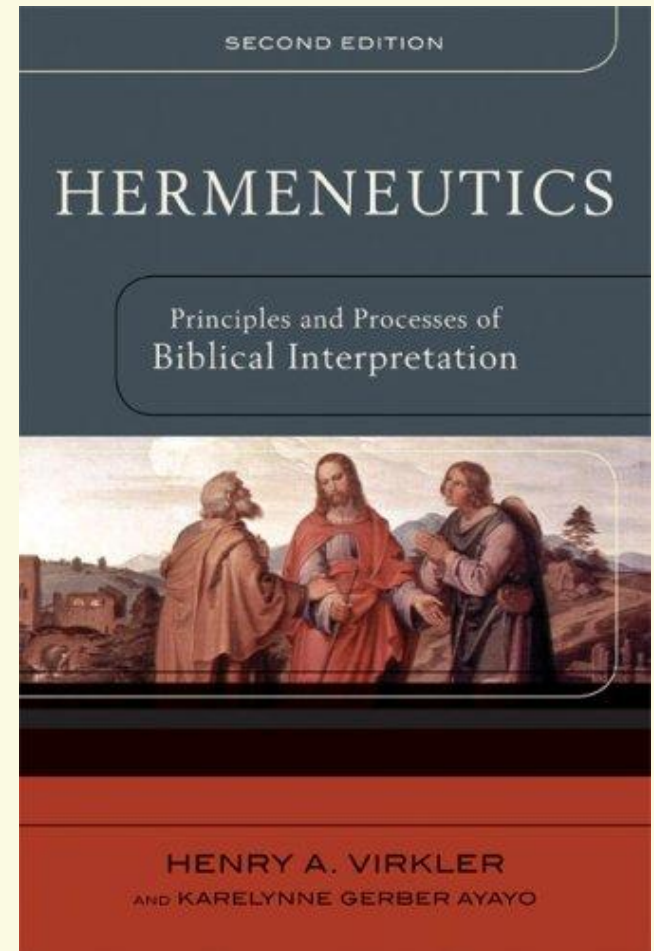
 The “Analogy of Scripture/Faith”

John Cooper, *A Cause for Division*, 1991:

“The Bible is analogical--different texts speak to the same issues, thus modifying and reinforcing each other as they present a unified message ...What God means to teach us in a specific passage cannot be understood apart from everything else he teaches us” (p 21)




“If we believe that each individual writing found in the Bible has a common divine author, then our exegetical exploration expands beyond the relationship between a text and the single biblical writing in which it is found to include questions about its relationship to the entire biblical canon. We are compelled to explore how each part is in continuity with, is consistent with, and must be interpreted by the whole of biblical teaching” (p 122)



Henry A. Virkler,  
*Hermeneutics* (Grand  
Rapids: Baker, 1981;  
2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2007)

# The Theological Element

## Interpreting Scripture with Scripture


 Example #1: Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to me and does not *hate his father and mother* ...he cannot be my disciple.”

= Hate parents?!



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## Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

 Jesus' words in Luke 10:27 “Love your neighbor as yourself”—thus Jesus wants us to love, not hate, others



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## Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

 Jesus' words in Luke 18:20 "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, *honor your father and mother.*'"






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 “hate” = Jewish way of saying “love less”


 Gen 29:30-31: Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah ... and Leah was hated”; “loved more” in the first verse is restated as “hated” in the second verse




Jacob Loved Rachel More Than Leah (Gen 29)

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## Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

 Mal 1:2-3: God says, “I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated”; God did not actually “hate” Esau but rather “loved him less” than Jacob



 See also Deut 21:15-17; Judg 14:16; Prov. 13:24; Isa. 60:15; Luke 16:13; Rom 9:13

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## Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

### Example #2: Church Discipline

- *1 Cor 5:1-2* “... should you not have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?” (i.e., excommunication)



# The Theological Element

## Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

### Example #2: Church Discipline

- *Matthew 18:15-17*
  - 1<sup>st</sup> step: “If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If he or she listens to you, you have won them over”
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> step: “But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses”

# The Theological Element

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### Example #2: Church Discipline

- *Matthew 18:15-17 (continued):*
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> step: “If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church”
  - 4<sup>th</sup> step: “and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or tax collector”

# The Theological Element

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### Example #2: Church Discipline

- *Galatians 6:1* “Brothers, if a person is overtaken in any sin, you who are spiritual should restore that person in a spirit of gentleness”
- *2 Thess 3:15* “... and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. And do not look on him as an enemy but warn him as a brother”