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Rhetorical strategies for biblical hermeneutics

Warren, Timothy S., Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1987
RHETORICAL STRATEGIES FOR

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of the Ohio State University

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Homiletical Task

When the biblical preacher stands to speak, the extent to which his purpose will be fulfilled is at least partially dependent upon his preliminary homiletical methodology. He will have worked through some hermeneutical process in an attempt to determine the meaning of his particular biblical text. Just as the practice of law first of all seeks to determine the intent of the law as written, so the preacher will have sought to determine the intent of the biblical author. Biblical issues are theological in that one's view of the metaphysical world will influence one's behavior in the physical world. If the listener perceives that God has ordained a specific behavior, as a true believer he will respond with proper obedience. A basic issue then, as the preacher mounts the pulpit, is, "What is the process by which the preacher has reached the conclusions he is about to share? What is the reasoning process by which he now asserts his version of Truth?"

As the contributions of hermeneutics, legal interpretation, theology, and rhetoric are examined, one begins to gain a perspective from which to answer the question of how the homiletician prepares to deliver his message. This paper seeks to address that process.

The ultimate goal of the biblical preacher is to repeat God's words after Him to a new generation, to proclaim again and anew God's message.

"The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God." So spoke the Second Helvetic Confession, and so speaks much of the church today. To claim for our flatulent pronouncements the status "Word of God" may be a bit much to swallow; to fail to make that claim, however, is to forget that, as long as our frailty represents frailty before God it is never absolute, for he is able to make of it what he wills.

Initiating this ancient tradition, Moses and the Jewish prophets claimed that God Himself, and God alone, was the source of their utterances.
"And it came about in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the Lord had commanded him to give to them . . . " (Deut. 1:3).

Among the prophets, Jeremiah wrote, "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying . . . . Behold, I have put my words in your mouth . . . . Now, gird up your loins, and arise, and speak to them all that I command you . . . " (Jer. 1:4, 9, 17).

The Apostle Paul identified the preacher's work with that of a steward who dispenses only that which has been entrusted to him by the master. "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy . . . " (1 Cor. 4:1-2).

While contemporary preachers still claim to speak God's words after Him, there is a critical difference between the biblical prophets and apostles and the present-day herald. The difference is that whereas once God spoke immediately, personally, and even audibly, now God communicates through the Scriptures. Personal revelation is no longer considered normative in Christian theology. Therefore, today's preacher begins with the ancient, yet extant, revelation from God as found in the Scriptures and declares it to a contemporary audience.

The task is parallel to that of Ezra, the teacher of Israel during the time of the Jewish restoration some 450 years before Christ. Ezra "explained the law to the people . . . and read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading." (Neh. 8:7-8). In the first century, Timothy, the young preacher-protege of Paul, was encouraged to "entrust [the message of God] to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" by "handling accurately the word of truth." (1 Tim. 2:2, 15).

We need also to view this task in its contemporary setting. When the preacher steps into the pulpit, the people listen for two elements. First, they listen for a true word from God. Second, they listen for a true word from God which substantially influences their lifestyle. Listeners want the assurance that the message spoken is accurate and that, through subsequent
application of that message, attitudes and behaviors will be brought into a closer congruence with
divine expectation. The preacher who speaks merely because the hour to speak has come is
doomed to failure. On the other hand, the preacher who speaks because God has spoken and
because some exigence is evident discovers the sometimes lonely and always difficult task of
interpreting the Scripture and then applying its truth to the contemporary situation.

But a tension often exists between these two necessary elements of biblical preaching.
There is a tendency to influence the preacher toward one requirement of the hermeneutical task
to the exclusion of the other. John R. W. Stott, arguing that one's theological stance often
prejudices one's approach to preaching, has noted that, "On the one hand, conservatives are
biblical but not contemporary, while on the other liberals and radicals are contemporary, but not
biblical." 9

In order to attain to the ultimate goal of preaching, then, these two hermeneutical
procedures must be implemented; first, the interpretational aspect which seeks to discover the
MEANING of the text and then the applicational aspect which seeks to articulate the
SIGNIFICANCE of that meaning. 10 The primary task of the biblical preacher, therefore, is to come
to terms with the meaning of the divine message. Only after this interpretational process has
been implemented will he be in a position to proclaim that meaning to the people, applying its
significance to that particular situation. 11

This paper will give attention to that primary homiletical task: the interpretation of the
Scriptures. It will endeavor to describe the hermeneutical process through which the preacher
must work if he is to follow the ancient tradition of speaking God's words after Him.

If the preacher fails at the primary or interpretational level, he will have failed his ultimate
task even before he stands to speak. The meaning of Scripture must be determined before
proclamation, for, according to Paul's account to the Thessalonians, it is the work of the herald to
speak God's words after him.
And for this reason (so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory) we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thess. 2:12-13).

**Context for the Study**

There are several considerations which highlight the importance of a study in biblical hermeneutics. First, numerous leading spokesmen for the evangelical community have been calling attention to the hermeneutical question. Carl F. H. Henry, for example, claims:

The problem of biblical authority will probably continue to disturb evangelicals very deeply. The issue will not focus simply on inerrancy, but also on interpretation as well, and especially on the culture-relatedness and culture-dependence on biblical revelation... The eye of the storm is shifting to two issues: the cultural conditioning of revelation and the interpretation of Scripture.

Though coming from a broader perspective, Richard Palmer concurs. He argues that, "The New Hermeneutic has emerged as a dominant movement in European Protestant Theology, asserting that hermeneutics is the ‘local point’ of today’s theological issues." The hermeneutical issue, in fact, has been classified as the "second front" in the "Battle for the Bible." The "first front" gives attention to the issues of biblical authority and inerrancy. "Is the Bible true and accurate?" is the primary question asked in this first line of conflict. Once that question has been answered in the affirmative, the preacher may address the hermeneutical questions: "What does the text mean?" and "What is the significance of the meaning for me and for my congregation?"

As A. Berkeley Mickelsen has noted in the Preface to his McElwain Lectures on Interpretation, "Christians not only want to communicate to the men of today, but they want to know the biblical basis for what they have to say." Hermeneutics, therefore, has become a predominant concern in theological and religious circles today.

A second consideration which encourages this study is more personal, for the individual preacher must come to terms with a process by which he can both understand the text for himself and communicate that understanding persuasively to his congregation. The message of the sermon, if it is to be genuinely biblical, must be determined by the text of Scripture.
The most impelling motive for learning to interpret the Scriptures correctly is the necessity to understand clearly for ourselves exactly what we are trying to communicate to others. The need to communicate all of the gospel message is urgent: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16); but double is the woe to one who, though he claims to be preaching the gospel, does in fact not do so because he has misinterpreted the written record. . . .

Beyond this need to interpret carefully the text in order to represent it accurately is the need to demonstrate that the message is actually there in the text. The preacher must employ a hermeneutical process that is clear enough to be sharable with his listeners. Christ followed this assumption when, in teaching His disciples, "he opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures" by "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets" and "explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:45, 27). The Apostle Paul, too, preached so that "they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

What is needed is a hermeneutical process by which the preacher will be able both to represent the text accurately and to demonstrate the integrity of his interpretation. Sermons must come out of the inexplicable realm of the mysterious and into the demonstrable realm of the reasonable. A sermon which cannot be supported by good reasons is not worth preaching, and a hermeneutical process that does not deal in good reasons is practically ineffective.

A third consideration in undertaking this study is that of seeking greater unity within the Church at large. There are many and important theological and practical differences throughout Christianity. Those differences are supposedly based on legitimate, but divergent interpretations of the same Text. Not only do diverse principles and procedures lead to different results, but also the same or similar principles and procedures often lead to dissimilar conclusions.

For example, there are several interpretations of the meaning and/or mode of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. If it is assumed that there is only one true meaning and mode in each of these Christian symbols, then it should be possible for Interpreters to come to agreement on
what it is. And in fact, "When interpreters from various groups have worked together to unfold the meaning of a passage, agreement on many significant conclusions has been reached."22

One of the needs, therefore, within the Church is an approach to interpretation which will prove itself worthy of acceptance to a wide representation of Christians. Hermeneutics could prove to be a means of bringing greater unity to the church.23

The groundwork for this broader unity, and a fourth constraint prompting this study, is the growing recognition of the relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric.24 Noting the conclusion of Hyde and Smith that "all hermeneutics is rhetorical"25 and the observation by Gadamer of "the ubiquitous function of rhetoric in all hermeneutical activity,"26 Allen Scutt argues that "the rhetorical rather than the hermeneutical situation is the proper ground for hermeneutical activity, at least in the case of sacred texts, and further that this grounding drastically alters our perception of the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics."27 Although Scutt falls into the common error of merging the interpretational and applicational aspects of hermeneutics, he is correct in asserting that "interpretation is a species of rhetorical invention chosen by the rhetorician-interpreter when there is warrant to extend in time and space the meaning of the sacred text."28 Thus, the motivation behind biblical hermeneutics, the source of ideas for the sermon, and the means of bringing this knowledge to new audiences are all fundamentally rhetorical.

This is the conclusion not only of rhetoricians, but also of biblical scholars. James I. Packer recognizes the necessity of employing reason during the invention process when he states, "The faithful use of reason in biblical interpretation is not ministerial, not magisterial; the believing interpreter will use his mind not to impose or manufacture meaning but to grasp the meaning that is already there in the material itself."29 When he argues that since God has spoken "Christian people must continually labor to interpret the Scriptures so that their normative divine message to us may be properly understood,"30 he echoes the notion of rhetorical situation.31
There is also a recognition among some biblical scholars of the difference between formal certainty and moral certainty, between the philosophical or, perhaps, scientific and the rhetorical. While this distinction is often noted and applied to the question of inerrancy, it is also being applied to the question of interpretation. The proper interpretation, that which is correct or valid, is founded and supported not by absolute, formal certainty, but by probability.

Rhetoric, therefore, provides the overriding principle for biblical hermeneutics. The rhetorical process of judging between good reasons in the search for knowledge transcends and tests the more specific and particular rules for interpreting a given text. This relationship demands our attention and merits further description.

**Thesis Statement**

In addressing the issues in context as stated above, the following thesis will be set forth and defended: RHETORICAL ARGUMENTATION IS A VALID BASIS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION. The interpretational aspects of the hermeneutical process are validated by sound rhetorical argumentation. Since rhetoric is a way of knowing, it is assumed that new knowledge is acquired through a rhetorical process of achieving consensus in the minds of the searching community. Thus, the preacher must prove to himself and to his congregation that a particular interpretation of Scripture is the valid interpretation by means of justifiable reasoning. He holds up a picture of how things are, how they must be because there are no more reasonable alternatives.

In demonstrating the thesis, the following questions will be asked: What theories address the issues of practical biblical interpretation? Can a practical model of biblical interpretation be developed? Will such a model function acceptably?

In answering these questions, the following organizational structure will be pursued: A review of the hermeneutical problem, including a discussion of the author's assumptions; a working definition of the term "hermeneutics" and other related terms; an overview of the
historical approaches to hermeneutics, with a special emphasis on biblical interpretation; an identification of the two major divisions of contemporary hermeneutical studies, that is, the philosophical and the practical; and a statement of the limitations of the study.

Next, a practical model for biblical interpretation will be proposed. Since the basic model is to be founded in rhetorical argumentation, these rhetorical elements will be identified. To round out the formulation of the model, the concept of game or schema will be discussed. The schema will serve as a basic component of the model.

The final section of this study will concentrate on the testing of the proposed model. The biblical term παρθένος (fornication), as used in the exceptive clauses of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, will be employed in the testing and evaluation of the model. Four major positions will be proposed for the interpretation of παρθένος. These schemata will be placed in contention with one another to test for reasonableness and rationalness. The goal of this evaluative process is to demonstrate whether or not the proposed model will provide a practical basis for determining the valid interpretation of a text.

Overview of Significant Resources

Hermeneutics

A broad range of subjects will be taken into consideration for this particular essay. The study will draw upon knowledge from four major fields including, Hermeneutics, Law, Theology, and Rhetoric.

For the purpose of this discussion, hermeneutics will be represented by its two distinct divisions, the philosophical and the practical, with each division having its own set of essential questions. Philosophical hermeneutics seeks to answer the ontological and epistemological questions, "Can we know?" and "How can we know?" Since the questions are general, the answers tend to be more abstract and theoretical. Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Bultman, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur are among the leading representatives of philosophical hermeneutics.
Palmer argues for a philosophical approach to the subject of hermeneutics. "What is needed . . . is a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interpretation itself, an understanding that is philosophically adequate both epistemologically and ontologically."39

Whereas philosophical hermeneutics focuses on the pre-condition of understanding, practical hermeneutics seeks out functional principles for understanding a particular phenomenon.40 Palmer notes, for example, that the use of the term "hermeneutics" emerged out of the felt need of biblical preachers to have some set of rules for the proper exegesis of Scripture.

. . . the term appears to have occurred with increasing frequency [after 1654], especially in Germany. Protestant circles there strongly felt the need for interpretive manuals to assist ministers in the exegesis of Scripture, since the minister was cut off from recourse to the authority of the Church to decide questions of interpretation.41

Historically, therefore, hermeneutics, and especially biblical hermeneutics, has specialized in the practical, seeking out the best methods, rules, and procedures for properly understanding and applying the sacred Text. In fact, hermeneutical studies grew out of this implicit need. Interpreters have searched for tools which would allow the critics to "get into" the text to determine the meaning of the author/Author, and then to "get back out of" the text to evaluate and apply the meaning. These tools must act as a doorway or window into and out of which the exegete/critic can climb to do his work. Some representatives of this practical school include Ramm, Pannenberg, Kaiser, Terry, Fee, Virkler, Packer, LaBreche, and Sproul.42

Both philosophical hermeneutics, with its concern for the process of understanding, and practical hermeneutics, with its emphasis on rules for understanding, have a legitimate service to render the student of biblical interpretation. The practical rules of biblical hermeneutics must be established upon a sound philosophical foundation.

Law

A tentative parallel between legal and biblical hermeneutics will be considered. In the case of law, the lawyer/judge sets about to interpret the "laws of the land" as they relate to crime
and punishment. In the case of the Bible, the exegete/preacher seeks to interpret the "laws of God" as they relate to blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. This writer assumes, therefore, that the processes through which the lawyer/judge comes to grips with the meaning of the law may shed light on the task of the biblical interpreter. Of special interest to the present argument are the issues of intent and justification. "What did the authors of the law intend when they wrote the law?" Whitehead, Malbin, Marshall, Kaiser, and Payne have written with this question in mind. "What reasons are put forth to justify one's interpretation of intent?" Cady and Dworkin have addressed the problem of how the law is to be approached, while Corwin, Perelman, Makau, and Golden have offered insights into the process of judicial reasoning which may prove beneficial in identifying principles of justification in biblical interpretation.

Hans-Georg Gadamer has called attention to the unity of the hermeneutical problem which existed in the eighteenth century between the jurist and the theologian. Several parallels have been noted by Palmer.

Both juridical and theological hermeneutics seek the task of interpretation not merely as an antiquarian effort to enter another world but as an effort to span the distance between a text and the present situation . . . both tend to negate the idea that the text is understood on the basis of congeniality with its author . . . in fact we do not relate to the author but to the text. In both legal and theological interpretation the interpreter does not so much apply a method as adjust and order his own thinking to that of the text. He is not so much appropriating a possession as being appropriated by the governing claim of the text.

One of the goals of this study will be to discover which juridical principles of interpretation have relevance to biblical hermeneutics. It is anticipated that the processes of argumentation through which the lawyer/judge proceeds may bear some resemblance to the process of the exegete/preacher.

Rhetoric

The third major field of study from which this dissertation will draw is that of rhetoric. Of particular interest are those areas that treat argument, probability, certainty, and learning.

Among the significant works to be examined are those of Aristotle, Wallace, Brockriede, Ehnner, Perelman, Toulmin, and Weaver. Since the basis of the proposed model for this
work is argumentation, the writer will be searching for a functional concept of the subject which can be incorporated into the practical model.

In that the goal of argument is to discover what is probable or even certain, the works of Campbell, Reid, and Quenstedt will be pursued along with those previously mentioned.\textsuperscript{49} While the interpreter is searching for certainty, it is not a formal certainty, but rather a moral certainty which "refers to certainty acquired from the weight of evidence that, though lacking in philosophical certainty, is weighty enough to impose moral culpability."\textsuperscript{50} This distinction must be and will be clarified.\textsuperscript{51}

It is through the process of argumentation that people "come to know."\textsuperscript{52} The works of learning experts like Dewey, Piaget, Odell, Polanyi, and Holt will be consulted, therefore, in an effort to sharpen our understanding of the operations through which all human beings move in order to come to terms with new words, situations, or concepts.\textsuperscript{53}

Theology

Finally, the field of theology will be consulted. In order to offer some preliminary evaluation of the hermeneutical model to be developed in this study, the theologically significant term \textit{nopvela} will be investigated. Representative theologians will serve as the proponents for each of four interpretations of the term \textit{nopvela}. The following writers are among those who have contributed to the debate: (1) representing the Erasmian view are Adams, Charles, Duty, and Murray; (2) for the modified Patristic position, Lovestam, Heth, and Wenham; (3) for the Betrothal view, Isaksson, Bolce, and Fitzmyer; and (4) for the Unlawful Marriages position, Steele, Ryrie, and Laney.\textsuperscript{54}

Method

Throughout this study, the critical/scientific method of research will be employed. F. N. Kerlinger has defined the critical/scientific method as the "systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural
phenomena. Less formally, this method consists of the employment of "a set of logical rules for determining the validity of assertions about observable events. The critical/scientific researcher, therefore, consigns himself to the process of observing particular phenomena, predicting demonstrable relationships between specific elements of those phenomena, and logically defending his choice to validate, invalidate, or modify his predictions.

Adapting John Dewey's explanation of this process, Robert J. Kibler has outlined a series of six stages through which the researcher advances including: (1) Encountering "some obstacle, barrier, or doubt which puzzles him. For example, he may observe an event which he does not understand and be curious about it." (2) Formulating "a precise statement of the problem" during which one "moves from an essentially 'emotional' encounter with the obstacle to an 'intellectual' encounter" by asking questions, reflecting on previous experiences and information, making further observations, and gathering facts. (3) Constructing a hypothesis which seeks "to explain the facts he thinks are related to the difficulty." These are "conjectural statements which predict the relation of dependency between two or more variables" and "propose a logical explanation for the specific problem under examination." (4) Deducing or predicting "the consequences of his hypothesis, reasoning that if his hypothesis is true, certain consequences should follow." (5) Observing the consequences of the hypothesis through empirical testing. "This step in the research process usually comes only after the scientist has recognized his problem and tried to state and explain it." (6) Drawing conclusions which "confirm or disconfirm his hypothesis on the basis of the empirical evidence of his research."

The following figure offers a visual conceptualization of these minimally required stages of the critical/scientific method.
Figure 1.
The Scientific Method
The process allows for individual flexibility. Kibler, in fact, warns against extreme rigidity while employing the critical/scientific approach.

This sequence of phases in scientific inquiry is not an inflexible pattern imposed on all practicing scientists and beginning researchers. Dewey himself observed that the reflective thinking sequence varies from individual to individual and problem to problem. A given phase is not always completed before the next is started. Moreover, the phases or steps may be undertaken out of order or even simultaneously. There may be a major emphasis on one phase of the process and limited interest in another phase. Dewey also recognized that some steps may be eliminated and others may need to be added for different types of problems. It is a process; the parts or phases are interdependent.60

A general summary of these stages delineates the rough structure to which this study will adhere. Phases 1 and 2, which represent the formulation of the problem, will be addressed in chapters I and II. Phases 3 and 4, which counterpart the establishment of a hypothesis and the criteria by which it will be tested, will receive attention in chapter III. Phases 5 and 6, which depict the evaluative aspects of the study, will be treated in chapters IV and V. The basic assumption is that through the use of the critical/scientific method, a logically defendable practical approach to the problem of biblical hermeneutics will be discovered and described.

Model

A key element of this method, and of particular interest to this study, is the development of a model which will serve to increase our understanding of important aspects of the interpretational process.61 Concerning this method of model building, Kelly suggests that we should, "Examine a variety of scientific theories, not to find one which can be copied concretely, but to discover common principles which can be applied to the building of brand new theories especially designed to fit [the present] realm of events."62 The goal for the model, then, is to illuminate the events leading to one's coming to understand the meaning of the biblical text. In so doing, the model must mirror the actual interpretational process as opposed to establishing a rigid structure which falls short of truly reflecting the interpretational event.
A model has been variously described as a "replica," a "well developed map," a "symbolic picture," an "argument by analogy," and a "process of abstraction." McQuail defines a model as "a consciously simplified description in graphic form of a piece of reality." A model seeks to show the main elements of any structure or process and the relationships between these elements. Deutsch has concurred, noting that the essential ingredients of a model are (1) "a set of symbols" by which we may "recall from memory a particular thing or event" and (2) "a set of operating rules" which "reflect the connections or relationships between these symbols." A model, he concludes, is "a set of symbols and operating rules which is supposed to match a set of relevant points in an existing structure or process."

Franklin Knower has added to the discussion the following observation:

"A good model... will have several properties. It first should be realistic. The model must indicate all the generally important variables of the behavior for which it stands. Evidence should be available to show that these features are significant. Since a model should conform to the skeleton of a reasonable theory of its inferent, it should be systematic. It is well to keep in mind that a model of this type is open ended. As theory develops the model should be revised to keep pace. It should have practical significance in that it should be applicable to various common examples of its territory. It will be especially helpful if it can stimulate scholarship and research on its various characteristics. And it should exemplify the economy, and the dynamics characteristic of the human behavior for which it stands."

The desired functions of our interpretational model will be, at least, threefold. It should serve to organize existing data related to the interpretational process. It ought to lead to new discoveries integral to the interpretive event. And finally, it must function as a basis for predicting particular attitudes and/or behaviors which are common to a legitimate interpretational approach.

The model to be developed for this study will seek to demonstrate the practical process through which anyone goes in order to come to grips with the meaning of any utterance. It will seek to make clear the ways and means by which we come to understand the biblical text specifically. Since it is assumed that the way we come to grips with the meaning of the Scriptures is essentially similar to the way we come to grips with the meaning of any other utterance, it may also be reasonable to assume that the model for the interpretation of the Bible may reflect the
general characteristics of the learning and legal models as presented by John Holt, Jean Piaget, James Golden, Josina Makau, and others. These models seek to clarify the process by which we come to understand novel concepts and/or extant laws and will serve as the seedbed out of which our new model will emerge.

The value of the model will be determined by the way the following three questions are answered: "How great is [this particular] model's generality or organizing function? What is its fruitfulness or heuristic [discovery] value? How important or strategic are the verifiable predictions which it yields?" Ultimately, "if the predictions are borne out, the successful model can be used for future predictions. If on the other hand, [the predictions are not borne out], the scientist must begin looking for another model." It is therefore anticipated that the application of the critical/scientific method, with its dependence upon the practical model, will result in a greater understanding and employment of sound hermeneutical principles and practices, especially in the preaching process.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II: Presumptions and Historical Background

Chapter II will provide an overview of some important considerations in biblical hermeneutics. First, the writer's theological and hermeneutical assumptions will be identified. Questions of fact, definition, and quality must be answered. Questions of fact ask, "Is the text true and accurate?" Questions of definition ask, "What does the author/Author mean?" Questions of quality ask, "What difference does it make or of what significance is this information?"

The major theological assumption is that God has spoken. This assumption includes the basic presupposition that God does exist, that He has communicated with His creation by means of biblical revelation, and that this revelation is without error and is therefore authoritative and binding upon His creation. Such an assumption creates an immediate rhetorical
situation. If God has spoken, and if this communication represents a Higher Law or a First Law, then the preacher, when he speaks, must bring the listeners to understanding and obedience.

The major hermeneutical assumption is that understanding the meaning of the biblical text is possible. More than that, understanding is probable and necessary. This assumption excludes various theories that would mitigate against understanding, including the skeptically-oriented theories of pre-understanding, tradition, distance, and language. It is assumed that words or symbols, while not the same to everyone, are similar enough to be understood. Coming to grips with the author's meaning in his communication is a realistic goal because of the sharability of meaning through symbols.

It is at this point that an extended definition of hermeneutics will be offered and argued. Historical uses of the word in its various contexts will be explored including the concepts "to express," "to explain," and "to translate."

A major portion of Chapter II will consist of a historical review of hermeneutics. Palmer has outlined the development of the science of interpretation through six stages including: (1) the theory of biblical exegesis; (2) general philological methodology; (3) the science of all linguistic understanding; (4) the methodological foundation of Geistwissenschaften; (5) phenomenology of existence and of existential understanding; and (6) the systems of interpretation, both recollective and Iconoclastic, used by man to reach the meaning behind myths and symbols.

R. M. Grant's A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible and Gerhard Ebeling's "Hermeneutik" trace the advancement of biblical hermeneutics specifically. Ebeling has identified seven distinct periods: (1) Pre-Christian; (2) Primitive Christian; (3) Patristic; (4) Medieval; (5) Reformation and Orthodox; (6) Modern; and (7) Contemporary.

A distinction will be made between the two major foci of contemporary hermeneutics; the Philosophical and the Practical. Philosophical or general hermeneutics functions in the area of the theoretical asking epistemological and ontological questions. These questions are foundational to understanding and their answers do and will influence the task of the preacher,
but in a more distant manner than the practical. In contrast, at least operationally, the focus of
practical hermeneutics is more immediately upon the text itself; its meaning and signification.

Since the purpose of this study is to offer some significant insight into the pragmatic
process through which the preacher goes in interpreting the biblical text week after continuous
week, our focus will be limited to the practical realm of biblical interpretation. We will seek to
describe what happens during that interpretational task and to offer some suggestions as to how it
happens. Crucial to our purpose is the question, “What practical process allows for a reasonable
interpretation of the sacred Text?”

Chapter III: Formulation of the Model

The next major section of the work, Chapter III, will concentrate upon the formulation of a
practical model of biblical interpretation. The example of the Apostle Paul will be called upon to
demonstrate the necessity of rhetorical argumentation in determining the valid interpretation of a
particular biblical text. Paul indicated that personal inspiration would no longer be normative after
the completion of a biblical canon, and that mystical approaches to God’s revelation are to be
avoided. By encouraging his listeners to evaluate carefully his own interpretations of Scripture
through the use of available evidence and sound reasoning, the Apostle confirmed the validity
of interpretation through argumentation. With these guidelines in mind we will be seeking a
model which allows for such hermeneutical behavior.

A primary consideration in developing the model will be the careful distinguishing
between the two distinct stages of hermeneutics; understanding and applying the text. The first
stage in the hermeneutical process is to determine the meaning of the text. This meaning, I will
argue, is determined on the basis of the most probable argument. The priority of understanding
the meaning of the text is crucial. Meaning must precede significance or application. The
model, therefore, must prove useful in identifying what is the most reasonable interpretation of
the author’s/Author’s meaning.
The secondary stage is to discover the significance of that now determined meaning as it relates to a contemporary situation. The application of the meaning is not "there, in the text" as is the meaning itself, but must be made. Nor is the application universally certain, but rather, relative depending upon the situation or context. In other words, whereas there is one and only one valid meaning, there may be many and varied applications. A critical feature of practical hermeneutics, therefore, is the acknowledgment of the distinction between an understanding of the text and its application, and also the recognition that the former must precede the latter. And whereas the two are distinct, this study will focus only on the primary, the interpretation of meaning. It is possible that a similar model could help in the evaluation of the proposed significance of that meaning, but such a project is beyond the scope of our attention.

Since an interpretation is only as strong as its weakest argument, some model of reasoning must be employed which will allow for an evaluation of individual arguments. This reasoning process, which is at the heart of interpretation, must allow for a mapping out of each distinctive position. For the purposes of this study, Stephen Toulmin's model of practical reasoning will be used. The goal of the hermeneutical model will be to illuminate the process by which the most probable of these individual arguments may be discovered, discussed, and defended as the proper interpretation.

It is at this point that the limitations of the hermeneutical circle will be made apparent. The hermeneutical circle does not allow for the extended reasoning necessary for handling multiple arguments simultaneously. As a model for biblical interpretation it fails in that it has the capacity to evaluate only one argument at a time.

The objective of the interpretational model will be to discover a means by which several positions may be inserted into the hermeneutical circle and debated in concert. The solution offered in this essay will be that of a schema. A schema represents a scientific effort to come to understand phenomena, in this instance, a biblical text. A schema is a guess, based upon reasons, which seeks to explain and thereby understand a particular phenomenon.
The schematic model should function along the following lines. A series of schemata, various arguments expressed in terms of Toulmin's model, will be established. The schemata will then be tested for reasonableness and rationalness and then compared and contrasted in an effort to establish validity. One by one, and then together, the arguments will be either rejected, accepted, and/or modified as the most probable and, therefore, the correct interpretation.

The final section of this work, Chapters IV-VI, will consist of a testing and evaluating of the interpretational model and a summary and conclusion to the study.

Chapter IV: Application: The Structure of the nopveta Arguments

Chapter IV will treat the problem of meaning in relation to the biblical term nopveta as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The arguments for each of the four divorce positions will then be structured according to the Toulmin model.

The term nopveta was used by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. In both instances, the term represents the one and only exception to the "no divorce" law as established by Moses and confirmed by the prophet Malachi. The Greek word nopveta has been interpreted/translated several different ways throughout the Bible. Some say the term refers specifically to adultery and/or the desertion of a marriage partner. Others make it refer to any sexual sin which would demand a divorce to maintain cultural norms. Some say it is an allusion to the unfaithfulness of an engaged or betrothed individual. Another group argues that nopveta refers to an incestual marriage; that is, marriage to a near relative.

The debate over this term is no merely academic exercise for thousands of Christ's followers. The meaning of nopveta, as Christ used it, is potentially life-changing in its significance. It will determine who can and who cannot legitimately, according to God's imperative, divorce their marriage partner. If, for example, nopveta means fornication of any kind, then divorce would be a legitimate option for most any couple. If, however, it is made to refer to a sexual sin which a culture might condemn and for which it might require divorce, then the requirement of divorce would
seldom apply in most cultures in our times. If the third interpretation is the valid one, then there is little significant application for today, for contemporary engagements are not binding as were first century betrothals, and can be broken without divorce proceedings. The significance of the fourth interpretation would be that divorce should be a rare occurrence and in violation of Christ's will except in extreme, almost nonexistent, cases.

Two phenomena have come together to create a rhetorical situation for the Interpreter of Scripture: the considerable number of marriages ending in divorce and the statements of Christ concerning divorce, especially His use of the term *mpveta*. What did Jesus mean? And what difference does it make now? No contemporary biblical preacher can escape the dilemma. Each must justify his position before a waiting, watching, listening world.

This major issue, that of the term *mpveta*, with its divergent interpretations and far-reaching contemporary consequences, will serve as the testing element of this study. While structuring the arguments of these various positions, it should become apparent that some method for attaining validity in interpretation is necessary. The writer's assumptions rule out the possibility of all of the arguments being valid. It is assumed that only one distinct interpretation could be correct. One must seek to validate or justify one and only one position as being the probable or correct or certain interpretation. Since the meaning of a text requires justification, the model of interpretation must help to validate a legitimate understanding of the meaning of the text. This necessity leads into Chapter V and the testing of a practical model of interpretation for the strength and soundness of each argument.

Chapter V: Application: An Evaluation of the *Mpveta* Arguments

Chapter V will demonstrate an application of the practical model through an effort to interpret the biblical term *mpveta* as used in Matthew 5:32 and 29:9. The arguments for four widely-held interpretations of this term will be presented. Each of the four series of arguments will represent a single schema. Each schema will be evaluated for validity. The assumption of this
study is that three or more of the schema will be identified as not valid, and that one or none of the schema will be confirmed as the valid interpretation of the term. It is recognized that in limiting the schema to four, the most legitimate interpretation may be precluded before the process begins. In any given situation several schema may be excluded prior to the confirmation of one. It is also possible that the evaluation of several schema may result in a new schema being developed, the result of merging or combining the best of two or more other schema. For the purposes of this study, however, the evaluation of schema will be limited to four. Arguments supporting each schema will be tested for reasonableness and rationalness and the most probable interpretation will be identified.

Chapter VI: Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter VI the findings of the study will be reviewed including a history of biblical hermeneutics, the development of a practical model, and the testing and evaluation of that model. Conclusions will be drawn as to the important findings of the study. Did the model prove useful? Did it appear to lead to valid interpretations? What alterations would add to its effectiveness? How practical a tool is it for the preacher who must stand in the pulpit week after week to speak God's words after Him? Finally, an effort will be made to point out specific directions which future studies might pursue.

1The preliminary homiletical methodology is exegetical. In his overview of contemporary homiletics, James Armstrong notes that, "There is a growing emphasis on exegesis and the new hermeneutics." He continues, "There is a growing realization that authentic preaching must be faithful to its biblical roots, rely on biblical scholarship, be open to careful research and analysis; that it must be committed to reaching into a sacred past for the sake of the here and now and an unfolding future." James Armstrong, "Homiletics: The State of the Art." The Iliff Review, Fall 1985, p. 34.

2Hermeneutics, law, theology, and rhetoric will be examined in the following study. Each adds an important dimension to one's understanding of the interpretational methodology employed by the biblical preacher. Hermeneutics focuses on the study of interpretation in general. Law provides a functional example of the practical interpretation of a given text.
Theology is the substance of preaching; the result and message of the interpretation. Finally, rhetoric offers a system of argumentation upon which interpretations can be judged.


"If we were expatiating upon our own views or those of some fallible human being, we would be bound to do so diffidently. But if we are expounding God's Word with integrity and honesty, we can be very bold. Whoever speaks, Peter wrote, should do so 'as one who utters oracles of God' (I Pet. 4:11). This is not because we presume to regard our own words as an oracular utterance, but because like the ancient Jews we have been entrusted with the oracles of God." (Rom. 4:2), and because our overriding concern is to handle them with such scrupulous fidelity that they themselves are heard to speak, or rather that God speaks through them."

5For an extended discussion, see Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Volume I* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Press, 1947), pp. 48-60.

6Joseph Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), pp. 119-136. Dillow argues that, "There are numerous scriptural indications that indicate that direct revelations from God ceased as a norm of His operation in the first century" (p. 125).

7Samuel J. Stoesz, "The Importance of Biblical Preaching," *His Dominion*, Winter, 1985, p. 2. Stoesz laments the lack of this element in pulpits today. "Some time ago Fortune magazine carried an editorial titled 'The Failure of the Church.' 'We are asked,' wrote the editor, 'to turn to the Church for an enlightenment, but when we do so, we find that the voice of the Church is not inspired. The voice of the Church today, we find, is the echo of our own voices.'"


9Stott, p. 144.


15 Henry, p. 19. Henry refers here to Harold Lindsell's "successive stages of his 'battle' for the Bible."


18 Kaiser, p. 117, senses that, "The hermeneutical debate outside our circles has grown so prolific and vigorous that at times it threatens to be, for some, the only issue, yet, the discussion may be 'not less serious that that of the Reformation' itself. Indeed, we believe something comparable to a hermeneutical reformation is needed in our day."

19 Mickelsen, p. vii.


21 Various faiths make this assumption, and are philosophically sound in doing so, for these symbols were meant to mean but one thing.

22 Mickelsen, p. vii.

23 Carl F. H. Henry, "Evangelicals and Biblical Authority: A Review Article," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, June 1980, p. 139. Henry agrees with the author in review that, "the conservative crisis is really one of hermeneutics and that only community consensus-building can cope with conflicting views. This collective strategy must keep in view not only Biblical authority . . . but traditional formulations and contemporary cultural judgments also."


27 Scutt, p. 221.

28 Ibid., p. 223.

29 Packer, p. 25.

30 Ibid., p. 21.
See also, Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, pp. 20-21, where he suggests that the recognition of a need to analyze what has been expressed is also an interpretation.


Throughout this study the two terms, reasonable and rational, will not be used synonymously. The distinction between these terms will follow closely Perelman's use of rational for more logical evaluations of arguments and reasonable for more practical evaluations of arguments. Toulmin would distinguish the two as formal logic (rational), and substantive logic (reasonable). See James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Barquist, and William E. Coleman, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 3rd ed. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 425 and 390.


See, for example, Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6 (Summer 1973), pp. 162-170.

Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 34.


See Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15-16 where this promise is most clearly stated to the nation of Israel and, by way of application, to all of God's people.


47 Ibid., p. 188.


51 The author does not intend to suggest that a particular interpretation can be validated to a level of absolute or scientific certainty. Hirsch has rightly argued that valid interpretation is based on probability, or what the author refers to as moral certainty as seen on pages 18-19, 66-67, and 111-112 of this study. Thus Hirsch writes,

"The most important argument to consider here is the one which states that the author's intended meaning cannot be certainty known. This argument cannot be successfully met because it is self-evidently true. I can never know another person's intended meaning with certainty because I cannot get inside his head to compare the meaning he intends with the meaning I understand, and only by such direct comparison could I be certain that his meaning and my own are identical. But this obvious fact should not be allowed to sanction the overly hasty conclusion that the author's intended meaning is inaccessible and is therefore a useless object of interpretation. It is a logical mistake to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding. It is a similar, though more subtle, mistake to identify knowledge with certainty. A good many disciplines do not pretend to certainty, and the more sophisticated the methodology of the discipline, the less likely that its goal will be defined as certainty of knowledge. Since genuine certainty in interpretation is
impossible, the aim of the discipline must be to reach a consensus, on the basis of what is known, that correct understanding has probably been achieved." Hirsch, Validity, pp. 16-17.


53In addition to the above cited authors, add Lee Odell, "Piaget, Problem-Solving, and Freshman Composition," College Composition and Communication 24 (February 1973); and Michael Polanyi, Knowing and Being (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).


57John Dewey, How We Think (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1933).


59This model has been adapted from the classroom presentations of Robert R. Monaghan, Professor of Communication at the Ohio State University.

60Kibler, "Basic Communication Research Consideration," pp. 11-12.

61Karl W. Deutsch, The Nerves of Government (New York: The Free Press, 1966). Deutsch maintains that, "men think in terms of models . . . . Their sense organs abstract the events that touch them; their memories store traces of these events as coded symbols; and they may recall them according to patterns they learned earlier, or recombine them in patterns that are new." (p. 19).


66ibid., p. 162.
67Ibid., p. 163.
72See McQuall and Windahl, p. 2.
76Bross, Design for Decision, p. 165.
77See Golden, The Rhetoric of Western Thought, p. 77.
78This position, held by the author, is argued in Francis A. Schaffer's He Is There and He Is Not Silent (1972). The primary thesis is that if God exists, and He does, and if God is good, and He is, then God will have communicated to mankind, which He has in the Scriptures.
82Hirsch in particular wrestles with these barriers in his Validity and Aims. See, for example, Appendix II of Validity, pp. 245-264, and Aims, pp. 12-13.
84Ibid., p. 33.
See 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 and a parallel passage in Jude 3.

See 1 Timothy 1:4 and 4:7 with 2 Timothy 2:14-15.

The Apostle challenged his listeners to challenge his interpretations of the Scriptures in Acts 17:11. He was continually reasoning with those he sought to persuade. See the use of the term διαλέγομαι in the Book of Acts, for example.

See Hirsch, Validity and Aims, and Kaiser, "Legitimate Hermeneutics," where he quotes Hirsch as saying, "MEANING is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. SIGNIFICANCE, on the other hand, names a relationship between the meaning and a person, or a conception or a situation." (p. 119).

Kaiser argues that, "My personal reception and application of an author's words is a distinct and secondary act from the need first to understand his words" (p. 122).

Hirsch deals with the issue of dual authorship in a footnote on page 126 of Validity. He states that it is the willed type of the divine Author which one seeks to interpret in such cases.

Hirsch, Aims, p. 89.

Hirsch, Validity, p. 39, and Aims, p. 146.

Hirsch, Aims, p. 88.

This is a thesis which Perelman argues in The New Rhetoric.

Toulmin, The Uses of Argument.

"The hermeneutical circle, on the other hand, as I shall point out at the end of the next chapter, has now been shown to be an inadequate model for what actually happens in the interpretation of speech" (Hirsch, Aims, p. 6).

The schema represents a way of viewing the world based on past experience and novel encounter. "A schema sets up a range of predictions or expectations, which if fulfilled confirms the schema, but if not fulfilled causes us to revise it" (Hirsch, Aims, p. 32).

Moses argued that a man and woman were to become an inseparable unity in Genesis 2:24, a position supported by both Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:5 and the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31. The Old Testament prophet Malachi wrote, "I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel," in Malachi 2:16.
CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF PRACTICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

In this second chapter several matters will be discussed which will help to narrow the scope of this study. Since the subject of our consideration is biblical hermeneutics, a major theological assumption will be clarified. Next, a major hermeneutical assumption will be articulated. Identifying these basic starting points is material because of the breadth of contemporary theological and hermeneutical perspectives.

A working definition of hermeneutics will emerge out of an exploration of its lexical meanings and most common uses today, as well as an overview of its historical conventions. It will be noted that past and present conceptions of hermeneutics allow for different and even disparate notions of the term. For the purposes of this study the boundaries of the meaning will be confined to practical and manageable limits.

In that two broad categories within contemporary hermeneutics may be easily identified (the philosophical and the practical), the remarkable differences between the two will be discussed and their particular purposes identified. The goal of all the foregoing will be to so limit the range of this inquiry into hermeneutics that the discovery of new and significant information related to the hermeneutical process will be possible.

Theological Assumption

We turn our attention, therefore, to the first of these narrowing procedures; the identification of this writer's controlling theological assumption. Simply stated, God had spoken. This assumption includes the basic presuppositions that (1) God does exist; (2) He has spoken to His creation by means of biblical revelation; and (3) This revelation is without any error and is
Given this assumption, the preacher will approach the hermeneutical task with at least three questions in mind. These three questions represent the most basic concerns regarding God's having spoken through Scripture. Ancient rhetoricians identified these three questions as the stasis, the central turning point(s) in a case and the issue(s) upon which the debate may hinge. Since the questions are best asked in a logical sequence, the homiletician first inquires of the revealed text, "Is it true and accurate?" This is the question of fact. The question which deals with definition asks of the text, "What does it mean?" The final question, that of quality, asks, "Of what significance is this meaning?" This triad of fundamental queries could reasonably be summarized under the headings of Inspiration, Interpretation, and Application. The latter two categories belong to the realm of hermeneutics, and will be the more immediate concern of this study. The former, however, is theological by the very nature of its subject matter and is of necessity preliminary to any hermeneutical concerns. In other words, the preacher, acting as homiletician, must first determine his approach to the text itself. It is at this point that this author's theological assumption comes into play.

Having put aside for the time being the hermeneutical problem, we note that the issue at hand is whether the text is merely a natural or human document with no particular authority over the interpreter, or whether it is a supernatural text demanding full conformity to its teachings. This study will assume the latter, that the text of Scripture is true and accurate because it is God-given and is, therefore, binding in its assertions. The Issue does not focus essentially upon the identification and/or preservation of the text (textual criticism), but rather upon its transmission and inherent truthfulness.

James I. Packer has sounded the evangelical position in an article which adheres to the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy's "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics."

Holy Scripture is the self-revelation of God in and through the words of men. It is both their witness to God and God's witness to himself. As the divine-human record and interpretation of God's redemptive work in history, it is cognitive revelation, truth addressed to our minds for understanding and response. God is its source, and Jesus Christ, the Savior, is its center of
reference and main subject matter. Its absolute and abiding worth as an infallible directive for faith and living follows from its God-givenness (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-17). Being as fully divine as it is human, it expresses God's wisdom in all its teaching and speaks reliably—that is, infallibly and inerrantly—in every informative assertion it makes. Scripture shows us the entire panorama of human existence as God wills us to see it.

Packer continues, arguing that the authority of Scripture is inclusive of its full content based on the influence of Christ.

The authority of Holy Scripture is bound up with the authority of Jesus Christ, whose recorded words express the principle that the teaching of Israel's Scriptures (our Old Testament), together with his own teaching and the witness of the apostles (our New Testament), constitute his appointed rule of faith and conduct for his followers. He did not criticize his Bible, though he criticized misinterpretations of it; on the contrary, he affirmed its binding authority over him and all his disciples (cf. Matt. 5:17-19). To separate the authority of Christ from that of Scripture and to oppose the one to the other are thus mistakes. To oppose the authority of one apostle to that of another or the teaching of any apostle at one time to that of his teaching at another time are mistakes also.

Simply stated, God is the Author of Scripture, God is true and accurate in all He does and says. Therefore, Scripture is true and accurate. Of course, the full argument for inerrancy is much more complex and has been carefully articulated by numerous evangelical scholars.

Perhaps the most representative statement on the issue of inspiration and inerrancy has come in the form of the 1978 "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," which has been summarized into five assertions:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: It is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed as God's command in all that it requires; embraced as God's pledge in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history,
and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace to individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.¹²

The most recent challenge to this traditional claim has come from those who argue that a conservative conception of inerrancy is in conflict with the commonly held doctrine of the Church's two thousand year history. Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, for example, maintain that "peculiar twists of American history have served to distort our view of both the central Christian tradition and especially of its Reformed branch."¹³ They continue, defining in their terms, the traditional view.

The early church fathers shared a common foundation that has been lost in the scholastic overreaction to biblical criticism. The central Christian tradition affirmed that Scripture was inspired by God and authoritative for human beings. Not rational proofs, but the Holy Spirit persuaded people of the Bible's authority.¹⁴

By insisting that the use of Scripture was "clearly for salvation, not science"¹⁵ the authors deny inerrancy, concluding that, "to erect a standard of modern, technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church."¹⁶ They announce, instead, that the central church tradition, that is, the historic position, has been to acknowledge the infallibility of the Bible's message concerning the one true way to bring people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but to deny the infallibility of the words of Scripture, especially in matters that relate to astronomy, chemistry, philosophy, medicine, history, and other non-theological matters.¹⁷

The major difficulty with this approach, of course, is that the interpreter would be required to determine, in each passage, whether the divine intent was salvific, and the extent to which it is binding (a terribly subjective and potentially endless task) before the actual work of hermeneutics could commence. Although it would be foolish to deny this position, if it were true, simply
because of the added and difficult work it required, the view has been rejected based on other historical grounds.\textsuperscript{18}

This serious challenge to inerrancy has been met head on by evangelicals holding an historic inerrancy position. For example, John D. Woodbridge, while commending Rogers and McKim for their more conservative approach to the authority of Scripture\textsuperscript{19} as compared to the liberal scholarship of the day and praising their "emphasis on the persuasive role of the Holy Spirit in convincing man of the authority of the Word of God,"\textsuperscript{20} still finds fault with their overall conclusion. He observes that

Despite their sincere Intentions, the authors have not constructed an adequate interpretation of the history of biblical authority. Not only is the linchpin thesis of the proposal defective, but its subthesis regarding accommodation and the original autographs qualification are not historically defensible. Other components of their proposal are also less than persuasive.

Evangelicals would be well advised not to espouse Rogers and McKim's proposal too quickly, despite several valued Insights it does provide. Those authors have not been successful in demonstrating their thesis that the "central tradition" of the church promotes an infallibility of the Bible limited to matters of faith and practice. Ironically, the research that their proposal stimulated has reinforced in several historians' minds the validity of aspects of the interpretation they were trying to overthrow.\textsuperscript{21}

Woodbridge makes reference here, for example, to \textit{Inerrancy and the Church} edited by John D. Hannah, in which Hannah states that "the position of the church, as it has been delineated by scholars, clerics, and teachers, is that of the absolute authority and inerrancy of Scriptures. That was the view of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, as well as of the entire church; inerrancy is the 'central church tradition.'"\textsuperscript{22}

The reason this question of inspiration is so material is because it determines the attitude in which the work of hermeneutics will be carried out. A firm commitment to inerrancy establishes the rhetorical situation which invites the interpreter into a hermeneutical situation demanding the most deliberate and practical methods.

The focus of this study, therefore, will not be upon the question of fact; "Has God spoken?" and "Do we have an inerrant revelation?" Though this might prove a beneficial endeavor, it would distract us from our stated purpose. Rather, we will assume the divine
authorship and absolute accuracy of the text, allowing it to speak for itself, and concentrate instead upon the task of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutical Assumption

A second assumption which will help to define the boundaries of this study surfaces a critical hermeneutical contention. Can we truly understand the meaning of a given text, or are we left with only guesses, approximations, and uncertainty? It will be assumed throughout this essay that understanding the meaning of the biblical text is possible, even probable.

There are hermeneuticians who would deny both the possibility and the necessity of understanding the original meaning of a text. For example, Bultmannians and other hermeneutical relativists argue that the meaning of the Bible is a new revelation to each succeeding generation. If one approaches the text with that assumption, holding that it means "what it means to us today," he would, in fact, become the author of the text, and would thus communicate his own ideas.

At least four contemporary theories of understanding preclude the possibility of interpreting a text in such a way that the author's original intention is reproduced. The first is that of pre-understanding. Pre-understanding assumes that "what is to be understood must, in a sense, be already known." It might hold, for example, that the Old Testament could not be truly understood until the New Testament came to provide a context for understanding it. Although pre-understanding correctly argues that some measure of the subject matter must be known prior to the act of interpretation, it errs when it assumes that one's presuppositions, rooted in one's present context, extracts a different or new meaning from the text. Thiselton notes the extreme position.

... the fact that Marxist interpreters do in fact tend to arrive at Marxist interpretations of the Bible even when they are aware of their own preunderstanding sharpens the problem of objectivity in biblical hermeneutics. A mere awareness of the problem of preunderstanding is not enough to solve the problems to which this phenomenon gives rise. We have arrived at a point where the problem is ... that of evaporating past meaning in the horizons of the present.
When the meaning of the text is lost to the new meanings of contemporary understanding, the text is silenced. Essentially, its author is silenced in favor of a new message. To say that reproducibility is not possible because of the effect of pre-understanding is to approach the text skeptically. Such a position must be rejected, for the practical task of the preacher assumes that his homiletical ideas are based upon God's Word.

A second skeptical view is that of tradition, which recognizes that every text and every interpreter are influenced by their own world, their own place in history. Language, culture, perspective, and context condition what is written and what is read. That we are influenced by our particular traditions is not the issue. Rather, the issue is whether it is "possible to distinguish between 'the meaning of a text' and 'the meaning of a text as I understand it from my place in a historical tradition." To hold the latter position is to affirm the indeterminacy of textual meaning. Hirsch identifies this characteristic in Gadamer.

The idea of tradition is essential to Gadamer because it points to a principle for resolving disagreements between contemporary readers. The reader who follows the path of tradition is right, and the reader who leaves this path is wrong. The determinate meaning of a text at any given point in time is what a present culture would generally take that meaning to be. Such "tradition" is ever-changing and does not lead the contemporary interpreter back into the text, but away from it. While we readily admit to the influence of tradition, at least two false assumptions have resulted in its extreme application. A unity of the hermeneutical task has been assumed. There has been a failure to distinguish between the meaning of a text and its significance in a contemporary setting. As a result, interpretations have so focused on the immediate relevance that the original meaning has been ignored. Also, the assumption has been made that it is not possible to comprehend the meanings of different traditions. For example, modern traditions which deny the possibility of supernatural intervention would deny the reality of miracles. Thus, the text is reinterpreted by demythologizing it. When present tradition does not square with the tradition of the text, the meaning of the text is, therefore, eliminated with the result that the text is not allowed to speak for itself. It is this extreme concept of tradition which is skeptical of meaning and is rejected in this study.
Historical distance is another concept which, in its extreme application, results in a suspicious view of the text. It correctly assumes that what is distant is generally more difficult to perceive and what is near is generally comprehended more easily. The goal of the interpreter is to bring himself into greater proximity to the text in order to understand it more fully. The question is, "Does the interpreter move himself back into the distant text, does he move the text up to himself, or do both move to a middle ground?" Ideally, the interpreter would go back. Realistically, there must be a bridging of the gap. What is denied here is the impossibility of understanding the text in terms of the text itself.

Finally, language is seen by some to be a barrier to understanding. For some, language prohibits the communication of ideas. Language is so shaped by culture and tradition that to try to comprehend the meaning of a text is to try the impossible. Words, even in context, do not mean the same thing to other people, including oneself at a later time. Since my context is ever changing, meanings so change as to be indeterminate.

While it is true that meanings do change, it does not follow that they so change as to be unintelligible. Nor does it follow that experience and language so fluctuate that understanding historical documents is impossible. Hirsch notes that, "The argument that an Interpreter's understanding is necessarily different because he is different assumes a psychologistic conception of meaning which mistakenly identifies meaning with mental process rather than with an object of those processes."

Practically, although one may not have in mind all the exact connotations of his table mate when he says, "Please, pass the salt," he does understand well enough to reach for the white spicy stuff in the shaker. It is at this level of understanding that the preacher seeks to comprehend the Bible. A blood sacrifice will not mean to the twentieth-century Interpreter what it meant to Moses, or David, or Paul, but the fact that animals were slaughtered as an act of faithful obedience to appease God's wrath is fathomable. We will, therefore, assume this degree of comprehensibility throughout this study.
Understanding a text, then, is both probable, and necessary. It is probable because, as Hirsch argues, "no philosophical or actual barrier precludes either true knowledge or probabilistic knowledge in interpretation." If it were not possible or even probable to understand the meaning of a given text, then friends would not write letters and scholars would not produce books. Sproul asserts this position, using the analogy of the law. He distinguishes between scientific or formal certainty and moral certainty. Moral certainty in understanding is based on that which is reasonable or probable. The jury must interpret the case and make judgment based on evidence that leads them beyond "reasonable doubt." The court assumes that understanding is more than possible, it is probable. Sproul goes on to quote Quenstedt who makes the point for biblical interpretation.

These motives, as well internal as external, by which we are led to the knowledge of the authority of Scripture, make the Theopneustity of Sacred Scripture probable, and produce a certitude which is not merely conjectural but moral... they do not make the divinity of Scripture infallible and altogether indubitable... That is to say, they are not of the nature of demonstration, but nevertheless give moral certitude.

Not only will it be assumed that understanding is probable, it will also be assumed that it is necessary. This necessity is based on the acknowledgement of the Scripture’s divine origin. If God has spoken, we must understand in order to obey. As Jesus often said, "If you have ears, hear." God’s revelation of Himself to His creation demands a practical and accurate understanding of the message.

There are at least four groups of interpreters that seem to agree that meaning is reproducible, but only one of the four appears to be in a position to verify its conclusions. The first group may be called Inspirationists. They do not bother with verification of meaning for they claim to be able to determine meaning "just by reading the text." The "spirit" of the meaning is revealed to the interpreter by-passing all the common norms or principles of hermeneutics. Even to a supernaturalist, this approach to meaning is unsatisfactory, in that there is no means of verifying which "spirit" is right; for as experience demonstrates, different Inspirationists are flashed
different meanings while reading the very same text. This position is not significantly distinct from autonomism in that it may result in a meaning totally independent of the author's.

A second group may be labeled assertivists. These are the positivists or rules-governed interpreters. They reject the extreme of the spirit for the extreme of the letter. For them "verification" is a simple task for "the text says what it says." That the empirical sign is the meaning, in an objective and measurable manner, is their claim. But meaning cannot be reduced to the empirical only. Meaning is not the sound waves that flow through the air when one speaks, or the lines on the page as one writes. Meaning is not the gesture; rather, the gesture makes manifest the meaning. Meaning is conceived in the consciousness and then inscribed in a context. The act of Interpretation is more than an exact science, it is also the art of distinguishing between competing possibilities.

Perspectivists also lay claim to the possibility of discovering the author's meaning, while remaining unable or unwilling to validate that meaning. It could be argued that the perspectivists should be classified along with other relativists, yet they may also only border on the skeptical. It is, to be sure, but a small step from perspectivism to radical historicism or psychologism. Since, however, they approach meaning from a somewhat different angle, the perspectivists may be viewed as distinct, if transitional.

The perspectivist's problem is that he fails to recognize the difference between "same" and "identical." Sharability aspect of language and Intentionality is misunderstood by him. Sharability asserts that we share meaning when we share a common experience. Since it is not possible actually to be another person and share fully his total thoughts, feelings, willful desires and perspective, it is impossible to share identical meaning. But identical meaning is not necessary for valid interpretation; only same meaning, and sharability assumes the possibility of sharing same meaning. So although the perspectivist may be accurate in his emphasis on non-identical experience, he draws an inaccurate conclusion when he holds that identical is necessarily equal to same.
Perspectivists argue that everyone experiences events from a totally unique perspective. They would argue that of the millions of individuals who happened to view the soccer riot in Brussels in May of 1985 each observed a different scene, and the event therefore has a different meaning for each; a meaning that cannot be identical. Every stadium fan had a slightly different angle because of his unique position, every television viewer experienced a different angle because of the arrangement of the room and the kind and size of the television, and so on. Even the individual rioters maintained a unique perspective. As a result, the perspectivist would claim that millions of different, even disparate, meanings exist which, if taken together, would not give a truer picture of the atrocity because they are different, if ever so slightly. Thus, it seems that the perspectivists have gone to another extreme and unrealistic position which, while allowing for some legitimate understanding, does not allow for a universally verifiable understanding.

A fourth group of interpreters might be called conformists. Not only do they maintain that the reader of a text can come to an understanding of the author's meaning, they seek to validate their conclusions regarding that meaning. This study assumes that position.42

It is through the concept of intentionality, as expressed by the text itself, that the interpreter is enabled to explain and validate the author's meaning. Two hermeneutical concepts allow for this level of understanding: determinacy and sharability.43

Determinacy is a term that names an event of intentionality; it holds that meaning is determined by the author himself, in the act of enscribing, and not by the interpreter. As will be argued later in this chapter,44 Intentionality is most reasonably conceived of as the meaning expressed by the author when he sets it in a context. The meaning is discovered, therefore, not in the mind of the interpreter, for that would be making him the author of a new meaning, nor in the mind of the true author, for it is not possible to perceive fully the plan or purpose or thought in the author's mind at the moment of enscribing. We must conclude that meaning is discovered in the text itself through the context.45 What the author intends is written and what is written discloses
and determines meaning. Not only is understanding possible, it is verifiable within the limits of the
text itself.

Another aspect of coming to meaning is sharability. All interpretation presumes the
sharability of meaning. Without sharability there would be no communication at all. Those who
deny the possibility of sharability in theory still must practice it in reality. As previously noted,
"Please, pass the salt," carries a meaning that can be comprehended.

Sharability is the term used to express the possibility that different people can talk about
different events, from different contexts and still share common meaning.46 For example, two
people can talk about "attending the University" without having attended the same university.
There is enough commonality in their various experiences, enough sameness without
identicalness, for them to be able to share meaning.47

The issue is not one of identicalness but of sameness. The findings of linguistic
asymmetry and synonymity allow us to see the distinction. Charles Bazell has argued that "an
indefinite number of lower level phenomena can represent a single, self-identical higher level
meaning."48 Thus, "orange" represents something than can be eaten, a color, a taste, a texture,
and so on. When the word is used in a particular context, however, the author generally is
conscious of only one of the exact meanings. How it is placed in context will determine its
intended meaning. The point is, it is possible for others to share the same higher level of meaning
and as a result come to a proper and verifiable understanding of "orange."

Synonymity allows for these differences to be the same on this higher level. For example,
someone with a North Jersey accent may make distinctly different sound waves than someone
with a Georgia drawl when he says "I'm going to the store. Do you want to come?" But, as a
Midwestener I can understand them both to mean the same thing. In fact, they are likely to
understand one another.49 Further, two different words may mean the same thing. Although
"chance" and luck" are two different words, they can mean the same thing, in fact, could be used
interchangeably in a paragraph with the same effect. Or, as Hirsch points out, "No one familiar with
English would be likely to claim that BACHELORS and UNMARRIED MEN presented in isolation are perfectly synonymous. Yet no native speaker except a theorist or professor of literature would be likely to deny their perfect synonymity.50

These concepts of sharability may be expanded to apply to innumerable experiences which still result in same meanings. The point is that even though the interpreter is separated from the original author by time, space, culture, language, and so on, it is not impossible to come to an understanding of meaning as ascribed by that author in the context that is established. The result of surrendering to the relativistic notion of understanding is that the interpreter becomes the author of a new meaning while the original author's meaning is lost. Not only is this abandonment unnecessary, it robs the ever contemporary interpreter of the insights of the past. Any method of interpretation which places the authority of the interpreter above that of the text must be rejected. While the worth or significance of a text may properly be challenged, the meaning itself must be left intact. And, that that meaning is discoverable and verifiable is the primary hermeneutical assumption of this study.

Definitions

The most basic meaning of the term "hermeneutics" is "interpretation." The verbal form speaks of interpretation in terms of proclamation, explanation, and translation.51 The concept of mediation is nearly synonymous with that of interpretation,52 for it is the mediator who, like Hermes of Greek legend, proclaims, explains, and translates the message. In fact, we are hard pressed to determine whether the messenger God derived His name from the activity of transmuting messages from the gods to men or whether the term found its source in the fictitious character.53 In any case, it appears that Plato was the first of many writers to speak of hermeneutics in a technical sense.54 Hermeneutics, therefore, "designates the science and art of interpretation."55 A brief investigation of the three shades of meaning that interpretation takes will more clearly establish the realm of hermeneutics.
Richard Palmer has elaborated on the significance of the three defining terms: (1) to express, (2) to explain, and (3) to translate. Palmer sees in each term an "independent and significant meaning..." which "can refer to three rather different matters: an oral interpretation, a reasonable explanation, and a translation from another language."57

A basic function of the interpretive act is that of expressing. The message must be stated, expressed, asserted, proclaimed; and this before it is explained. It is this very act of expression that initiates the interpretive process, for the manner in which the message is spoken (and we might add, written) brings a degree of understanding. That is exactly what a performance does for a poem or a musical score. The oral reading of the poetry offers an interpretation. The actual playing of the score manifests the performer's or conductor's understanding of the composition. The auditory expression of a message allows it to be communicated with a dynamic potential not necessarily realized by written symbols. As Palmer reminds us, "language in its original form is heard rather than seen, and... there are good reasons why oral language is 'understood' more easily than written language."58 While this is fundamentally true, Carl F. H. Henry warns of the possible abuse of this concept. He argues that

Surely the indispensability of oral proclamation and the values of oral hearing can be preserved without demeaning the significance of the written text. The apostles, and Jesus also, appealed to the written Old Testament as being a witness and a message no less powerful than oral proclamation; indeed, they represent the prophets, and beyond them the Spirit of God, as still speaking by means of the written record. If valid, Palmer's premises would drain Scripture of most of the values it has historically held for Judeo-Christian religion, and would do so on the basis of an arbitrary theory of hermeneutics.59

The legitimacy of Palmer's observation must not be minimized, however, for oral expression implies a previous understanding of the text as a whole on the part of the performer, which understanding is conveyed in the expression. As Palmer notes,

... the reproducer must grasp the meaning of the words in order to express even one sentence. How does this mysterious grasping of meaning take place? The process is a puzzling paradox; in order to read, it is necessary to understand in advance what will be said, and yet this understanding must come from the reading. . . . Oral interpretation thus has two sides: it is necessary to understand something in order to express it, yet understanding itself comes from an interpretive reading-expression.60

Thus, the work of the interpreter is to so understand a message that he is able to express that message orally. This is especially true in the case of biblical literature for it was written to be
heard (Rom. 10:14-17) and the public reading of Scripture was not only practiced but also encouraged (Neh. 8:2-3 and 1 Tim. 4:13). We conclude this section by suggesting that it is often in the expression of the text that the meaning is grasped.61

But this represents only one element of the full meaning of interpretation. A second stage of the process is that of explaining. It is here that we find what is probably the most common conception of the term, for the interpreter seeks to explain, rationalize, or make clear the meaning of a message. The goal is not merely to express the message, but also to explain the meaning, for one may simply express without actually explaining.

The cryptic messages from the oracle at Delphi did not interpret a preexistent text; they were "interpretations" of a situation. (The messages themselves required interpretation.) They brought something to expression (the first and more primordial direction of meaning), but what they brought was at the same time an explanation of something—something formerly unexplained... It was explanation in the sense of saying something about something else.62

The New Testament, in other places to be sure, but clearly in Acts 8, illustrates the use of the word "interpretation" in this explanatory shade of meaning. Walking along the road to Gaza, Philip encounters an Ethiopian eunuch returning home from Jerusalem with a copy of Isaiah the prophet from which he is reading. Philip asks, "Do you understanding what you are reading?" The eunuch answers, "How could I unless someone guides me?" The passage at hand reads:

He was led as a sheep to slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He does not open His mouth.
In humiliation His judgment was taken away;
Who shall relate His generation?
For His life is removed from the earth.

Philip then "opens his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him." The evangelist explains the text which has already been expressed, either by means of the written or spoken word or both. Understanding, then, is more than a matter of hearing (or seeing) the message, it includes an unfolding of the text "in other words." In this case, the "other word" is Jesus'. The Interpreter explains the text in terms that are not necessarily "heard" in the reading of the text, but which offer a way into the text without which the meaning will not be grasped.

The third and final element of interpretation to be considered here is that of translating. What concerns us at this point will be determined by whether the goal of the Interpreter is to
translate the actual words and phrases from one language into another (a process which may even be preliminary to oral expression), or to translate that which is removed in time and/or space and thereby needs to be made relevant or of significance to another culture (a process which follows both expression and explanation).

In either case, the process is essentially the same for, as Palmer notes, "the problems of the interpreter of languages are not structurally different from those of the literary critic working in his own language." The focus of both is on language and the goal of the interpreter is to mediate between the two worlds at hand, whether they differ only slightly, as in the case of translating between dialects within the same language, or more significantly, as in the case of crossing language, time, and culture all at once. This element of interpretation, therefore, seeks to overcome "the clash of our own world of understanding and that in which the work is operating."

With these three lexical shades of meaning as a foundation for our definition of hermeneutics we will now begin to build upon them six modern usages of the word.

"The oldest and probably still most widespread understanding of the word 'hermeneutics' refers to the principles of biblical interpretation." The goal of biblical hermeneutics remains the establishment of principles for the valid interpretation of Scripture. The focus is on the methods or rules for discovering meaning rather than the content of the message for, "The distinction between actual commentary (exegesis) and the rules, methods, or theory governing it (hermeneutics) dates from this earliest usage and remains basic to the definition of hermeneutics both in theology and, when the definition is later broadened, in reference to non-biblical literature."

Understanding hermeneutics in these terms, we may trace its origins to a much earlier time than the Reformation when scholars sought to aid the pastor who discovered himself without Church or tradition to lend authority to his exegesis. We may trace the practice back to the Old Testament Rabbinic methods.
We will momentarily, therefore, review of the six modern usages of "hermeneutics" in order to observe these historical roots of biblical hermeneutics, for an essential part of articulating a definition of biblical hermeneutics is historical. As Gerald L. Burns has argued,

The point is that all hermeneutical positions are rooted in one or another tradition of understanding—one or another tradition that hands down normative practices for determining authoritative interpretations. The question of what counts as authoritative is always historically contingent; that is, it is never purely logical but is always relative to prevailing cultural norms. That is why, in order to understand the nature of interpretation, one must study its history.

The following overview of major historical periods of biblical hermeneutics will demonstrate significant trends, methods, and shortcomings. It will help to narrow our use of the term within the context of this study.

**Historical Perspectives**

**Pre-Christian**

The Palestinian Jews maintained the longstanding tradition of a literal hermeneutic which they traced back to the days of Ezra, who translated and expounded the meaning and application of the Scriptures during the restoration of Israel following the Babylonian captivity. For the most part, these Jewish interpreters were characterized by a great respect for the Law. The very letters of the text were regarded as holy and were actually counted during transcription to insure that none were lost. Interpretations of the meaning of the Scriptures were generally strict and literal, whereas the applications of the Law, as recorded in the Midrash, were broad and often arbitrary.

Several teachers within this tradition developed principles of interpretation which reflected their basic commitment to a literal approach to the text. Some of these rules are still recognized as legitimate hermeneutical principles. Ramm notes that

1. They insisted that a word must be understood in terms of its sentence, and a sentence in terms of its context.

2. They taught that Scriptures dealing with similar topics should be compared, and that in
some instances a third Scripture would relieve the apparent contradiction between two Scriptures.

3. A clear passage is to be given preference over an obscure one if they deal with the same subject matter.

4. Very close attention is to be paid to spelling, grammar, and figures of speech.

5. By the use of logic we can determine the application of Scripture to those problems in life Scripture has not specifically treated.72

Palestinian Rabbinic Interpreters thus demonstrated a commitment to handling respectfully the Sacred Text. But their major weakness resulted from a sometimes fanatical obsession with the letters of the text. This hyperliteralism ushered in the error of letterism. In an effort to plumb the full depths of meaning by scrutinizing every detail of the sentence, phrase, word and letter, the essential message of the text was lost.73 Rather than worshipping the God of the Bible, most of these teachers came to worship the Bible itself. Though they preserved the text with extreme accuracy, they "ended in Pharisaism with all its fatal evils, substituting an empty externalism for the religion of the heart. . . . The profession of Biblicolatry slowly but surely undermined the Bible. . . ."74

Certainly the greatest error of this school was their abandonment of a literal interpretation to which they eventually paid but lip service. In going deeper they sacrificed the clear and obvious message. "In the exaltation of the very letters of the Scripture the true meaning of the Scripture was lost."75

The Alexandrian Jews were characterized by a commitment to allegorization having been influenced by the Greek philosophies. Picking up on Plato's dictum, they adopted the principle that no text should be interpreted in such a way that God is portrayed in an unworthy manner. Although the Scriptures were highly respected, and the literal sense not totally rejected, the subjective and often capricious nature of the allegorical approach made allowance for a multitude of misinterpretations.
The tenets of biblical allegorism, which have significantly influenced the interpretation of Scripture to this day, can be traced back to the desire of Jewish scholars who sought to merge the teachings of the Old Testament with the wisdom of Greek philosophy. Aristobulus, for example, maintained that Greek philosophy had borrowed from the Old Testament, especially Moses, and that by the proper methods of inquiry, all the tenets of the Greek philosophers were to be found in Moses and the Prophets.76

Turning from the detailed analysis of the letter of the Law, the Alexandrian Jews embraced a hermeneutical method which would display the unity of Jewish legislation and Greek philosophy. The goal was no longer an adherence to prescribed ritualism, but an unveiling of all knowledge. Even Philo, who asserted the superiority of Moses and the Prophets over Plato and the philosophers, felt it necessary to "show that nothing in his ancestral faith shut him out from the charm of classical antiquity and the splendor of philosophic truth. His object was to defend the cause of Judaism alike against sneering Greeks, wavering Jews, and narrow-minded Pharisees, by harmonizing the dogmas of divine revelation with the discoveries of speculative thought."77

Although the allegorical method of interpretation accommodated a reconciliation between particular revelation and secular philosophy, it resulted in some outrageous explanations. Ramm notes, for example, that

Abraham's trek to Palestine is really the story of a Stoic philosopher who leaves Chaldea (sensual understanding), and stops at Haran, which means "holes," and signifies the emptiness of knowing things by the holes, that is the senses. When he becomes Abraham he becomes a truly enlightened philosopher. To marry Sarah is to marry abstract wisdom.78

The subjectivity of this method may be seen in its three major and six sub-canons. Scriptures were to be interpreted allegorically...

1. If a statement says anything unworthy of God.
2. If a statement is contradictory with some other statement or in any other way presents us with a difficulty.
3. If the record itself is allegorical in nature.
And...

1. Grammatical peculiarities are hints that underneath the record is a deeper spiritual truth.
2. Stylistic elements of the passage (synonyms, repetition, etc.) indicate that deeper truth is present.
3. Manipulation of punctuation, words, meanings of words, and new combinations of words can be so done as to extract new and deeper truth from the passage.
4. Whatever symbols are present, we are to understand them figuratively not literally.
5. Spiritual truth may be obtained from etymologies of names.
6. Finally, we have the law of double-application. Many natural objects signify spiritual things (heaven means mind; earth means sensation; a field, revolt, etc.).

Pre-Christian biblical interpretation may be summed up as reverential of Scripture, but to a fault. On the one hand, the Rabbinic exegetes so venerated the text that letterism overshadowed their original literal efforts to explain the Law in the tradition of Ezra. On the other hand, the Hellenistic Jews of Alexandria so esteemed the text that they employed a subjective allegorical method in order to harmonize Scripture with the secular philosophies of the day. Both lost sight of the straightforward message of the text.

**Primitive Christian**

The two outstanding representatives of the early Christian era of biblical interpretation are Jesus and Paul, both of whom maintained a literal and Christocentric view of the Old Testament. Jesus himself initiates this fresh tradition, which stands in contrast to the typical Jewish methods of the day. He channels attention back into the meaning of the text rather than on the commentaries that surrounded the text. The Rabbis focused on the external, the letter of the Law. Jesus reveals the internal spirit of the Law. He contrasts the laws of the scholars with God's Law.

This contrast between Jesus and the Rabbis is not to be explained by their primary attitude toward Scripture. The Talmud warned, "He who says, 'The Torah is not from God,' or even
Il he says, 'The whole Torah is from God with the exception of this or that verse which not God but Moses spoke from his own mouth—that soul shall be rooted up.'Jesus' view was equally as strict (Matt. 5:17-18). Rather, the distinction is found in their understanding of Scripture. For the Rabbis it was a closed system; something to be encoded and dutifully followed to the most intricate, external detail. The Law led them back to the time when God had spoken.

Jesus, on the other hand, saw the Old Testament as open—a document that was full of promise yet to be fulfilled. The Scriptures pointed ahead to the time when God would make good on His promises to Israel and the spirit of the Law would be practiced throughout the nation. And He interpreted the kingdom and Messianic prophesies in terms of Himself. "Jewish exegesis of Isaiah 53 never interpreted messianically the passages referring to suffering and rejection." But Jesus argues that He fulfills the Messianic promises. "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21). "If you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." (John 5:46). It was this literal and Christocentric hermeneutic that caused the Jewish Interpreters to seek Jesus' execution.

The Apostle Paul followed the hermeneutic of Jesus. He saw the meaning of the Old Testament as prophetic, pointing to the Messiah and His kingdom; a meaning which was fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus and Paul are not unlike in their attitude toward the question of the Old Testament; and any investigation into the relationship of their outlooks which results in a sharp antitheses between a Jewish Jesus and a Greek Paul can hardly be correct. Both of them faced the final question of the meaning of the Old Testament for the new Israel of God; and their answers were not dissimilar.

Like Jesus, Paul rejected the legalistic interpretation of the Old Testament. Jesus had said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20). Paul too rejects the Law as a means of spiritual life, arguing that it merely pointed to the coming Messiah. (Philippians 3:9). That Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament is clearly seen in Paul's interpretation.
Not only is the Apostle’s hermeneutic Christocentric, but it is also literal. In Galatians 3:16 Paul argues on the basis of a literal interpretation of Genesis 12:7; 13:15; and 24:7. He says, "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person who is Christ."

The word "seed" is a collective noun in Genesis, but Paul makes it refer to Christ in Galatians, following a Rabbinic emphasis on verbal literalness. In verse 19 Paul says "... until the seed to whom the promise referred had come." For Paul, then, Christ is the Seed, for Christ is the Head of the collective parts of the Body.

Both the Gospels and the Epistles abound with examples of Jesus’ and Paul’s similar hermeneutic. Both valued the words and very letters of the text, attaching to them a literal fulfillment. That fulfillment culminated in Christ and His kingdom, in contrast to the Rabbinic interpretations of the day. Jesus and Paul, therefore, although often reflecting a hermeneutical perspective similar to that of their Jewish contemporaries, gave a fresh meaning to the Scriptures, one that set them in conflict with the accepted Jewish interpretations.

**Patristic**

The second century witnessed the waging of numerous battles over the proper content of the Scriptures and methods of interpreting them. Some argued for the inclusion of the Old Testament while others sought to exclude it. Still others held that certain of the New Testament books should be excluded. Methods of Interpretation abounded. Some were highly typological or allegorical, others strictly literal. Most tended to be Christocentric and many highly imaginative. As the major issues became more clearly defined, three distinct schools may be identified: the Alexandrian, the Antiochene, and the Western.

The Christians in Alexandria adopted the allegorical method of their Jewish predecessors. Much of what was noted in the Old Testament was considered unworthy of the title "Christian." Yet, the Old Testament was considered a Christian document. In order to reconcile these two,
seemingly incompatible doctrines, the Alexandrian Christians baptized the Old Testament into an allegorical methodology which enabled them to explain away texts that would be difficult if taken literally. In so doing they were able to communicate the essential elements of the gospel without acknowledging the impediments of Jewish ritual and practice.

Clement and Origen were the outstanding representatives of this school. In seeking a means of defending the faith reasonably, they justified and explained the allegorical method. Clement saw five possible senses of any passage, noting that faith in Christ represented the key to knowing the interpretation. These senses include the historical, the doctrinal, the prophetic, the philosophical, and the mystical. It is possible for a passage to be understood in all five ways at once, according to Clement.

Origen, who made the clearest presentation of Christian allegorization to this point, looked for the intellectual and spiritual truths behind the literal or historical statements of Scripture. If one prayed for guidance and worked diligently he could uncover a literal, a spiritual, and a moral or allegorical sense in any text. In practice, however, Origen tended to disparage the literal sense and seldom made reference to the moral.

Somewhat later, Jerome and Augustine were influenced by the allegorical approach. Both spoke in theoretical terms of a more literal methodology, but, in practice, both failed to overcome the force of allegorization. The extremes of literalism and the potential of a “spiritual” interpretation help to explain the ongoing commitment to the allegorical method in spite of its many weaknesses.

The second major school of Interpretation, the Antiochene, rejected the allegorical method for a more literal exegesis.

The Alexandrines, naturally, appealed to the use of allegorization by the apostle Paul in the fourth chapter of Galatians. The Antiochenes, on the other hand, explained that while he uses the word he does not really interpret allegorically. There is a great difference, they say, between what the apostle means and what the Alexandrines mean. The apostle believes in the reality of the events he describes, and used them for examples. The Alexandrines, on the other hand, deprive the whole biblical history of its reality.
In taking up a literal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic, the fathers of Antioch were following the basic method of the Palestinian Rabbis, while avoiding the excesses of letterism. The result of these principles was some of the finest exegetical literature of ancient times. As Gilbert says, "the commentary of Theodore (of Mopsuestia) on the minor epistles of Paul is the first and almost the last exegetical work produced in the ancient Church which will bear any comparison with modern commentaries." Grant observes that this school had a remarkable influence in the Middle Ages and became the pillar of the Reformation, and finally became the "principle exegetical method of the Christian Church."

In seeking the original meaning of the Scriptures, this school of interpretation did not overlook the figurative use of language or the spiritual sense of the message. There was a recognition of both plain-literal and figurative-literal language. The plain-literal was the language of straightforward prose, like historical narrative or levitical passages. The figurative-literal interpretation acknowledged the use of figures of speech by the biblical authors. For example, whereas the allegorical school would say a literal interpretation of "the eye of the Lord is upon you" means that God actually has an eye, the literal school would argue that it meant that God is all knowing and all observing. This recognition of the spiritual truth expressed by the words of Scripture enabled the Antiochene literalists to uncover the prophetic references concerning the Messiah, even recognizing the typological allusions. They were Christocentric without having to go beyond the natural sense of the text.

The two most illustrious representatives of the school of Antioch were Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom. Theodore was more liberal in his view of Scripture, more intellectual and dogmatic in his interpretations, and more exegetical than practical. Chrysostom took a strict view of the Bible's infallibility, interpreted more spiritually and practically, and was known more as a preacher than an exegete. Both, however, "went far towards the development of true scientific exegesis, recognizing, as they did, the necessity of determining the original sense of the Bible . . . . Not only did they attach great value to the literal sense of the Bible, but they rejected the allegorical method of interpretation."

In the West a third school of interpretation developed during the Patristic era. Dogmatic exegesis, the result of innumerable doctrinal conflicts within the Church, resulted in an
authoritarian interpretation. Rather than demonstrating, from the Scripture itself, a justifiable exegesis, these interpreters looked to tradition and the Church for confirmation.\textsuperscript{101} Their basic argument maintained that the Scriptures belonged to the Church as a result of apostolic succession, and, therefore, only the Church could properly Interpret Scripture.\textsuperscript{102} The theme phrase of this school became, "No innovation, except from tradition."\textsuperscript{103} The proper interpretation was that which had "been believed everywhere, always, by everyone."\textsuperscript{104} In order to be an interpreter one must be fully qualified "philologically, critically, and historically" having a "love for (the) author," and looking to a "statement of the faith of the Church."\textsuperscript{105}

Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine, and Vincent defended the authoritative Interpretation of Scripture. This new methodology shifted the focus of the interpreter away from the text itself and toward the Church. A result of this shift toward tradition, which became the major methodology of the ever more dominating Western influence, was the sad state of interpretation in the Middle Ages.

\textit{Medieval}

There was much interest in but little significant advance in the biblical Interpretation of the Middle Ages. Whereas the focus of Interpretation had been exegetical theology during the era of the Church Fathers, there was now a division between Interpretation and theology.\textsuperscript{106} Berkhof has summed up this period.

During the Middle Ages, many, even of the clergy, lived in profound ignorance of the Bible. And insofar as they knew it, it was only in the translation of the Vulgate, and through the writings of the Fathers. It was generally regarded as a book full of mysteries, which could be understood only in a mystical manner. In this period, the fourfold sense of Scripture (literal, topological, allegorical, and analogical) was generally accepted, and it became the established principle that the Interpretation of the Bible had to adapt itself to tradition and the doctrine of the church.\textsuperscript{107}

Since the goal was to find the doctrine of the Church in the Scriptures, the allegorical interpretation was the most widely used method.\textsuperscript{108} The Fathers were called upon for support as long as the interpretation was solely about faith and morals (not science, or history), (2) the Father was bearing witness to the Catholic Tradition, and (3) the Fathers offered a unanimous
The ever increasing structure and ritual of the Church was developed out of the "seed bed" of the Scriptures. The Bible was pregnant with implications which ushered forth in an ever expanding tradition. "Not a single new hermeneutical principle was developed at this time, and exegesis was bound hand and foot by traditional lore and by the authority of the Church." A notable deviation from the allegorical/authoritarian interpretation of the Middle ages came from the Victorines. The Abbey of St. Victor in Paris was influenced by Jewish scholarship, which tended towards a more literal hermeneutic. By employing the tools of a liberal arts education, the Victorines first established the historical sense of a passage and then articulated their theology. Thus a check was put on allegorical interpretations which moved too far from the natural sense. But this small school stood in contrast to the majority of scholarship which endeavored to discover multiple senses in Scripture.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, yet another sympathy was expressed for the primacy of a literal hermeneutic. Aquinas, arguing that Scripture alone was free from error, concluded that the literal sense of the text must be established first and only then the other senses. Biblical scholarship proceeded to turn toward a more rationalistic approach to Scripture. Not through spiritual qualification, but by the use of reason, aided by the senses, the interpreter may come to a knowledge of the meaning of the text. The interpretation of Scripture became a scientific undertaking, the goal of which was a literal understanding.

The influence of Aquinas and Scholasticism slowly, but certainly made its mark upon biblical hermeneutics. Though delayed by the Reformation, the confidence placed in rationalism was not lost. Rather, it was received with vigor and has served as the starting point for later methods of hermeneutics.

**Reformation/Orthodox**

The emphasis upon a literal interpretation continued throughout the Reformation period. Searching for the multiple senses of the text was nearly abandoned as studies in the original Hebrew and Greek texts flourished. No longer did the Church determine the meaning of
Scripture, now the Scriptures determined what the Church could or should teach.\textsuperscript{113} The move away from an authoritarian interpretation was precipitated by the Reformers' adamant insistence on the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. The two fundamental rules of interpretation were that Scripture is the Interpreter of Scripture and that all understanding and exposition of Scripture must be in conformity with the uniform teaching of Scripture.\textsuperscript{114}

Another important factor which helped to usher in the hermeneutical reformation which preceded the ecclesiastical reformation was the influence of Occam. Occam proclaimed the separation of revelation and human reason. "Human reason had as its territory nature, philosophy, and science. Revelation which was received through faith had for its territory salvation and theology. This was a radical separation of two elements that existed on friendlier terms in the philosophy of Aquinas."\textsuperscript{115}

It was in the Protestant movement that we find an advance during the Reformation. Making no exegetical advances, the Catholic church "did not admit the right of private judgment, and defended as over against the Protestants, the position that the Bible must be interpreted in harmony with tradition."\textsuperscript{116} Further, the Council of Trent emphasized

(a) that the authority of ecclesiastical tradition must be maintained, (b) that the highest authority had to be ascribed to the Vulgate, and (c) that it is necessary to conform one's interpretation to the authority of the church and to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.\textsuperscript{117}

Thus, the Roman Catholics entrenched their allegorical/authoritarian hermeneutic while Protestantism recognized the need for a literal interpretation. Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin were the most notable representatives of the reformation hermeneutic. Luther's approach was Christocentric, but subjective. The goal of exegesis was to come to a discovery of Christ. The means was faith. Luther argued that, "Experience is necessary for the understanding of the Word. It is not merely to be repeated or known, but to be lived and felt. . . . God must say to you in your heart, this is God's word."\textsuperscript{118} Luther's premise was that the Scriptures were so lucidly
written that everyone may understand them. The Bible was not to be kept from the people, but rather given to them that they too might experience God's revelation. Six fundamental principles of Interpretation were to be followed, according to Luther's theory.

(1) The psychological principle. Faith and Illumination were the personal and spiritual requisites for an interpreter. The believer should seek the leading of the Spirit and depend on that leading. . . .

(2) The authority principle. The Bible is the supreme and final authority in theological matters, and is therefore above all ecclesiastical authority. . . .

(3) The literal principle. In place of the four-fold system of the scholastics, we are to put the literal principle. . . . The literal principle implies three sub-principles:

   (a) Luther rejected allegory . . . .

   (b) Luther accepted the primacy of the original languages . . . .

   (c) (Luther held to) the historical and grammatical principle. . . . The interpreter must give attention to grammar; to the times, circumstances, and conditions of the writer of the biblical book; and to the context of the passage.

(4) The sufficiency principle. The devout and competent Christian can understand the true meaning of the Bible and thereby does not need the official guides to interpretation offered by the church . . . .

(5) The Christological principle. The literal interpretation of the Bible was not the end of interpretation. The function of all interpretation is to find Christ . . . .

(6) The Law-Gospel principle. Luther saw the root heresy of the Galatian churches transported into a different key in the Catholic Church. The Galatians had been taught to (a) be circumcised--the seal of the Old Testament Covenant, and (b) to believe in Christ--the center of the New Covenant, and they would be saved. The Catholic Church taught that (a) to do religious works, and (b) believe in Christ would save them. Justification by faith alone not only repudiated the Judaizers of the Gospel, but the Roman Catholic
system of salvation. Luther taught that we must carefully distinguish Law and Gospel in the Bible.\textsuperscript{119}

These principles provided a significant impetus for those who were dissatisfied with traditional approaches to Scripture. It must be added, however, that Luther's principilizing was not necessarily carried over into his practice, for though he decried the weakness of Roman Catholic exegesis, he sometimes fell back into the allegorical method. Still, a new course had been charted and would be followed for centuries to come.

Melanchthon worked alongside Luther. Reportedly a more brilliant scholar than Luther, he had an excellent facility in both Hebrew and Greek. A literal hermeneutic is easily identifiable in his two fundamental principles of interpretation. He argued that "(a) the Scriptures must be understood grammatically before they can be understood theologically; and (b) the Scriptures have but one certain and simple sense."\textsuperscript{120} Melanchthon was the teacher, if Luther was the prophet, of this new approach. The principles and procedures were passed on to numerous sons of the Reformation who kept alive the vision of an understandable Bible.

After Luther had made the break from the old methods, Calvin exemplified the distinction in his exegetical writings.\textsuperscript{121} For him, "the first business of an interpreter is to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say."\textsuperscript{122}

Calvin's practice of hermeneutics followed the principles which he laid down. Ramm notes the crucial points:

1. Calvin insisted that the illumination of the spirit was the necessary spiritual preparation for the interpretation of God's Word . . . .

2. Calvin, with Luther, rejected allegorical interpretation. Calvin called it satanic because it led men away from the truth of Scripture . . . .

3. "Scripture interprets Scripture" was a basic conviction of Calvin . . . it meant literalism in exegesis with a rejection of the medieval system of the four-fold meaning of Scripture. It
meant listening to the Scripture, not reading Scripture to justify a host of dogmatic presuppositions.

(4) Calvin showed a marked independence in exegesis. He not only broke with catholic exegetical principles, but with any sort of exegesis which was shoddy, superficial, or worthless.

(5) Finally, Calvin anticipated much of the modern spirit with reference to the interpretation of Messianic prophecy.

Having broken away from the authoritative narrowness of the Roman church, the Reformation, in its insistence that the individual believer could discover the meaning of Scripture, opened the way to a dogmatic confessionalism which splintered interpretation into many factions. In fact, "At one time almost every important city or principality had its own favorite creed," so that "exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts." In general, however, the principles and spirit of Reformation hermeneutics provided the foundation upon which Protestant orthodoxy was constructed.

**Modern**

Modern approaches to biblical hermeneutics have been characterized by rationalism. Reason was divorced from and took precedence over the Church, faith, and Scripture. A critical attitude toward the Scriptures surfaced in which the human authors were emphasized and the full inspiration and infallibility of Scripture denied. The historicity of the text was questioned and reason alone became the key to unlocking the true meaning of the text. By their insistence on a supposedly presuppositionless approach to the Bible, these modern scholars insisted that the Scriptures were to be interpreted just like any other book. This meant an almost exclusive commitment to the grammatic-historical method.

Seven principles undergirded this rationalistic method. First, modern rationalism is made up of a complex of presuppositions; e.g., standards of scholarship as practiced in higher...
education, the validity of the scientific outlook as well as method, and the ethical standards of educated people. In essence, that which cannot be explained by sensual observation of the physical world is denied. Whatever in Scripture does not measure up to this scientific standard is rejected. Second, rationalism redefines the term "Inspiration." No longer is the Word of God inspired. Rather, it has the ability to inspire. Revelation is human insight into religious truth discovered through a religious experience of inspiration through the Bible. Third, the supernatural is redefined. Since miracles and other forms of divine intervention cannot be measured scientifically, they are rejected. Any allusion to such in the Bible must be considered folklore or myth. Existential experience becomes the new supernatural. Fourth, the religion of Israel and the religion of the Bible are viewed as developing, evolutionary phenomena. Dates and authorship are challenged based on the assumption that the well developed books of the Law must have followed the more primitive works of the prophets. Even the New Testament documents are torn apart and pieced back together in an effort to discover the real context in which the Scriptures were recorded. Fifth, the notion of accommodation has been applied to the Bible. It is assumed that much of what has been written was put into language that does not reflect the truth of historical events or even doctrinal beliefs. The death of Christ, for example, is described in terms of a blood sacrifice only to accommodate the Jewish religious mind. And doctrines based on such primitive accommodation must be abandoned for a more civilized perspective. Sixth, the full force of the historical interpretation is to be employed. The modern interpreter seeks to get behind the text itself and into the context from which the text came. It assumes that social conditions create doctrinal beliefs. The goal of the interpreter is to uncover the confluence of social pressures, including the influence of surrounding religions, in order to discover the real source of biblical theologies. Seventh, the ethics or morality of Scripture is of greater significance than the historical fact of Scripture. What happened is of little importance for it was the result of fertile imagination anyway. The essence of the Bible is found in the ethical and moral lessons to be learned.
Perhaps the two most influential philosophers, those who initiated modern hermeneutics, are Thomas Hobbes and Benedict Spinoza. Hobbes paved the way for the view of Scripture that sees it as a record of revelation rather than revelation itself when he wrote that:

When God speaketh to man, it must be either immediately or by mediation of another man. . . . To say that God hath spoken to him in the Holy Scripture is not to say that God hath spoken to him immediately but by mediation of the prophets or of the apostles or of the church, in such a manner as he speaks to all other Christian men.128

Spinoza articulated the rationalistic approach to biblical revelation.

I found nothing taught expressly by scripture which does not agree with our understanding, or which is repugnant thereto, and as I saw that the prophets taught nothing which is not very simple and easily to be grasped by all, and further, that they clothed their teaching in the style, and confirmed it with the reasons, which could most deeply move the mind of the masses to devotion to God, I became thoroughly convinced that the Bible leaves reason absolutely free, that it has nothing in common with philosophy, in fact, that revelation and philosophy stand on totally different footings.129

The irony of rationalism is that its presuppositions are no more scientifically defendable than those of a purely orthodox view. While there is a necessary regard for reason, it becomes over emphasized to the exclusion of any revelation. By making the Bible equal to any other book, it eliminates the possibility of understanding its real message.

As rationalism grew, the authority of Scripture and of the Church waned. Theology was perceived as a moral undertaking; the question of miracles being one of discovering the truth behind the statements of the uneducated authors. Hermeneutics had established as its goal the explaining of the supposed historical conditioning of the text.

Contemporary

The contemporary school of biblical hermeneutics has followed the general tendencies of the rationalists. Contemporary hermeneutics appears to be firmly rooted in the philosophical, having denied the possibility of revelation. Our review of Palmer's six definitions of hermeneutics will highlight the general tendencies to get behind the meaning of the words to the essence of the text.130 There is, however, a duel approach; one philosophical, the other practical. A later section of this chapter will deal with the differences between the two.
This review of the history of biblical hermeneutics calls to attention some ongoing trends. The major schools might well be reduced to three; the allegorical, the literal, and the critical. Although extremes have been noted in all three schools, the one which seems best to aid the exegete is the literal. It avoids the excess subjectivism of both allegory and hyper-criticism. It allows the text to speak for itself. While it recognizes a spiritual dimension, it does not ignore the historical and grammatical. While it acknowledges the role of reason, it does not fall into excess by denying the possibility of revelation. A literal hermeneutic appears to strike the balance between two common extremes.

Returning now to our consideration of the six modern usages of the term "hermeneutics," we must keep in mind that while the basic goal of biblical hermeneutics has remained stable (the establishment of a system of rules for proper interpretation), the scope of hermeneutics in general has broadened, especially in this century, from the practical considerations of understanding the meaning and/or significance of individual passages, to include the philosophical issues surrounding the phenomena of understanding itself, as we shall see in some of the later definitions.

As has been noted, the eighteenth century witnessed the results of rationalism upon biblical hermeneutics. With the introduction of the grammatical and historical methods of interpretation came the conviction that the principles of biblical hermeneutics were applicable to other forms of literature. Thus, classical philology made its entrance into the realm of hermeneutics. No longer was the Bible given special treatment. Reason, which came to be revered above Revelation, was put to bear upon the Scriptures. To a great extent, sacred and secular theory merged into one. Interpreters maintained that the Bible does not tell man anything true which he would not eventually have recognized through using his reason. It is simply rational, moral truth revealed before its time. The task of exegesis, then, was to go deeply into the text, using the tools of natural reason, and to find those great moral truths intended by the New Testament writers but hidden within different historical terms. What was needed, they argued, was a developed historical understanding which could grasp the spirit (Geist) behind the work and translate it into terms acceptable to enlightened reason.
It should be remembered that this slight move away from traditional hermeneutics was precipitated by a change in attitude toward the Bible itself. When Revelation became rationalized the workplace of the interpreter began to change from a position of under the text to one of over the text. The now slippery message of the Bible could only be seized by reason as it judged the Scriptures.

F. Schleiermacher took the next step toward a more modern hermeneutic by ushering in the notion of a general hermeneutic. The scope was broadened as he "reconceived hermeneutics as a 'science' or 'art' of understanding."133

By advancing hermeneutics beyond the systematic principilizing of rules for interpreting a text, Schleiermacher sought "a science which describes the conditions of understanding in all discourse."134 This giant step carried hermeneutics into a new world. From the practical and philological it moved into the philosophical and ontological; from the mere rules of interpretation into the reality of understanding. As Thlseilton has noted concerning this major shift, "We cannot ignore this work and attempt to turn back the clock, even if we wished to do so."135

In order to approach the problem of understanding from a still more humanistic perspective, Wilhelm Dilthey set forth his impression of the Geisteswissenschaften. Palmer summarized this effort.

To interpret a great expression of human life, whether it be a law, literary work, or sacred scripture, calls for an act of historical understanding, Dilthey asserted, an operation fundamentally distinct from the quantifying, scientific grasp of the natural world; for in this act of historical understanding, what is called into play is a personal knowledge of what being human means.136

Hermeneutics was becoming less objective. The subjectivism of the human mind and experience was increasingly taking on a greater role than any principles which would lead to verifiable meaning.

Martin Heidegger's phenomenological method of exploring human existence superceded the thinking of Dilthey.

Heidegger's analysis indicated that "understanding" and "interpretation" are foundational modes of man's being. So Heidegger's "hermeneutic" of Dasein turns out, especially insofar
as it presents an ontology of understanding, also to be hermeneutics; his investigation was hermeneutical in content as well as method.137

Hans-Georg Gadamer, following in the existential train of Heidegger has added the implications of linguistics to the hermeneutical process.

Hermeneutics is an encounter with being through language. Ultimately, Gadamer asserts the linguistic character of human reality itself, and hermeneutics is plunged into the fully philosophical questions of the relationship of language to being, understanding, history, existence, and reality. Hermeneutics is put in the center of the philosophical problems of today; it cannot escape the epistemological or the ontological questions when understanding itself is defined as an epistemological and ontological matter.138

The trend in these new usages of the term "hermeneutics" is not difficult to perceive. The scope of things hermeneutical has ever broadened to the extent that all human existence is somehow subsumed under the hermeneutical heading. The old hermeneutic has essentially been replaced by a new hermeneutic. Whereas the former was generic dealing with the interpretation of the Bible, the latter is wholly general seeking to interpret the very process of understanding across all experience.

More recently, however, Paul Ricoeur has turned attention back into the text, but still with a much broader conception of text than traditionally held. A text could be a "collection of signs susceptible of being considered a text."139 Thus, the interpretation of dreams or even psychoanalysis, for example, do not lie outside the realm of hermeneutics.

Ricoeur argues for a simple or surface meaning in the text and also a deeper, hidden meaning. The surface meaning is generally to be distrusted, for the hidden meaning reveals genuine intent. The symbol may be interpreted sympathetically or antagonistically depending on whether the message of the text is worth recovering because it represents a significant reality or demands destroying in that it portrays a false reality. However, "because of these two antithetical approaches to the interpretation of symbols today, Ricoeur asserts, there can be no universal canons for exegesis but only separate and opposing theories concerning the rules of interpretation."140
With these representative usages of "hermeneutics" in mind, along with the previously mentioned shades of its lexical meaning and the historical overview of biblical hermeneutics, we will now consider the manner in which the term will be used throughout this study. Hermeneutics is the science/art of understanding the meaning and the significance of a biblical word, phrase, or passage. The scientific dimension of hermeneutics has long been recognized. R. C. Sproul follows this traditional view when he argues that "the establishment of objective rules of interpretation is what the science of hermeneutics is all about." And Carl Henry demands its continuance.

But whether we shun the term hermeneutics or not theologians dare not shun the question of the methodological principles to be employed in biblical interpretation and explanation. The issues at stake are foundational to all literary understanding in general and to the validity of scriptural meaning in particular. The crucial issue today is whether, in the face of rival theories of textual interpretation, any universal canons of exegesis remain to be affirmed. If biblical language is not to be regarded as conveying objectively valid information, but is simply the medium through which God confronts men internally with the possibility of new self-understanding, then the significance of Scripture lies no longer in its shared cognitive message but only in a private internal response.

The other side of hermeneutics is admittedly more subjective and artistic. "Hermeneutics is the science and the art of biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation."

Another crucial aspect of this definition is the insistence on a distinction between the meaning of the text and its significance. While this distinction has been noted in another section of this study, it is foundational to a clear definition of the term. Mickelsen states that

the task of the interpreters of the Bible is to find out the meaning of a statement (command, question) for the author and for the first hearers or readers, and thereupon to transmit that meaning to modern readers.

... it is evident that all biblical interpretation has two dimensions. The first is concerned with discovering the original meaning of a statement, while the second takes into account the changes in meaning which contemporary readers may attach to the same words.

This study will be limited to the following definitional characteristics: it will focus on the explanatory aspect of lexical meaning, it will concentrate on the theory of biblical interpretation to the exclusion of other modern usages of the term, and it will narrow its discussion primarily to the
not whether certainty is accessible to the interpreter but whether the author's intended meaning is accessible to him.¹⁵⁰

But such a statement is not necessary, for there is a certainty that allows for an authoritative interpretation. Sproul has outlined three common usages of the term certainty.

(1) Philosophical or Formal Certainty . . . has to do with formal arguments that are so logically tight and compelling that to deny the conclusion would be to yield to manifest irrationality or absurdity.

(2) Confidence as Certainty . . . . Here we are using the word certain in a way that describes a particular feeling state that attends a given idea or assertion. Here the word certain describes a sense of confidence or assurance.

(3) Moral Certainty . . . . This is the certainty of the law courts when they use the expression "beyond reasonable doubt" . . . . Moral certainty refers to certainty acquired from the weight of evidence that, though lacking in philosophical certainty, is weighty enough to impose moral culpability.¹⁵¹

While the first definition calls for a certainty too objective for practical purposes and the second allows for more subjectivism than the pulpit permits, the third squares with both theologians¹⁵² and rhetoricians.¹⁵³ When, therefore, we speak of certainty, we mean that which is probably true,¹⁵⁴ that, which, being beyond reasonable doubt, carries with it an imperative to act in congruence with the meaning as interpreted.

**Philosophical vs. Practical Hermeneutics**

Modern hermeneutical theory is moving in two directions at the same time. Palmer identifies "two separate foci: one on the theory of understanding in a general sense, and the other on what is involved in the exegesis of linguistic texts, the hermeneutical problem. These two foci need not be either self-canceling or absolutely independent yet they are best held in sufficient separateness . . . ."¹⁵⁵ Palmer argues for the importance of a general or philosophical hermeneutic.
interpretation of meaning rather than the application of significance. In order to distinguish between hermeneutics (which includes both meaning and significance), the term "interpretation" will be used when referring to the discovery of the original meaning of the text.

Intention and Certainty

Two more definitions of significant terms need to be stated. The first is the definition of intent. When one interprets, he seeks to discover the intent of the author, for it is the intent that determines meaning. This is what Hirsch means when he states that, "A determinate verbal meaning requires a determining will." Geisler adds, "Technically speaking, the interpreter does not determine (cause) meaning by any hermeneutical procedure. Meaning is determined by the author; it is discovered by the reader (listener)."

The problem with the term "intent" is that it has several definitions. Geisler has noted four different meanings of the word.

(1) plan, as in: "I intend to go tomorrow";
(2) purpose, as in: "My intention was to help you";
(3) thought in one's mind, as in: "I didn't intend to say that";
(4) expressed meaning, as in: "the truth intended in John 3:16 is clear."

The fourth definition is the one that is used in this study. Whereas the first three are all legitimate uses of the word, only the last allows for discovery of meaning.

A second definition is that of certainty. In seeking to validate one's interpretation, especially before it is represented in the pulpit as "The Word of the Lord," the homiletician will want a degree of certainty which will give authority to his message. How can he be certain that his interpretation is the correct interpretation?

Hirsch is careful to distance himself from the concept of certainty while at the same time arguing for the discoverability of meaning. "It is a logical mistake," he says, "to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding. . . . The issue is
What is needed... is a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of understanding itself, an understanding that is philosophically adequate both epistemologically and ontologically. Histories of interpretation theory in specific disciplines are certainly vital to the continuing quest for a deeper understanding of interpretation, as are syntheses of several disciplinary approaches; but they are not in themselves sufficient.156

The purpose of general hermeneutics is broad and theoretical, focusing on all of life. Schleiermacher may properly be considered the Father of modern hermeneutics and the originator of general hermeneutics. Until his contributions, the study of interpretation was specific and local. The lawyer had a set of rules by which he could interpret the law. The preacher had a set of rules by which he could understand the Scriptures. Except for a few others who had proposed rules for literary criticism, there was no interest in or effort made to develop the study of hermeneutics. It was Schleiermacher's desire to get beyond the local interpretation and frame a general hermeneutic as the art of understanding. In other words, while still interested in the understanding of a particular text, he advanced the term "hermeneutics" to include the art of understanding itself. He viewed the new task of hermeneutics as providing a way of understanding; for example, how a child grasps the meaning of a new word or context. This new task began to move the interpreter beyond the mere interpretation of a text, even beyond the author's intentions and mental processes, to the starting point of comprehending life itself. Thus the idea was born that it is as important to understand what is being done when one interprets, as it is to actually interpret.

Following Schleiermacher, there is a direct and unbroken lineage within the new tradition, beginning with Boeckh and continuing with Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. During this evolutionary development, there has been a constant trend away from the practical questions and toward the more philosophical ones. Hermeneutics has wrapped its roots around epistemological and ontological questions.

Boeckh argued that Hermes is the, "mediator between gods and men. He manifests the divine thoughts, translates the infinite into finite, the divine spirit into sensible appearance. Thus,
everything that belongs to the realm of understanding is attributed to him, particularly speech and writing. "Everything" is now included in studies of hermeneutics.

Dilthey offered a hermeneutical formula based on Erleben (experience), Ausdruck (expression), and Verstehen (understanding). To him hermeneutics was not merely, not even primarily, the interpretation of a text, but rather the How life discloses itself and expresses itself through a work.

Dilthey's contribution was to broaden the horizon of hermeneutics by placing it in the context of interpretation in the human studies. His thinking on the hermeneutical problem started very much in the shadow of Schleiermacher's psychologism, and only gradually did he conceive of interpretation as focused on the expression of "lived experience" without reference to its author.

Heidegger generalized the definition of hermeneutics still further. The "event" of understanding was primary. Broadening out from the epistemological considerations of his predecessors and probing into ontological questions, hermeneutics became, for him, the process by which being comes to be revealed. In so doing he redefined the very word and gave hermeneutics a new context and a new direction.

Gadamer has moved even farther from the practical considerations of historical hermeneutics. He is not so much interested in formulating correct rules for interpreting and applying texts; instead he seeks to reveal the phenomenon of understanding. "... method is not the way to truth. On the contrary, truth eludes the methodical man. Understanding is not conceived as a subjective process of man over and against an object but the way of being of man himself; hermeneutics is not defined as a general help discipline of the humanities but as a philosophical effort to account for understanding as an ontological--the ontological--process in man."

Thus, the purpose of the general hermeneuticians is to address the broad questions of knowing and being. The issues they concern themselves with are abstract and not easily resolved. In fact, one might suggest that more questions have been raised to date than answered and that more contradictions have been revealed than problems resolved. This does not mean
that the pursuit of general hermeneutics is useless. To the contrary it demonstrates, however, that general hermeneutics has failed to be of significant practical value as yet. Their purpose is to come to a deeper, not necessarily valid or correct, understanding of a text by asking broad epistemological and ontological questions.

On the other hand practical approaches to interpretation have tended to be generic, focusing on the text itself. When Aristotle divided rhetoric into three genre, it was a practical distinction he was making, for each genre had a specific purpose.

(1) The elements of deliberation [counsel] are: (a) exhortation [encouragement], (b) dissuasion; for as advice given in private always has one or the other aspect, so is it with those who discuss matters of state in public—they either exhort or dissuade. (2) The elements of forensic speaking are: (a) accusation, (b) defense, since the parties to a legal action will necessarily be engaged in either one or the other. (3) The elements of an epideictic speech are: (a) praise and (b) blame.160

Many who have concerned themselves with the practical questions of communication find a common ground with Aristotle in their generic conception of discourse.161 These critics seem to be in general agreement as to the purpose of generic hermeneutics. They conceived it as a means of letting the text speak in its own specialized way. It is a window or door through which the interpreter enters a speech, a poem, a legal document, or a sacred text in order to let that particular communication speak in its own context.

Perhaps a review of some of the definitions being offered by students of genre will give insight into its purpose. Hirsch articulates the position.

The fountainhead... is Aristotle, the father of evaluation-through-the-genre. A work shall be judged to the extent that it fulfills the intrinsic imperatives of the kind to which it belongs, and it shall be judged bad to the extent that it fails to fulfill those generic imperatives. Each thing shall be judged not in relation to the state or some other external standard, but in relation to the proper criteria of the subsuming species.162

For Hirsch genre is a kind or species which is identified by its own intrinsic demands. A comedy must be interpreted differently than a tragedy because the two are different in kind answering to different claims. Conley defines genre similarly when he writes that "genre can better be thought of as a congeries of expectations which the audience brings to an occasion."163 In other words, the way to tell a comedy from a tragedy is to determine whether
the audience came to laugh or to cry. The author and the situation are involved also, Jamieson notes, defining genre as that which is "Shaped in response to a rhetor's perception of the expectations of the audience and the demands of the situation."

In their introduction to *Forms and Genre*, Campbell and Jamieson offered a comprehensive definition of genre as follows.

If the recurrence of similar forms establishes a genre, then genre are groups of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics. Or, put differently, in the discourses that form a genre, similar substantive and stylistic strategies are used to encompass situations perceived as similar by the responding rhetors. A genre is a group of acts unified by a constellation of forms that recur in each of its members. These forms, *in isolation*, appear in other discourses. What is distinctive about the acts in genre is the recurrence of the forms *together in constellation*.

... a genre is composed of a constellation of recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic.

Pulling these various strands of definition together we can begin to formulate a purpose for practical hermeneutics. That purpose seems to be the enabling of an interpreter to come to grips with the dynamic of any particular discourse or text in its own right. By taking the three elements suggested by Campbell and Jamieson, substance and style and situation, the interpreter inductively discovers genre. Once the interpreter has been immersed into the text in the above manner, he is better able to conceive of standards by which the discourse ought to be understood and judged. One's probing into the biblical Source and its interrelation with the three other elements of genre will shape the entire hermeneutical process. In fact, that is the hermeneutical process: plunging into the text to discover its dynamic so that particular criteria may be established which will lead to meaning and its verification.

Palmer acknowledges that "there is room for a hermeneutics oriented to method and validity." That is the goal of practical hermeneutics which, in its most recent theorizing, has turned to generic literary criticism to help identify helpful methodology.

Since this distinction exists between the philosophical and practical approaches to hermeneutics, and since the division seems presently unbridgeable, this study will follow the practical course rather than the philosophical. It will seek to demonstrate a methodology for
interpreting a biblical text in a way that will allow the text to speak for itself. This is not an attempt to discredit general hermeneutics, it is merely a choice to be made in light of our practical goal of speaking God's words after Him from the pulpit.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the author's theological and hermeneutical assumptions have been stated. It is assumed that God has spoken, in the Bible without error and, therefore, authoritatively. It is also assumed that textual meaning is understandable and verifiable.

Having reviewed both the history of biblical hermeneutics and several contemporary uses of the term, it was determined that by "hermeneutics" we mean the science and art of understanding the meaning and the significance of the biblical text. For purposes of this study, however, we will limit the scope to the process of discovering the meaning of the text. By "intent" we mean the expressed, in this case recorded or written, meaning as found in the text. By "certainty" we mean the justification of an interpretation beyond reasonable doubt.

We also saw that philosophical and practical hermeneutics are different in scope, method, and purpose. It was determined that the focus of this study would be limited to the practical disciplines of articulating a methodology for coming to an understanding of a particular biblical text.

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6Carl Henry has noted that the theological question precedes the hermeneutical one in "Are We Doomed to Hermeneutical Nihilism?" Vol. IV, pp. 296-315. He writes, "For two generations Western Christianity has echoed with reverberations of the 'hermeneutical problem.' Contemporary theologians formulate this problem in various ways that reflect the disagreements of modern theology and require a prejudicial solution." p. 296.


9Ibid., p. 23.


14Ibid.

15Ibid.

16Ibid.

17See, for example, Zlony Zevit, "The Problem of Al," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (March/April 1985), pp. 58-68. Zevit concludes, "Whether the story of Al is historically accurate, however, is not important. What is important is the meaning of the story. The biblical composer took what was apparently a bard's tale and, assuming it was historically accurate, gave it theological significance."

18John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982). In this devastating critique of the Rogers/McKim proposal, Woodbridge reveals that, "I found the authors' presentation regarding issues of biblical infallibility in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be unreliable. I had also studied the beliefs of nineteenth-century American Evangelicals about biblical authority. Rogers and McKim's commentary on these viewpoints appeared to be deficient as well." p. 15.

20Ibid.

21Ibid., p. 109.


23Recent works in literary criticism that have argued that the text should be allowed to speak for itself include: Leland Ryken, How to Read the Bible as Literature (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1984) and Kenneth R. R. Gros-Louis, ed., Literary Interpretation of Biblical Narratives, Volumes I and II (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974 and 1982).


25See Hans-Georg Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 57, where Gadamer states, "When [Scripture] does begin to speak, however, it does not simply speak its word, always, the same, in lifeless rigidity, but gives ever new answers to the person who questions it and poses ever new questions to him who answers it."

26E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity In Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), critiques three such skeptical approaches: radical historicism, which holds that meaning changes with each and every new context; psychologism, which abandons the distinction between mental acts and meanings, claiming that in general men cannot understand the meanings of one another since they are different from one another; and autonomism, which allows for or even demands a meaning that is totally independent of what the author willed. Each approach is found wanting in that none allows for the possible verification of verbal meaning. See pp. 1-67 and 209-264.


28ibid., p. 107.

29ibid., p. 113.

30ibid., p. 29.

31Hirsch, p. 250.


33Thiseitlon, pp. 51-52.

34Dennis E. Nineham, The Uses and Abuse of the Bible (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 39. Nineham quotes Lionel Trilling, writing, "To suppose that we can think like men of another age is as much of an illusion as to suppose that we can think in a wholly different way. . . . It ought to be for us a real question whether, and in what way, human nature is always the same."

35Hirsch, p. 32.


39 Matthew 13:9-17. Jesus indicates to his disciples that a true understanding of Scripture is possible, but that many never understand because they are not open to its proper interpretation or, as in the case of the Old Testament prophets, did not have enough information to determine the proper interpretation in their time.

40 For a discussion of verification, see Hirsch’s *Validity in Interpretation*, especially pp. 235-44.

41 Hirsch notes that although an identical, that is, absolutely exact perspective is impossible to acquire because of time and space restrictions, the intended or interpreted object can be the same. "To say . . . that men and cultures are often different from one another [that is, in perspective, not identical] is not to deny that a man can understand someone [that is, in meaning, the same] with a perspective very different from his own." *Aims*, p. 41.

Again, "We cannot look at a blackbird thirteen ways and thereby expect to come up with a truer blackbird if our model assumes that each way of looking gives us a different blackbird. The net result would be thirteen blackbirds, and by analogy, thirteen interpretations of the same text." *Aims*, p. 43.

See also, *Validity*, p. 38 where Hirsch argues that "an unlimited number of different intentional acts can intend the same verbal meaning."

42 The position has been defended in essays such as: Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Meanings from God’s Message: Matters for Interpretation," *Christianity Today*, October 5, 1979, pp. 30-33. and "Legitimate Hermeneutics," *Inerrancy*, pp. 117-47.

43 A third hermeneutical concept integral to the process of interpretation, as opposed to its possibility as discussed here, is that of schema.

44 See pp. 66-68.


46 "An unlimited number of different intentional acts can intend the very same intentional object." Since meaning is an intentional object, an unlimited number of different acts can intend the very same verbal meaning. See Hirsch, *Validity*, p. 38.

47 Phenomenologists have a term that exposes this sharability of meaning. It is called eidetic, from the Greek *eidē* meaning "to see" or "idea." The eidetic is not the empirical thing itself. Husserl was convinced that "the phenomenon given to consciousness is the essence of the object experienced empirically." Thus, the unity or commonality or sameness of an experience is that which is sharable, or in phenomenological terms, eidetic. See David Steward and Algis Mickunas, *Exploring Phenomenology* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1974), p. 40.


56 The following discussion is based primarily on Palmer's analysis of the three shades of meaning that "hermeneutics" reveals. His deliberations are found in *Hermeneutics*, pp. 13-32.


58 ibid., p. 16.


60 Palmer, p. 16.

61 Ibid., p. 20. Palmer maintains that theological and literary interpretation must retransform writing into speech. The principles of understanding which enable this transformation constitute a major concern of modern hermeneutical theory.

62 ibid., p. 20.

63 ibid., p. 27.

64 ibid., p. 30.

65 ibid., pp. 33-45.

66 ibid., p. 34.

67 ibid., p. 34.


69 Besides the standard work by Farrar, other excellent historical surveys of hermeneutics include: Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), and Gerhard Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, III*, 1959, pp. 242-64. We will be following Ebeling's basic structure of Pre-Christian,
Primitive Christian, Patristic, Medieval, Reformation and Orthodox, Modern, and Contemporary as we trace the history of biblical hermeneutics.


71 Farrar, p. 97.

72 Ramm, pp. 46-47.

73 Ibid., pp. 47-48. Ramm notes that

"Eventually this system developed into the system . . . wherein letterism and allegorism form a grotesque alliance. By the use of notarkon all sorts of exegetical gymnastics were performed. Each letter of a word was made to stand for another word. By use of gemetria they endowed words with numerical values which became grounds for arbitrary and odd associations of verses. . . . By the use of termura they permuted the letters of a word and so extracted new meanings from old words."

74 Farrar, pp. 105-106.

75 Ramm, p. 48.

76 Farrar, p. 129.

77 Ibid., p. 133.

78 Ramm, p. 28.

79 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

80 Luke 5:33-39. Jesus argues that a new patch (his interpretation of the Old Testament) should not be attached to an old garment (the Pharisees' interpretation of the Old Testament) because the one will tear the other into pieces. So too, new wine must not be placed into old wine skins. Jesus' view of Scripture is at odds with his contemporaries.

81 Mark 7:9-13 gives Jesus' explanation of how the Pharisees set aside the true meaning of the Law for their own meanings.

82 Matthew 5:17-49. Six times in this section Jesus contrasts his interpretation and that of his contemporaries by saying, "You have heard that it was said (It has been said). . . . " But I tell you."  


84 Grant, p. 20.

85 Matthew 26:63-69. When asked under oath if he was the Christ, Jesus answered, "Yes, it is as you say. But I say to you: In the future you will see the Son of Man (a Messianic reference from Daniel) sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming in the clouds of heaven." In this reply, which interprets literally the Messianic passages of the Old Testament, Jesus' enemies find the evidence they need to condemn Him to death.

86 Grant, p. 23.
87I Corinthians 11:25 and 15:3-8.

88See Grant, pp. 16-42.

89Berkhof, p. 20, where Berkhof quotes Origen as saying, "The fundamental principle of this work is, that the meaning of the Holy Spirit is always simple and clear and worthy of God. All that seems dark and immoral and unbecoming in the Bible simply serves as an incentive to transcend or pass beyond the literal sense."

90Ramm, p. 29.

91Grant, p. 81.

92Ibid., p. 80.

93Ibid., p. 85.

94Berkhof, p. 20.

95Ramm, p. 29-30. These weaknesses include: a lack of genuine historical sensitivity, an immature understanding of the progress of revelation, an over emphasis on parables, enigmas, and riddles even when they did not exist, a confusion of the allegorical and the typical, a reading of Greek philosophy into the Old Testament, and a highly subjective approach that resulted in dogmatism.

96Grant, p. 90.

97Ramm, p. 49.

98Ibid., p. 50.

99Grant, pp. 95-97.

100Berkhof, p. 21.

101Ramm, p. 49.

102Grant, p. 105.

103Ibid., p. 114.

104Ibid., p. 112.

105Berkhof, p. 22.

106Grant, p. 116.

107Berkhof, p. 23.

108Ramm, p. 41.

109Ramm, p. 43.
Grant, p. 119. Grant relates the following sixteenth century verse which illustrates the several senses of the allegorical interpretation:

"The letter shows us what God our father did;  
The allegory shows us where our faith is hid;  
The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life;  
The analogy shows us where we end our strife."

"The author of holy scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify his meaning, not by words only (as man also can do) but by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it."

This was true, of course, only, or mainly, in the Protestant churches, for the Roman Catholic Church was still dictating the interpretations of its preachers.

Grant, p. 133, argues that "John Calvin ... vigorously maintains an 'objective' type of interpretation. ... In the Institutes of the Christian Religion Calvin sets forth his theology of exegesis ... he rejects the use of allegorization in dogmatic theology." Calvin has been identified as the first scientific interpreter in the history of the Christian Church. Although he recognized the necessity of the spiritually prepared and ready heart, he also acknowledged the importance of a more objective and intellectual method of interpretation.
Ramm overviews these on pages 64-69. The following paragraph is a summary of his discussion.

Ramm, p. 64.

Grant, p. 145. Hobbes articulated the theory so widely accepted today which holds that the Bible is not revelation, but merely a witness to revelation.

Ibid., p. 148.

The following pages will continue to examine the modern uses of the term "hermeneutics" after our review of the history of the first of these usages; biblical hermeneutics.

See also the section near the end of this chapter on the comparison between philosophical and practical hermeneutics.

Palmer, p. 39.

Ibid., p. 40.

Ibid.

Thiselton, p. 4.

Palmer, p. 41.

Ibid., p. 42.

Ibid., pp. 42-43.

Ibid., p. 43.

Ibid., p. 44.


Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, Vol. IV, pp. 311-12.

Ramm, p. 1.

See pp. 18-19.

Mickelsen, p. 5.

Hirsch, Validity, p. 46.


Ibid., p. 230.

For Geisler's conclusion, see pp. 229-31.
81

152 Sproul quotes B. B. Warfield and Johannes Quenstedt on the probability of interpreting Scripture, p. 347.
153 Kenneth Burke has written that "the basic function of rhetoric [is the] use of words . . . to form attitudes or to induce actions. . . ." Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 41. Statements like this affirm that communicators assume that their messages are probably able to be interpreted. Other rhetoricians, like George Campbell in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, and Reid in *Inquiry Into The Human Mind*, support the concept of common sense or moral certainty.
156 Palmer, p. 38.
158 Palmer, p. 121.
159 Ibid., p. 163.
160 Aristotle, p. 17.
161 Hirsch has based his entire argument on, not a general hermeneutic as he claims, but rather on a generic hermeneutic. In *Validity*, chapter 3 "The Concept of Genre" is given more discussion than any other. He states his position on page 121, "The degree to which unique meanings are bound to unique expressions depends . . . on the intrinsic genre of a text--the particular norms and conventions under which it was composed."
In the field of rhetoric Campbell and Jamieson, *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action* (Falls Church, VA: The Speech Communication Association, 1978); Black, "A Note on Theory and Practice in Rhetorical Criticism," *The Western Journal of Speech Communication*, (Fall, 1980); Fisher, "Genre: Concepts and Applications in Rhetorical Criticism," *WSSC* (Fall, 1980); and Conley, "Ancient Rhetoric and Modern Genre Criticism," *Communication Quarterly* (Fall, 1979), among others have pursued the applicability of the generic approach.
163 Conley, p. 47.
Black argues for this emic approach in "A Note on Theory and Practice in Rhetorical Criticism."

Palmer, p. 66.

See Ryken and Gros-Louis.


"This dicotomy [that between the 'integrity of texts and the intelligibility of their meaning, and the opposed effort to unmask the pretensions hidden behind so-called objectivity'] is too sharp to allow us to rest content with a mere classification of the two forms of interpretation, either as simply interpreting statements following the intentions of the author or as revealing the meaningfulness of statements in a completely unexpected sense and against the meaning of the author. I see no way of reconciling the two."
CHAPTER III

THE HERMENEUTICAL MODEL

In this third chapter the practical model of hermeneutics upon which this study focuses will be presented. Before the paradigm is laid out, however, a few preliminary matters warrant consideration. These include the biblical example of a practical reasoning approach to the understanding of Scripture, the necessary distinction between the author's stated meaning and its significance to subsequent readers, the limits of the hermeneutical circle which demand a more objective basis of textual analysis, and finally, the connotations of the legal model of reasoning.

The Biblical Example

There are at least two biblical exemplars of the use of rhetorical argumentation by the preachers of Scripture. Under the leadership of Ezra, the Old Testament scribe, the Levites, "explained the law to the people . . . and they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading."¹

Three terms within these two verses demonstrate the praxis of interpretation by means of a particular selection from possible alternatives. The Hebrew וֹ הַ עַד יִהְיֶה נָאָה הַדָּבָר of Nehemiah 8:7 carries the meaning "to discern, to become separated, to be distinct," and therefore, "to make understandable."² It is apparent that the Levite process of instruction included a choice of translation, that is, a particular selection from among alternative interpretations. A similar term יָ הָ עַד in verse eight indicates the making of a distinction by means of "spreading out" or "separating."³ Also, the word לָ עַד in verse eight carries the force of giving "prudence" or "insight."⁴ Although not explicitly depicted by the text, it is not unrealistic to picture the Levites arguing, at least intrapersonally, for a specific reading of the Law as opposed to the possible alternatives. This
concept of choice making, which could be identified with reasonableness or reasoning, appears often among other Old Testament prophets. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul offers a vivid portrait of rhetorical argumentation. His preaching rests on the necessary foundation of practical persuasion. Paul encouraged his audience to test his reasoning against the Scripture. Luke records that Paul "... was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade ..." (Acts 18:4); that he "... entered the synagogue and continued speaking out... reasoning and persuading..." (Acts 19:8). The result was that "... some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe." (Acts 28:24). Later, the Apostle reminded young Timothy that he should "continue in the things [he had] learned and become convinced of." (II Timothy 3:14).

At least two implications may be drawn from the biblical commentators' practices of reasoning. First, contemporary preachers especially are compelled to use argumentation rather than revelation in making their proclamations. Whereas the prophet of biblical days received direct communication from the Lord, the evangelical preacher of today cannot claim revelatory interchange with God. Roy Zuck distinguishes between revelation (the content of the divine message) and inspiration (the means of delivering the message, including the concepts of inerrancy and infallibility). Hence, "The role of the [Holy] Spirit in interpreting the Bible does not mean that one's interpretations are infallible. Inerrancy and hence infallibility are characteristics of the Bible's original manuscripts, but not of the Bible's Interpreters." As a result, the biblical interpreter must recognize that the "leading of the Holy Spirit [for the purpose of interpretation or illumination] will never be as crystal clear as the original inspiration of the Scriptures. This would be a confusion of inspiration and illumination... No man can say he has had infallible illumination from the Holy Spirit." This recognition has led Walter Kaiser to the conclusion that whereas revelation and inspiration guarantee the "single meaning" as recorded in the text, illumination functions, not in the realm of coming to grips with the meaning of the text, but in the principilizing, particularizing, and personalizing. The work of discovering the meaning of
the Scriptures, therefore, must be accomplished by means of common sense logic, or rhetorical argumentation. The Prophet Ezra and the Apostle Paul exemplified this practical reasoning role in their teaching and preaching.

A second implication is related to the first. Paul, as must therefore the present day proclamer who follows his biblical example, employed an argumentational model of preaching not only because revelation was coming to a close, but also because mystical approaches to understanding the Scriptures had always been discouraged. Ramm warns against any "Protestant Pietism" which would result, not in an understanding of the single meaning of the text, but rather a plurality of meanings. Zuck, too, contends for a rational and reasonable approach to hermeneutics.

The work of the Spirit in interpretation does not mean that He gives some interpreters a mental acuity for seeing truths under the surface that are not evident to any other dedicated Bible students. The place of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible means that He does not normally give sudden intuitive flashes of insight into the meaning of Scripture. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in Bible interpretation does not mean interpreters can ignore common sense and logic.

Biblical example, as well as biblical theology, promotes an approach to interpretation which is essentially rhetorical. The model for this study, therefore, will reflect a similar commitment to logic and common sense.

The Distinction Between Meaning and Significance

A second preliminary concern is that of distinguishing between the meaning and the significance of the text. Although it could be assumed that our model would function as effectively in the discovery of applications of the text, this study will focus on the determination of the meaning of the text. When the two are confused, the interpretation of the meaning is placed in jeopardy. It would not be untenable to view the two steps of hermeneutics as consisting first of The Discovery of Meaning and second of The Determination of Its Significance. The following distinctions may then be made clear.
Meaning focuses on . . .

1. Understanding.
Understanding is the process by which one comes to perceive and construct the author's verbal meaning. One submits himself to the author's "will" in order to understand his meaning.

Message is that which is represented by the text; it is what the author had in mind by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the sign represents. It is the result of understanding.

The issue is one of determining fact; "What did he say/mean?"

4. Re-cognition.
Re-cognition is the means by which one comes to understand what the author has cognized.

5. What is In the Author.
The relationship sought here is that between the sign sequence and the author's meaning which exists within his consciousness as expressed on the page . . . consciousness of something.

The original meaning of the author is a unity; "There is but one meaning/interpretation." That meaning is stable in that it never changes, not even for the author himself, though it may be repudiated.

Significance focuses on . . .

Judging or critiquing is the process by which one comes to perceive how the author's meaning fits into his world and one's own. One acts independently of the author's will to judge the significance of his meaning.

2. Application.
Application names a relationship between the meaning of the author and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or anything imaginable. It is the result of judging.

3. Value/Implication.
The issue is one of determining worth; "What difference does it make?"

4. Re-determination.
Re-determination is the means by which one comes to judge the relationship between what the author cognized and what one sees as its value to any new or different context.

5. What is In Me.
The relationship in this case is that between the author's meaning, which exists within his consciousness as expressed on the page, and myself, outside of the author and his meaning.

The significance of a meaning may change from place to place, time to time, relationship to relationship; "There are many applications." While meaning is determined, significance may fluctuate.

Meaning, therefore, is the understanding of the author's message, as expressed in the written text, through a recognition of stable knowledge. Significance, in contrast, is the judging of
the personal/contextual application of an author's meaning through a redetermination of its changing value. Thus, the two-fold goal of the biblical hermeneuticist is 1) to demonstrate the (single) message (discover the meaning), and then, 2) to demonstrate the (many) limits/limitlessnesses of the context(s) to which that meaning has significance. A valid determination of significance is dependent upon the valid discovery of meaning.18

It is incumbent that the preacher validate both his discovery of the meaning of the text, and his determination of the significance of that meaning. Although it is possible that the model proposed in this study may be of some benefit in evaluating the cogency of one's applications, the present scope will be limited to the consideration of the determination and validation of meaning only.

**Limits of The Hermeneutical Circle**

One of the stress points of hermeneutics has been the perpetual enigma of the hermeneutical circle.19 This predominant model for validating interpretation depends upon a circular, if not subjective, method of testing the whole meaning against the parts of meaning and vice versa. Ramm describes the process.

We can understand a particular passage only if we know what the whole Scripture teaches; but we can only know what the whole Scripture teaches by knowing the meaning of its parts. And so all theological interpretation of Scripture is a rotation or "spiraling" from part to whole, and whole to part.20

The ease with which an interpreter may be trapped in and by this "vicious" circle has not gone unnoticed. "Every interpreter labors under the handicap of an inevitable circularity: all his internal evidence tends to support his hypothesis because much of it was constituted by his hypothesis."21 Once the Interpreter has proposed his hypothesis, his whole, the parts tend naturally to fall into place for him. The result is a self-confirming, subjective, interpretation. No matter where the circle is entered, be it whole or part, the exegete has set into motion the elements which will inevitably result in a conclusion which is irrefutable . . . given the original hypothesis. As a result, the hermeneutical circle falls short of encouraging a rational or reasoned
examination of the entire argument in detail. Since once the interpreter has grasped a concept of the whole, one which will necessitate no revision unless the parts do not fit, the parts may easily be made to fit, for typically, no apparent need exists to revise the hypothetical construal of the whole.

Norman L. Geisler attempts to resolve this "viciousness" by suggesting that the relationship of the parts to the whole is qualitatively different than the relationship of the whole to the parts. He argues that, "the whole is related to the parts by way of determination, but the parts merely make a contribution to the whole . . . the whole gives structure to the parts, whereas the parts provide the stuff for that form . . . the parts are the material cause but the whole is the formal cause of the overall meaning."22

Rather than solving the problem of the hermeneutical circle, however, Geisler merely articulates it. If the whole determines the parts, how can the exegete test his conception of the whole? This is an essential requirement for anyone wishing to evaluate objectively more than one interpretation at a time. A more accurate model is necessary in order to work toward the justification of a valid, that is more probable, statement of meaning. Although the biblical preacher realizes that his interpretations of the text can never carry the weight of formal or scientific certainty, he does strive toward a method of exegesis that enables him to evaluate several arguments that are juxtaposed, rather than examining one tightly held hypothesis, and thus to reject and to modify in order to articulate the most reasonable, the most morally certain interpretation possible. What is needed is a model that will accommodate multiple hypotheses at the same time, something the hermeneutical circle fails to offer. Noting that "the hermeneutic circle . . . has now been shown to be an inadequate model for what actually happens in the interpretation of speech,"23 E. D. Hirsch calls for a model which "is conceived of as a validating, self-correcting process - an active positing of corrigible schemata which we test and modify in the very process of coming to understand an utterance."24 The goal, therefore, is not to discover the meaning of the text absolutely, for as we have said there is no way of verifying an absolutistic
interpretation, but to determine, by means of evaluating and modifying all relevant arguments, the most probable meaning. It is the goal of this study to propose a model of interpretation which will satisfy these necessary demands.

The Legal Model

Because of the similarities between the interpretation of the Constitution and the Scriptures, many students of practical hermeneutics have suggested that the biblical exegete look to the judicial model as a starting point in constructing a model for biblical hermeneutics. One advantage in looking to the judicial model is that it is solidly based on reasonableness, the type of validity for which the biblical interpreter is seeking. The legal model not only provides for the reasonable evaluation of justificatory proofs, it also provides for a rational examination of the arguments. Chaim Perelman distinguishes between the rational and the reasonable as it relates to law, and as it would apply to scriptural interpretation.

The rational in law corresponds to adherence to an immutable divine standard, or to the spirit of the system, to logic and coherence, to conformity with precedents, to purposefulness; whereas the reasonable, on the other hand, characterizes the decision itself, the fact that it is acceptable or not by public opinion, that its consequences are socially useful or harmful, that it is felt to be equitable or biased.

This distinction not only highlights the justificatory advantages of the legal model as applied to biblical hermeneutics, but also calls attention to a crucial difference between contemporary methods of judicial reasoning and evangelical biblical hermeneutics. Whereas contemporary perspectives on law characterize it as relative, in the sense that "new" law is made/created based on the precedents of the past and the fluctuating values of the present, evangelical interpreters characterize Biblical Law as stable, in the sense that universal principles are discovered/clarified based on the meaning of the text as expressed in the language of the text. Only the applications of these principles are relative. These dissimilarities account for much of the conflict that exists in biblical hermeneutics today. The crux of the issue revolves not so much around the methodology of validation as it does around the authority of the text itself.
Legal Perspectives on Textual Authority

In an article relating the hermeneutics of jurisprudence and theology, Linell E. Cady identifies three approaches to legal reasoning which are mirrored in biblical interpretation. Conventionalism turns back to the law itself in order to determine the proper interpretation of the law. The judge looks to the individuals or institutions authorized to generate law, seeking their original intent. In order to determine that intent, he will seek the precedents which have clarified the law in the past. Only when there are no controlling precedents will the judge enjoy the freedom of interpreting the law on the basis of his own arguments. Thus, conventionalism tends to limit meaning to the intent of the law as it has been identified in the past. When this perspective is applied to biblical hermeneutics, Cady concludes that, "Insofar as there is no experience of distortion within a tradition, this approach construes theology as a translation process."  

Naturalism looks both to the past, in the text and the precedents, and also to the present political order. The judge must weigh the authority of the text with or against the prevailing views of the culture. What the populous values at any moment in time demands at least as much attention and ought to be granted as much influence as the text. "The naturalist model of hermeneutics may be viewed as that type which continues to view the past as disclosive of truth but which refuses uncritically to capitulate to it." Whereas conventionalism slants toward the absolutistic, naturalism moves down the continuum toward relativism. The changing sentiments of society carry at least as much authority as the original intent of the law itself.

Instrumentalism looks to the present and future rather than the past. "[This] last level, constituting the most radical crisis, is experienced when no dimension of the tradition is considered retrievable, a judgment which necessitates the move to alternate traditions or to the creation of totally new ones." It has an eye on justice as seen through the eyes of society. It strives to make law which will effectively confront the issues of the times. Instrumentalism does not give credence to the past, be it the law as written or the precedents of other courts, because it views the law as relative, changing according to the mores of the culture.
Whereas Ronald Dworkin applies the conventionalism - naturalism - instrumentalism continuum to the interpretation of legal decisions particularly, Cady has carried the concept over into the realm of biblical interpretation. While arguing for a naturalistic methodology, Cady acknowledges that "methodological divergences are rooted in conflicting assessments of the capacity of the resources of their inherited symbolic world to orient life adequately." Cady cannot go as far as the instrumentalist who rejects the authority of the past and gives adherence to it only to avoid societal chaos. Conventionalism is also rejected as being merely a "translation" in which the exegete has "mindlessly relinquished his or her critical judgment" to the text. Naturalism allows both the past text and the present culture to have significant influence in the decision making processes of the theologian.

But Cady recognizes that the different theories represent "divergent theories of revelation." Therefore, one cannot dismiss any of the three methodologies without first determining the perspective of the interpreter. Those "judges" who reject any notion of the authority of revelation will not be bound by the constraints of the text or the past. Those who give little or some weight to the text will seek a middle ground between the text and the contemporary audience. If, however, the interpreter holds to the absolute authority of the text, as evangelicals do, then the legal conventionalist methodology may prove an acceptable parallel for biblical hermeneutics. In fact, for those who acknowledge the absolute authority of the text and carefully distinguish between meaning and significance, the conventionalist approach becomes extremely germane. It is this approach to universally grounded first principles which lead to moral obligation that James L. Golden identified in the rhetorical theory of Plato who upheld the validity of absolutism in the work of the judge.

... Plato carefully demonstrates the need for a communicator to display courage in articulating his arguments and convictions. This is especially true of the judge who, in fulfilling the role of rhetor, is ready to pronounce a verdict. The decision he is to announce and justify must be derived from first principles and be corroborated by reasonable explanations, and, consequently, not be influenced by the biases of the audience.
Evangelical Perspectives On Textual Authority

Evangelical biblicalists readily buy into Dworkin's descriptive perspective on the Scriptures. The descriptive interpreter "attempts to describe some pure objective or natural law, which exists in virtue of objective moral truth rather than historical decision . . . what he believes is objectively required by the principles of an Ideal political morality." Evangelicals would have little trouble accepting the relativism of man-made legal systems. Most could agree with Perelman that, "Unlike natural law, we do not presuppose today that the legal rules are universal and immutable." The issue for the evangelical is not whether there are instances in which law is relative, based not only on precedent but also on the contemporary values of a society. The issue is whether or not there is a binding, absolutistic, universally authoritative Law which does not and cannot change over time and among cultures. The philosopher, Richard Weaver, argues for such as Law.

That there is a world of ought, that the apparent does not exhaust the real - these are so essential to the very conception of improvement that it should be superfluous to mention them. The opening made by our wedge [between the material and the transcendental] is simply a denial that whatever is, is right, which takes the form of an insistence upon the rightness of right. Upon this rock of metaphysical right we shall build our house. That the thing is not true and the act is not just unless these conform to a conceptual ideal - if we can make this plain, again, utilitarianism and pragmatism will have been defeated.

Whereas Weaver has difficulty in identifying the source of the "Right" by which we may judge ideas and actions, the evangelical holds to a revelational concept of "Rightness" . . . God has spoken in absolute truth, with binding authority. Therefore we must interpret so as to understand the "Right" by which all things may be judged. Those who wish to contribute to the evangelical perspective on interpretation must become knowledgable of its presuppositions regarding Scripture. James I. Packer articulated the evangelical perception of both Scripture and interpretation when he summarized the findings of the 1982 Summit Conference on Hermeneutics, sponsored by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy.

To have formulated the biblical concept of Scripture as authoritative revelation in writing, the God-given rule of faith and life, will be of no profit where the message of Scripture is not rightly grasped and applied. So it is of vital importance to detect and dismiss defective ways of
interpreting what is written and to replace them with faithful interpretation of God’s infallible Word.52

One must be careful to make a clear distinction between the conception which evangelicals have regarding the record of Scripture on the one hand and the interpretation of the interpreter on the other. Although they do not see the meaning of the Bible as relative, they would acknowledge that the interpretation of the biblical exegete is fallible as well as relative. Whereas the inspired words of the Scriptures record objective truth and may be trusted as absolutes, the act of interpretation is corruptible and its conclusions probabilistic. For this reason, the evangelical biblicist approaches the Text from a conventionalist perspective, while at the same time, seeking a method of interpretation which allows for the most reasonable interpretation possible. The goal is to discover “new” knowledge about the unchanging Text, to gain a fresh insight into the meaning of the Text. The diligent study of the exegete will not change the eternal truth as revealed in the Scripture, rather it will enable the interpreter to come to a better understanding of that truth than has ever been known in the past.53

So then, what kind of model is the evangelical preacher seeking to guide his hermeneutical inquiry into the absolute truth of Scripture? He is seeking a model that will enable him to examine the text using the full capacity of his mental ability, weighing all the suggested possible interpretations, and coming to a rational and reasonable conclusion about the probable meaning of the passage. Where may one discover a presently functioning model of interpretation which is easily adaptable to the biblical requirements? I am suggesting that the legal model, in the conventionalist mode, suggests a workable paradigm for biblical interpreters. This is so because the legal model provides not a formal validity as would be required in a mathematical study, but rather an informal validity, one based in rhetorical strategies which results not in formally certain conclusions, but rather morally compelling ones.54

The goal of both the legal and the biblical model of hermeneutics is a rational and well reasoned discovery of meaning. Judges “engage in all of the three principal rhetorical activities; no case is adequately adjudicated without careful deliberation, effective persuasion, and
appropriate justification" which "offers a complete model of argumentation." Since the goal of both the judge and the preacher is to declare the truth or The Truth, neither is seeking the truth/Truth by mere consensus, but "according to adversary procedures." Both must make a choice between competing possibilities. Although they do not seek conclusions that will satisfy the values of the audience per se, they do submit arguments which attempt to justify their decision in favor of one set of claims and against all others. Agreement is sought from the audience only after the preliminary decision has been made rather than during the decision making. Of course this decision may always be modified in light of new evidence. The judge or the preacher, therefore, hands down a decision regarding the meaning of the law/Law, which decision is held tentatively. It may be modified or even directly countermanded in light of new evidence, though, in the meantime, the decision stands, and stands as obligatory. "Judicial opinions which detail the reasoning behind judicial decisions provide essential information to the citizenry regarding likely consequences of their behavior." The similarities recommend that the judicial model is suggestive for biblical interpreters.

A Rhetorical Model for Biblical Hermeneutics

James L. Golden and Josina M. Makau have exposed the rhetorical model of hermeneutics as employed by the Supreme Court of the United States. They determined that the Justices use a basic four-step process in identifying and pronouncing their judgments.

We have found consistent adherence to the following pattern of reasoning: (1) examination of the facts in light of the legal statutes, rules, and precedents; (2) analysis of the attitudes, beliefs, values, and needs of the composite audience; (3) invention of arguments, including a critical assessment of their strength or relevance; and (4) justification of reasons utilized in rendering the decision.

As a result of these carefully followed steps, the public can expect that the opinions of the Court will be "predictable, internally consistent, and, above all, reasonable. A Court which violates these fundamental expectations risks loss of its authority." These steps and results set a standard of interpretation which, this writer proposes, serves as a helpful starting point for expressing a model of interpretation for those handling the text of Scripture.
The rhetorical model for biblical hermeneutics may be conceived of as a cyclical paradigm which includes the following four stages: (1) Identification, in which the known existing interpretations of the text are exposed; (2) Evaluation, in which these interpretations are critiqued; (3) Formulation, in which the valid, that is the most probable/morally obliging interpretation, is assembled; and (4) Dissemination, in which the valid interpretation is communicated to the audience through a justificatory statement. The model is cyclical, if not helical, in that the emerging "valid" interpretation immediately becomes the grist for the next interpreter's investigation. The process may be visualized as follows.

![Diagram of the rhetorical model for biblical hermeneutics]

Identification

The first stage of the hermeneutical model, that of Identification, consists of two procedures. The first is that of discovering the divergent interpretations which have been disseminated up to the present point in time. The second consists of disclosing the essential argumentation of each competing proposal.

**Discovery of Interpretations**

In his chapter entitled "Effective Decisions," Peter F. Drucker reminds the decision maker that options are essential in the search for new ideas.

In his chapter entitled "Effective Decisions," Peter F. Drucker reminds the decision maker that options are essential in the search for new ideas.
Whenever one has to judge, one must have alternatives among which one can choose. A judgment in which one can only say "yes" or "no" is no judgment at all. Only if there are alternatives can one hope to get insight into what is truly at stake ... decisions of the kind the executive has to make are not made well by acclamation. They are made well only if based on the clash of conflicting views, the dialogue between different points of view, the choice between different judgments ... he uses conflict of opinion as his tool to make sure all major aspects of an important matter are looked at carefully.

Drucker acknowledges that the practice of entertaining disparate opinions was introduced into the decision making process at least as early as Plato. In the Phaedrus Plato "is concerned first with understanding " based on a consideration of every conceivable point of view. It is only after the multiple positions have been examined on their own terms that the interpreter may fairly judge the "rightness" or "wrongness" of each argument, and perhaps conceive of a "better" perspective himself.

This is what Grant had in mind when he addressed the question of whether or not biblical interpretation is scientific. He concluded that the process "is scientific in the sense that it involves analysis before and along with the synthesis toward which it aims." Since the history of biblical interpretation, especially during the past two hundred years, has produced such a multiplicity of interpretational hypotheses, it would be unlikely that the mere analysis of a particular passage would generate a startlingly new and true explanation. It is much more plausible that an examination of the text in conjunction with a consideration of its existing explanations would produce a line of argument supporting a more accurate, though modified exegesis. Having identified as many variant interpretations as possible, the exegete "could proceed to regard these views either as complementary or as mutually exclusive. If they are mutually exclusive, only one of them represents the view of [the text]."

The work of the interpreter, therefore, parallels the work of anyone seeking to understand a phenomenon. He first gathers as much information as possible about the object, and only then begins the activity of comparing and contrasting in order to determine its meaning. Children come to understanding in this way, according to John Holt, who, having studied their learning processes, came to the conclusion that children are much less likely to make decisions based
on too little information than are adults, and that children are much more inclined to examine new evidence even if it may necessitate a revision in their conception of a particular object or event. With too little insight, one runs the risk of coming to conclusions which are inaccurate and therefore useless. Holt contrasts the approach of an adult "scientist" discovering the world with that of a child discovering the cello.

A trained scientist wants to cut all irrelevant data out of his experiment. He is asking nature a question, and he wants to cut down the noise, the static, the random information, to a minimum, so that he can hear the answer. But the child doesn't work that way. He is used to getting his answers out of the noise . . . . His way of attacking the cello problem is to produce the maximum amount of data possible . . . . Then, as he goes along, he begins to notice regularities and patterns. He begins to ask questions - that is, to make deliberate experiments. But it is vital to note that until he has a great deal of data, (my italics) he has no idea what questions to ask, or what questions there are to be asked.66

The primary goal of the biblical interpreter, therefore, is to discover the possibilities69 in order to "encounter them on their own terms."70 The ingathering of competing interpretations enables the exegete to examine each option in its own context and from its particular point of view. The initial goal is not refutation, but rather understanding. Therefore, the first step in the hermeneutical process, the discovery step, may be pictured as following:

![Diagram of interpreter with options]

If the interpretation, for example, centered around the celebration of the Lord's Supper as it relates to Christ's words, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me . . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you," (Luke 22:19-20), at least four Christian perspectives would be sought out. (1) The Roman Catholic view, commonly identified as transubstantiation, holds that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are miraculously transformed
into the literal body and blood of Christ, thus providing a means of grace to salvation for those who partake. (2) The Lutheran view, known as consubstantiation, teaches that, although the elements do not actually change, the bread and wine take on the real presence of Christ "in, with, and under" the elements, thereby providing a means of grace. (3) The Reformed view maintains that, while the elements do constitute a means of grace through the partaking of them, the presence of Christ is a spiritual reality rather than a literal one. (4) The Zwinglian or memorial view rejects the concept that the partaking of the elements is a means of grace encouraging salvation. The bread and wine do not change, there is no presence of Christ in a real or even spiritual sense. The Lord’s Table is primarily an act of commemorating the death of Christ.71

The various constructions of the Lord’s Supper must be identified and gathered into the interpreter’s sphere of consideration. In this particular case, the preliminary task of the exegete would consist of the following procedure.

The biblical interpreter discovers, from the examination of commentaries, periodicals, sermons, theological dictionaries, reference guides and indexes, computer searches, bibliographies, card catalogs and other publications,72 as well as dialogue with other interpreters, what options exist in regard to the particular text or concept he is addressing. These options are gathered into the interpreter’s realm of awareness for future consideration. The development and use of effective research skills are the basic requirements for this step of the hermeneutical
process. The expositor must learn how to discover as many interpretational possibilities as he can.\textsuperscript{73}

**Disclosure of Arguments**

The second procedure of the Identification stage of the Hermeneutical Model is that of disclosing the essential argumentation of each competing interpretation. Even as Supreme Court Justices first gather arguments from the facts and interpretations presented by the litigants participating in a case as well as from their own research and then express the essential arguments supporting each option,\textsuperscript{74} so the critic of biblical interpretations will first discover the disparate possibilities and then disclose the rhetoric which undergirds each contention. The purpose, at this point, is not to create arguments, but rather to expose them; not to judge the significance of the various arguments, but rather to distinguish their meanings.

In order to later evaluate the suggested meanings of the text, the biblical preacher must first understand these possible interpretations. And if Steven Toulmin and his disciples are correct, the model he has proposed in his *The Uses of Argument*\textsuperscript{75} and more recently *An Introduction to Reasoning*\textsuperscript{76} may prove to be one tool of value to the exegetical critic. Wayne E. Brockriede and Douglas Ehninger introduced the concept of argument as proposed by Toulmin to American students in 1960.\textsuperscript{77} Since that time, theoreticians have based their approach to Χρησις on the Toulmin model,\textsuperscript{78} and critics have approached discourse from a Toulminian point of view.\textsuperscript{79} The model has been accepted as a useful critical tool for gaining insight into all kinds of discourse. Toulmin maintains that his model of argument provides a means of understanding practical reasoning processes,\textsuperscript{80} processes which the biblical preacher uses at the exegetical stage of sermon preparation.

In the following pages, an explanation of Toulmin's reasons for developing his model of argument and an illustration of the model itself are offered. This discussion would be more abbreviated for students of rhetoric, but is offered here for the sake of biblical expositors and preachers who are not aware of *The Uses of Argument* or *An Introduction to Reasoning*. 
The Toulmin Model

In his earlier volume, Toulmin introduced a new model of argument to the fields of logic and rhetoric. The author was motivated by a personal dissatisfaction with the traditional persuasion vehicle of formal logic, the syllogism. "The contrast between the standards and values of practical reasoning (developed with an eye to what I call 'substantial' considerations) and the abstract and formal criteria relied on in mathematical logic and much of twentieth century epistemology,"\(^8\) had been noted by Toulmin. Thus, he wanted to speak in regard to

... problems about logic ... problems which arise with special force not within the science of logic, but only when one withdraws oneself for a moment from the technical refinements of the subject, and inquires what bearing the science and its discoveries have on anything outside itself - how they apply in practice, and what connections they have with the canons and methods we use when, in everyday life, we actually assess the soundness, strength and conclusiveness of arguments.\(^8\)

As has been more recently noted, "The practice of providing reasons for what we do, or think, or tell others we believe is built firmly into our accepted patterns of behavior."\(^8\)

Toulmin does not appear to condemn all formal logic per se. His criticism has been aimed at those who seem to be so captivated by the syntactical relations of logic, that is the structural relations between premise and conclusion, that they are seemingly unaware that, in some cases, validity rests with the audience or interpreter, being not a formal true/false validity but a probable validity. According to Toulmin, "Logicians allowed themselves to be excessively impressed by the unique character of the analytic syllogism; it is not only analytic, but also formally valid, warrant-using, unequivocal in its consequences, and expressed in terms of 'logical words.'\(^8\) These logicians, he has claimed, in concentrating on syllogistic arguments and particularly analytic syllogisms,

were led to neglect the differences between four or five crucial distinctions. ...(1) The distinction between necessary arguments and probable arguments, (2) The distinction between arguments which are formally valid and those which cannot hope to be formally valid, (3) The distinction between those arguments, including ordinary syllogisms, in which a warrant is relied on whose adequacy and applicability have previously been established, and those arguments which are themselves intended to establish the adequacy of a warrant, (4) The distinction between arguments expressed in terms of "logical Connectives" or qualifiers and those not so expressed, and (5) The fundamental distinction between analytic arguments and substantive ones.\(^8\)
Therefore, the following conclusion is drawn. "So far as formal logicians claim to say anything of relevance to arguments of other than analytic sorts, judgment must therefore be pronounced against them: for the study of other types of fresh categories are needed."^88

Toulmin has gained the attention of rhetoricians, especially those concerned with rhetoric as a way of knowing,^87 because of his willingness to speak out concerning these supposed weaknesses of formal logic. He has demonstrated an effort to present arguments as epistemic by analyzing and employing a form of argument which, heasserts, leads to greater understanding or more valid interpretation.

In order to present a model of argument that is more practical than formal logic, Toulmin has borrowed from jurisprudence.^88 His goal has been to help critics better understand and better be able to use and judge what is a good or sound argument. "A sound argument, a well-grounded, or firmly-backed claim, is one which will stand up to criticism, one for which a case can be presented coming up to the standard required if it is to deserve a favorable verdict."^89

Thus, in the realm of interpretation, for example,

... we should take the novel idea and subject it to critical tests. Reasoning ... does not create ideas and does not answer once and for all whether those ideas are good or bad, true or false, rather, the task of reasoning in each situation is to enable the questioner to make the best decision about a particular issue, in particular circumstances, within a particular forum and enterprise.90

A further goal has been to demonstrate a model which would "appeal to one and the same set of standards, in all different kinds of cases which we have occasion to consider."91

Toulmin has sought to clarify that

The science of logic has throughout its history tended to develop in a direction leading it away from these issues, away from the practical question about the manner in which we have occasion to handle and criticize arguments in different fields, and towards a condition of complete autonomy, in which logic becomes a theoretical study of its own, as free from all immediate practical concerns as in some branch of pure mathematics.92

In hopes of offering a broader employment of argument and a greater understanding of its function, Toulmin has suggested that his model affords these benefits. To Toulmin, the formal logic model fails "to draw in one's logical theorizing all the distinctions which the demands of
logical practice require. The traditional major premise, minor premise, and so conclusion is, indeed, a very simple model. While Toulmin often sees simplicity as having merit, he believes that this insistence of simplicity has been bought at too high a price. Also, the traditional model lacks clarity and, thus, a "crucial difference in practical function can in this way [through the use of syllogism] pass unmarked and unnoticed." In contrast, "Our own more complex pattern of analysis . . . avoids this defect. It leaves no room for ambiguity; entirely separate places are left in the pattern for a warrant and for the backing upon which its authority depends."

As we approach Toulmin's model, we must be aware that the goal of his model is to "bring forward in support of assertions . . . justificatory arguments." These arguments should be laid out in such a way as to "characterize the stages into which a justificatory argument naturally falls." Toulmin is careful to point out that this way of looking at argument perceives argument as an organism. Each part of the argument is a vital organ which fulfills a different and necessary function in sustaining the life of the argument.

We now turn to an examination of these various elements. There are at least two, with up to six vital functions in any practical argument. The first is the Claim (C). The Claim is "the conclusion whose merits we are seeking to establish." It is very much the same as the conclusion of a formal syllogism. The major difference between the two is the process through which each is established. Toulmin notes that, "When we embark on an argument, there is always some 'destination' which we may arrive at for ourselves as a discovery, or else may be invited to arrive at by somebody else, as an assertion; and the first step in analyzing and criticizing the argument is to understand the precise character of that destination."

The second element is the data or Grounds (G). Data are "items of information" which answer the challenge to the Claim, "What do you have to go on?" Toulmin identifies the function of Grounds.

Having clarified the claim, we must consider what kind of underlying foundation is required if a claim of this particular kind is to be accepted as solid and reliable . . . . Depending on the kind of claim under discussion, these grounds may comprise experimental observations, matters of common knowledge, statistical data, personal testimony, previously established claims, or
other comparable "factual data." But in any case, the claim under discussion can be no stronger than the grounds that provide its foundation.  

If we visualize the model to this point, it would look like this:

G ——— C

Or, for example,

St. Paul was a true believer ——— St. Paul will be resurrected

Many practical arguments, however, demand another function. Someone may ask, "How did you get from there to here, that is, from Grounds to Claim?" The third vital element of the model answers that question. It is called the Warrant (W). Warrants are "general, hypothetical statements which can act as bridges, and authorize the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us." That is, Warrants bridge and authorize the step from the specific statement of fact to the conclusion. Whereas Grounds are specific, explicit statements, similar to questions of fact, Warrants are general implicit statements similar to questions of law in a court of law. While the Grounds functions as the foundation, "The warrant is, in a sense, incidental and explanatory, its task being simply to register explicitly the legitimacy of the step involved and to refer it back to the larger class of steps whose legitimacy is being supposed."  

Toulmin reminds the critic that, "We must check whether these grounds really do provide genuine support for this particular claim and are not just irrelevant information having nothing to do with the claim in question - designed to 'pull the wool over our eyes,' for instance."

Having added this new element, the model takes on this form:
Or, for example,

Given that all true believers will be raised from the dead

St. Paul was a true believer  St. Paul will be resurrected

Toulmin notes that, "warrants are of different kinds, and may confer different degrees of force on the conclusions they justify. Some warrants authorize us to accept a claim unequivocally." Others, however, "may need to add some explicit reference to the degree of force which our data confer on our claim in virtue of our warrant." Again, "Since in all practical realms, the connections that we have to deal with are more or less qualified, and more or less conditional . . . we then put forward our claims, not as being formally irrefutable, but rather as being practically strong or reliable." Thus, "the strengths and limitations of the Initial claims are indicated by the addition of qualifiers." The Qualifier (Q) serves to define the scope or limits of a particular Claim.

It also may be necessary to employ the conditions of Rebuttal (R), indicating "the circumstances in which the general authority of the warrant would have to be set aside." Whereas (Q) relates to the force of the Warrant, (R) relates to the circumstance. Toulmin observes that the term Rebuttal "applies wherever a general presumption is set aside in the light of certain exceptional facts. An argument that would normally have been sound is invalidated as a result of the discovery of those special circumstances."

A final organ of this organism of dynamic argument is Backing (B). "Standing behind our warrants . . . there will normally be other assurances, without which the warrants themselves would possess neither authority or currency." Like the Grounds, the Backing are straightforward matters of fact. Their function, however, is different. An argument cannot exist without Grounds. It can exist without Backing for the Warrant. Toulmin points out that "some warrants must be
accepted provisionally without further challenge." At times, however, the Warrant may be challenged so that Backing, "that is, generalizations making explicit the body of experience relied on to establish the trustworthiness of the ways of arguing applied in any particular case," is demanded to substantiate the Warrant.

The model finally assumes this form:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{B} \quad \text{Backing} \\
&\downarrow \\
&\text{W} \quad \text{Warrant} \\
&\downarrow \\
&\text{G} \quad \text{Grounds} \\
&\text{Q} \quad \text{Claim} \\
&\downarrow \\
&\text{R} \quad \text{Rebuttal}
\end{align*}
\]

Given grounds, G, we may appeal to warrant, W (which rests on backing, B) to justify the claim that C - or, at any rate, the presumption (Q) that C - in the absence of some specific rebuttal or disqualification (R). Or, for example,

Since Jesus was resurrected as an example of all who believe,

Given that all true believers will be raised from the dead,

St. Paul being a true believer \(\rightarrow\) St. Paul will be resurrected presumably

Unless, Jesus was not raised from the dead.
As contrasted to the syllogism, this layout of argument, Toulmin maintains, offers a more detailed, if not more accurate picture of how one reasons in a given situation, as in the process of selecting between competing interpretations of a text, for example. Whereas Toulmin characterizes the traditional logical system, with the syllogism, as failing to advance our knowledge because it fails to represent sufficiently the practical reasoning process, he claims his model more adequately meets the need. By his disciples it has been claimed that, "As an audience-centered guide for reasoning, it should be put into practice frequently when we design our speeches." If so, the critic of exegetical discourse, also, ought to find insight into the various interpretations of a text by laying out the divergent explanations of a particular text in order to analyze them in juxtaposition.

The purpose of the exegete’s use of Toulmin in the first stage of this study will be preliminary to both the Evaluation of existing arguments and the Formulation of new ones. The focus of Toulmin’s model will be limited to the disclosure of those arguments which have been discovered by the research of the Interpreter. As the disparate options are set out according to Toulmin, the exegete will seek to comprehend the logical processes of each position. The goal, at this stage, is to represent as fairly as possible the conclusions and arguments of all the Claims.

Evaluation

The second stage of the hermeneutical model is that of Evaluation. Whereas the first phase allows for an analytical identification of the arguments posed by the disparate interpretations of a text, the following stage seeks to judge the arguments for both reasonableness and rationalness. The Interpreter first observes the statement and structure of each argument and only then assesses the degree to which the various interpretations adapt their arguments to the expectations of the audience and the requirements of structure. Appraising both the strength and the soundness of each argument in whole and in part constitutes the two separate steps of this phase of the interpretational process.
The Schematic Model

Historically biblical interpreters have turned to the hermeneutical circle to aid their discovery of the meaning of a text. Although Gelsler's explanation of the hermeneutical circle, that the "form or context . . . determines [the] meaning; the whole determines the parts . . . the meaning of the smaller unit is determined by the broader context," seeks to free it from its viciousness, there are still two reasons, at least, why the circle falls short as an effective model of evaluating incompatible interpretations. First, the circle is constructed so as to consider but one argument at a time, rather than examining multiple arguments. Second, the circle functions within a province that is invariably limited to making sense within a closed cycle; one that typically does not take into consideration the logical and the probable qualities of arguments. According to the hermeneutical circle, so long as the parts can be made to fit the whole, the interpretation could stand. The work of the interpreter, however, is to evaluate the disparate constructions which understanding has brought forward, and then to validate [by showing] that a conclusion is probably true on the basis of what is known.

Since evaluative judgment calls for the critical assessment of multiple interpretations, an assessment which the hermeneutical circle cannot provide, our paradigm emulates the schematic process rather than the hermeneutical circle. Just as children learn by making guesses at the meaning of words and then trying to follow those guesses to a correlation with the thing that is to be learned, confirming correct guesses as they fit, and rejecting wrong guesses because they do not, so the interpreter gathers in as many possible guesses as he can identify in order to test them to the point of confirmation or refutation. The interpreter gathers as many schemata (as many "best guesses" from as many other interpreters as he can discover) in order to "set up a range of predictions or expectations, which if fulfilled, confirms the schema, but if not fulfilled causes us to revise it."

The value of the schematic approach is that it anticipates and enables the evaluation of multiple interpretations simultaneously. It provides a way of viewing competing arguments
concurrently in order to see which one of the many best fits the facts as they are perceived. All suggested ways of viewing the text are considered, not one at a time to be either rejected or accepted in isolation, but rather each option is considered in light of all the others, in an effort to search out the best arguments in what may become a new interpretation. This interpretation would be new in the sense that it reflects the best possible explanation to date as a result of considering all the known options. It is not likely that this new interpretation will be totally novel, but rather an accommodation, based on two or more schema.129

In order to test the various schemata, each interpretation is processed through a series of reasonable and rational criteria to determine which is the better representation of the meaning of the text. It is to be expected that each suggested interpretation will have followed the particular principles of biblical interpretation130 and will have drawn from the general sources of argument. Hirsch notes that "To emerge successfully from the rigors of an adjudication, the victorious hypothesis must have been compared with every disparate hypothesis severally or with hypotheses that had already emerged victorious over other competitors."131 The process begins "by positing probable meanings based on past usage; then we proceed to qualify and amend this conjecture by further experience."132 The interpreter is seeking to discover whether each schema is either frail or strong in external reasonableness, and either faulty or sound in internal rationalness. To accomplish this test, the various schemata are subjected to a two phase test; one which seeks to determine the reasonable strength of the interpretation and another which seeks to determine the rational soundness. The standard requirements for reasonableness and rationalness must be met in order for an interpretation to be considered credible and authoritative.

Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics

Having asserted the necessity of both a reasonable and rational criticism of the various interpretations of a text, a distinction must be made between the source of the arguments which will be so judged and the criteria by which the judgment will take place. Those who are seeking to
establish an interpretation of a biblical passage look to at least two sources of argument in order to
discover ideas which could serve to authorize their construction of the text's meaning. Toulmin
has identified "field-invariant" and "field-dependent" or "interfield" and "intrafield" sources.133

What things about the modes in which we assess arguments, the standards by reference to
which we assess them and the manner in which we qualify our conclusions about them, are
the same regardless of field (field-invariant), and which of them vary as we move from
arguments in one field to arguments in another (field-dependent)? How far, for instance can
one compare the standards of argument relevant in a court of law with those relevant when
judging a paper in the Proceedings of the Royal Society, or those relevant to a mathematical
proof or a prediction about the composition of a tennis team?134

Toulmin warns that an evaluation of arguments from one particular field based on the
standards of another particular field results in a faulty judgment, for although there are criteria
which are applicable for evaluating arguments across the spectrum of critical thinking, some fields
of study are so specialized that unique modes and styles of argumentation must be identified and
adhered to during the evaluative process. The biblical interpreter must, therefore, recognize both
interfield and intrafield arguments so as to appraise their rationalness and reasonableness.
Interfield arguments will follow the standard of probability, while intrafield arguments will comply to
the particular rules of biblical interpretation. We will briefly consider both, looking to the particular
or intrafield principles first.

In the field of evangelical biblical hermeneutics, an established approach to the
uncovering of arguments which demonstrate the meaning of a text has been articulated.135 This
approach considers the text from grammatical, historical, contextual, literary, and theological
perspectives. These criteria, which comprise the biblical interpreter's intrafield or field-dependent
sources of argument, have been distinguished by Virkler.

*Historical-cultural analysis* considers the historical-cultural milieu in which an author wrote, in
order to understand his allusions, references, and purpose. *Contextual analysis* considers
the relationship of a given passage to the whole body of an author's writing, for better
understanding results from a knowledge of the overall thought.
*Lexical-syntactical analysis* develops an understanding of the definitions of words (lexicology)
and their relationship to one another (syntax) in order to understand more accurately the
meaning the author intended to convey.
*Theological analysis* studies the level of theological understanding at the time a revelation was
given in order to ascertain the meaning of the text for its original recipients. Thus it takes into
account related Scriptures, whether given before or after the passage being studied.
Literary analysis identifies the literary form or method used in a given passage for various forms such as historical narrative, letters, doctrinal exposition, poetry, and apocalyptic. Each have their unique methods of expression and interpretation.136

In reaffirming this particular approach for the practice of biblical hermeneutics, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy identified it as the "literal" method.137 These "principles of biblical interpretation" enable the interpreter to begin to make guesses as to the meaning of the text. They are not intended to "call into question the integrity or truth of the writer's meaning but simply to help determine it."138 Arguments are brought forth in support of these various principles in an effort to establish a "best" interpretation. That interpretation which best explains the grammatical, historical, contextual, literary, and theological demands of the text is considered the interpretation.

Once these arguments have been set out, they must be judged for their adherence to the guiding principles which generated them. Are the arguments as set forth by the interpreter reasonable and rational? Do they fit the rules of probability and structure as we know them? As Hirsch has noted, "Coming to understand the meaning of an utterance is like learning the rules of a game. To play the game properly you must have learned the rules."139 A goal of the exegete is to determine whether or not the various interpreters of the text are playing by the established, intrafield rules of biblical hermeneutics.

Rhetoricians from the classical period to the contemporary have identified general sources of arguments which prove effective in convincing others of their claims, regardless of the field of study under consideration. "The speaker must frame his proofs and arguments with the help of common knowledge and accepted opinions," according to Aristotle's Rhetoric.140 These commonplaces generate the interfled or field-invariant kinds of arguments. Prior to listing and discussing twenty-eight valid and nine sham topoi,141 Aristotle noted the distinction between the particular arguments of interfled persuasion and the general arguments of interfled persuasion.

... the proper subjects of dialectical and rhetorical syllogisms are those with which the so-called Topoi (Common-places, Lines of Argument) are concerned; and by these I
mean arguments that are applicable in common to the study of justice and physics, to the study of politics - to a large number of inquiries of divers sorts. Take the topic of more and less: this is of no greater service when we make a syllogism or utter an enthymeme about matters of right and wrong than when we make one about physics, or about anything else, different though these things are in kind. [Arguments as to degree (more just and less just, longer and shorter, etc.) are equally applicable to all subjects.] On the other hand, there are particular arguments, those derived from the propositions relative to a particular species or class of things. Thus there are propositions in physics (natural science) from which it is impossible to form an enthymeme or a syllogism for ethics, and propositions in ethics from which it is impossible to do so for physics, and so on through all the special subjects.142

Among the British rhetoricians, Hugh Blair acknowledged the "'loci... such as genus and species, cause and effect, antecedents and consequents, likeness and contrariety, definition, circumstances of time and place; and a great many more of the same kinds."143 Contemporary classifications of general sources of argument follow the classical and British catalog. Ehninger and Brockriede, for example, list cause-effect, effect-cause, generalization, classification and analogy, as well as authoritative and motivational proofs.144 It was Karl Wallace who, perhaps more conspicuously than others, put forward the concept of "good reasons" as the source for general arguments. He concluded that

It seems probable that if students of rhetoric looked to the substance as well as to the forms of practical discourse they would discover a set of statements or value-axioms that would constitute a modern system of invention. The axioms would consist of those political and ethical values that apply to public discussion. Derived in theory from politics and ethics and in practice from the rules and conventions that speakers appeal to explicitly and implicitly when they explain, advocate, deliberate upon, and justify their choices, the axioms would serve as a base for finding good reasons and thus for providing fundamental materials in any given case of rhetorical discourse.145

The biblical interpreter, then, will recognize that arguments brought forth in support of a specific construction of the text will have been generated by the particular principles of biblical hermeneutics as well as the general "good reasons" employed by representatives of all fields of study. Having identified the source of the interpreters' arguments, we now turn to a consideration of the criteria by which those arguments will be judged.

First a test for reasonableness, and then a test for rationalness will be proposed. Each argument must pass a test demonstrating its strength and soundness. Douglas Ehninger argues that the possibility of a valid, or morally obligatory, conclusion cannot follow an argument which does not meet the standards of both rationalness and reasonableness.
At the outset we must dismiss the hypothesis that internal consistency or noncontradiction among the various elements of a case constitutes an appropriate test of its validity. For while a case that contradicts itself always is suspect, the mere absence of self-contradiction is not a guaranty of the pertinence or cogency of the arguments presented. Because the inducements of which a case consists are related to its claim psychologically rather than logically - as grounds or motives for believing rather than as proofs by which one is bound - they must appeal beyond noncontradiction to the "state of the world" and the values of the persons addressed.146

First a test for reasonableness, and then a test for rationalness will be proposed.

**Test for Reasonableness**

Arguments must be functionally valid; they must fit the world as it is. Since arguments are intended to persuade people, they must adhere to standards of common reasonableness. The interpreter will have to provide evidence, evidence that is acceptable to those he is seeking to convince, that will represent some image of reality which the reader/listener will recognize and affirm. Strong arguments, therefore, anticipate the expectations an audience will hold in regard to reasonableness. As Ehninger and Brockriede concede, "Because the evaluation of a proof is a question of personal judgment, because persons are prone to disagree often in those judgments, all one can say about problematic proofs is that they will be more or less strong to more or fewer persons who judge and criticize them."147

If Ehninger and Brockriede seem somewhat pessimistic about the ability of a rhetor to anticipate with any degree of accuracy the expectations of a particular audience, it is probably because they have overstated the case to make their point. Though the point is well taken, the critic need not despair thinking that no universal standards of reasonableness exist. Lloyd Bitzer has reminded us that rhetorical situations are a complex of exigence, audience, and constraints.148 Particular events, objects, and/or relations demand "fitting" responses to meet the demands of the situation. Constraints serve to guide both rhetor and audience, enabling a reasonable anticipation of the audiences' expectations on the part of the writer/speaker. The question emerges, "By what standard will the biblical exegete evaluate the reasonableness of an
interpreter's argument?" Our standard will reflect that proposed by Plato and recently articulated by Richard Weaver.

Acknowledging that Plato "upheld the validity of absolutism," James Golden suggests that Plato was committed to an argument-centered theory of rhetoric. Freely he held that a communicator must be guided by good reasons - especially those grounded in first principles. . . . A major purpose in a rhetorical situation is to enable the participants through the means of dialogue to go beyond sensory experiences of the observable physical world and glimpse those universals that adhere to an ideal form.149

Richard Weaver has developed this Platonic concept of the ideal. By arranging lines of evidence in relation to their proximity to the Ideal, Weaver has proposed a hierarchy of argument to which evangelical interpreters may readily subscribe.150 In Weaver's own words, "... the reasoner reveals his philosophical position by the source of argument which appears most often in his major premise because the major premise tells us how he is thinking about the world."151 Therefore, the critic starts "... at the prevailing source, or the source which is most frequently called upon in the total persuasive effort."152 Weaver had suggested that the major premise of an argument is the key element because "... in addition to their logical function as part of a deductive argument, [premises] are expressive of values, and a characteristic major premise characterizes a man."153

To Weaver, "value" or a "scheme of values" is the basis of rhetoric.

Rhetoric is advisory, it has the office of advising men with reference to an independent order of goods and with reference to their particular situation as it relates to these. The honest rhetorician therefore has two things in mind: a vision of how matters should go ideally and ethically and a consideration of special circumstances of his auditors.154

These values are to be determined by dialectic. Weaver argued that "dialectical inquiry will concern itself not with what is 'iron' but with what is 'good'."155 Further, "Any piece of persuasion, therefore, will contain as its first process a dialectic establishing terms which have to do with policy."156 These terms are the "goods," for, "It is impossible to talk about rhetoric as effective expression without having a term giving intelligibility to the whole discourse, the Good."157
Whereas Weaver sought to judge a rhetor's character based on the use of value laden premises or the lack thereof, we will employ his hierarchy of values to judge the strength of arguments, examining what kinds of arguments interpreters have called upon to warrant and back their claims.

Weaver placed four types of argument into a descending order, moving from the highest appeal, that closest to the "Good," to the lowest. To Weaver, a man "is making the highest order of appeal when he is basing his case on definition or the nature of a thing." This argument is also called argument from genus or first cause. This type of argument appeals to man's "... highest capacity - his capacity to apprehend what exists absolutely." If a speaker should define man as a creature with an indefeasible right to freedom and should upon this base an argument that a certain man or group of men are entitled to freedom, he would be arguing from definition. Freedom is an unchanging attribute of his subject; it can accordingly be predicted of whatever falls within the genus of man. Stipulatlve definitions are of the ideal, and in this fact lies the reason for placing them at the top of the hierarchy.

For the biblical exegete, with his commitment to the absoluteness of the text of Scripture, arguments which are based in the Bible are clearly arguments from first cause or principle. A universal principle, "You shall not commit adultery," (Exodus 20:14), is a fair example here. For those who accept the authority of the Scripture, there would be no question as to what the passage means; that is, "No matter what the situation, a sexual relationship with another man's wife is wrong, so leave that married woman alone." Those arguments rooted in the Bible and those which are recognized as universal statements of the "Good" are the ones which I will call arguments of principle.

The next step down the hierarchy of values consists of those arguments which are based on relationship or similitude. "We make use of analogy or comparison when the available knowledge of the subject permits only probable proof. Analogy is reasoning from something we know to something we do not know in one step; hence there is no universal ground for predication."
There is, then, a necessary jump that must be made in this type of reasoning. "The user of analogy is hinting at an essence which cannot at the moment be produced."\textsuperscript{163} One who argues on this basis ultimately holds that, "Everything is like everything else somehow, so that we have a ladder of similitude mounting up to the final one-ness - to something like a unity in godhead."\textsuperscript{164}

A case in point would be those interpreters who argue against abortion based on the biblical absolute, "You shall not murder," (Exodus 20:13). They would argue that "murder" refers to the unlawful taking of a human life (this would exclude the killing of animals, acts of war, civil executions, etc.). Having defined the terms, the anti-abortion advocate would seek to demonstrate that the fetus/unborn child is at least similar to human life, so much so that the principle would apply in the case of humanly conceived life. He might go on to argue that since the spontaneous miscarriage of a fetus/unborn child is at least similar to the cessation of human life, a funeral service is appropriate not only in the case of an abortion, but also in the case of a miscarriage. These arguments based on analogy would be necessitated by the inability of the rhetor to demonstrate that the fetus is indeed a human being and thereby opening up the argument to that of principle.

Descending the hierarchy we come to argument based on cause and effect. "Causes are causes having effects and effects are resulting from causes," so that this type of argument from consequence is "... completely devoid of reference to principle or defined ideas."\textsuperscript{165} The goal of the rhetor, then, is "to affirm [his subject] as the cause of some effect or as the effect of some cause. And the attitudes of those who are listening will be affected according to whether or not they agree with our cause-and-effect analysis."\textsuperscript{166}

If, for example, a biblicalist were seeking to convince an audience of non-believers that pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations are wrong, he would not find much success in arguing from principle, for the listeners would not accept the authority of the Scripture. Arguments from analogy would face the same difficulty. In this particular case, an argument from consequence could easily prove to be the most convincing type. "Since if you engage in pre-marital or extra-
marital sexual activity, your chances of eventually contracting A.I.D.S. are relatively high, then your best bet for a safe sex life is to practice sex within a heterosexual marriage."

Many of the policy decisions of life are made in the realm of the non-absolute. In these cases, as well as those mentioned above where the audience will not admit to an authoritative principle, arguments from consequence are perfectly legitimate and effective. While decisions of lesser significance (Shall I buy stock or purchase gold? Shall I take this job with these benefits or that job with those?) may well be decided based on cause-effect relationships, when the preacher/interpreter stands to represent the Word of God, arguments based on consequence are generally deficient, if not unnecessary, when arguments from principle and analogy are available. The honest interpreter will explain the meaning of the text based on principle rather than explain away the meaning through the use of consequence.167

At the bottom of Weaver's hierarchy is argument from circumstance. This type of argument is based, not on principle, but on expediency. "An even less admirable subvariety of this source is the appeal to circumstance, which is the least philosophical of all the topics of argument. Circumstance is an allowable source when we don't know anything else to plead . . . . Actually this argument amounts to a surrender of reason."168

Arguments rooted in circumstance parallel Dworkin's instrumentalist concept of legal interpretation, just as arguments from principle parallel Dworkin's characterization of hermeneutical conventionalism. The instrumentalist looks at the world as it is, seeking neither to evaluate nor correct it, but rather to analyze and adapt to it. There is no appeal to the "Good" based on principle, but only an accommodation to things as they are.

An example of argument from circumstance can be found in the statements of those who advocate the acceptance of homosexuals into church membership and for ordination. They maintain, "Many good people these days are practicing homosexuals - we must recognize that - and to exclude so many good people from membership and ordination would be to fall behind the times." Although argument from circumstance may be useful in insignificant decision making
("Since there is only French dressing, I guess I'll have that on my salad.") to employ this kind of thinking in the face of, and contrary to, first principle is a form of unreasonableness which honest evangelical interpreters will reject. David W. Kate has expressed the evangelical concern for an adherence to principle.

The rise of ethical relativism generally reflects a shift of emphasis in ethics from the ontological to the teleological or from the "good" to the "right." While the ontologist tends to base an ethical system on a set of principles or values which is deemed to have inherent "goodness" about it before facing situations in which it must be applied, the teleologist tends to base an ethical system on what is likely to produce consequences that are beneficial for those who are affected by the action or communication involved . . . An emphasis on consequences, however, tends to give heightened prominence to the role of the situation and reduce the salience of ethical principle . . . the existence of those "good reasons" for behavior . . . is in fact support for the notion of ethical universalism.169

While the natural conception of a hierarchy is probably that of a pyramid or triangle, I believe that a series of concentric circles, as in a target, is a better way to visualize Weaver's concept of argument. In his Ideas Have Consequences, Weaver makes several allusions "a center."

Now the return which the Idealists propose is not a voyage backward through time but a return to center, which must be conceived metaphysically or theologically. They are seeking the one which endures and not the many which change and pass, and this search can be only described as looking for the truth. They are making the ancient affirmation that there is a center of things, and they point out that every feature of modern disintegration is a flight from this toward periphery. It is expressible, also, as a movement from unity to individualism. In proportion as a man approaches the outer rim, he becomes lost in details, and the more he is preoccupied with details, the less he can understand them.170

Weaver's conception of good reasons, therefore, could be pictured in the following manner, with principle at the center of reasonableness and analogy, consequence, and circumstance moving, in that order, toward the periphery and away from reasonableness.
As the interpreter works his way through the test of reasonableness he will begin with each disparate interpretation at the outside of the circle. Arguments will work their way toward the center of the figure, as if working through a circular maze, seeking to advance as close as possible to a reasonableness based on principle. As Weaver maintained, "Plato reminded us that at any stage of an inquiry it is important to realize whether we are moving toward, or away from, first principles." Those arguments which demonstrate a greater dependence upon principle or analogy will be regarded more reasonable than those which hang on consequence or circumstance.
Test for Rationalness

While testing for the strength or reasonableness of an argument constitutes the first phase of the evaluation of multiple interpretations of a biblical text, this alone is not enough. The arguments that seek to substantiate each interpretation must be tested for soundness or rationalness as well.

Several rhetoricians have offered standard criteria for testing the soundness of arguments at this evaluative stage in the hermeneutical process. For example, Golden and Makau argue that some adherence to a standard of structural integrity is necessary. Whereas some have suggested that tests for the soundness of arguments are unrealistic due to the personal nature of reasoning, they maintain that, "For our purposes, some of the generally accepted rules of logic, which appropriately fall under the category of the 'rational,' have utility as a critical tool in evaluating the structural integrity of an argument."

In order for an interpretation to be considered sound, that is rational, it must demonstrate an internal consistency to the rules of structure. It must be formally sound in that, "We understand the expression rational . . . as conformity to the rules of logic." Toulmin acknowledges that there is a place for the rational in the evaluation of arguments.

The theory and techniques of rational criticism must be approached from two complementary directions, formal and functional. On the one hand, we can use the word "argument" for a string of propositions, which may be written on the blackboard or thought about in the abstract; and we can examine the formal relations - of consistency and inconsistency, entailment and contradiction - by which these propositions are (or are not) knitted into a logical fabric. (It would be foolish to deny that this "formal" aspect of rational criticism is one legitimate and well established part of the subject . . .)

In commenting on the decision making of the courts, Richard Wasserstrom has noted that formally logical categories, while they may not provide arguments, do tend to shape them, and certainly provide some basis for critiquing them.

It may indeed be true that the syllogism can neither furnish nor evaluate the content of propositions, but it does not follow that a procedure which seeks to use the syllogism to "test" the validity of arguments is thereby committed to employ any particular method for deriving the premises of these arguments. Courts cannot have used the syllogism to decide which premises to select; but this by itself does not show that they did not use the syllogism as a means for assessing the validity of arguments they formulated.
Noting that "fallacies are arguments that can seem persuasive despite being unsound," Toulmin, Rieke, and Janik identify and describe five nonrational types of argument including,

1. Fallacies that result from missing grounds;
2. Fallacies that result from irrelevant grounds;
3. Fallacies that result from defective grounds;
4. Fallacies that result from unwarranted assumptions; and
5. Fallacies that result from ambiguities in our arguments.178

Arguments with missing grounds lack evidence which will support the claim being made. Whereas arguments with irrelevant grounds give the wrong kinds of proofs in seeking to secure a claim, those with defective grounds offer evidence which is relevant to the claim being discussed, but is nonetheless insufficient to establish the stated conclusion. Arguments which assume that there is a wide consensus of agreement concerning crucial evidence when there is not are those with unwarranted assumptions. Arguments that are ambiguous are faulty because they are so unclear as to lead to confusion or uncertainty about the conclusion being sought.

For the purposes of this study, the following categories will serve as a basis for testing the rationalness of an interpreter's argumentation. Each construction will be tested for (1) Insufficiency, or arguments that result from hasty generalizations or accident,179 (2) Irrelevance, or arguments which evade the issue at hand, appeal to authority as an ultimate warrant, reject evidence based alone on the character of the rhetor, appeal to ignorance, appeal to popularity, appeal to perverted emotions, or appeal to coercion,180 (3) Incompleteness, or arguments that beg the question,181 (4) Improbability, or arguments which seek to answer complex questions with overly simple answers, are mistaken about cause-effect relationships, make inappropriate comparisons, or seek to support claims by evidence for which no arguments can be found,182 and (5) Incoherency, or arguments which employ words or phrases in ambiguous ways, omit or misuse punctuation or disregard rules of syntax, misrepresent ideas by taking them out of context, assert unfounded relationships between parts and the whole, or carelessly employ
figures of speech.\textsuperscript{183} It is to be remembered that demonstrating the absolute correctness of an interpretation is a practical impossibility. On the other hand, in order to discredit or disprove any argument, all that is required is the demonstration of some unsoundness, some lack of internal consistency to the rules of logical thinking. Limited knowledge only is required in this case, whereas unlimited and infinite knowledge would be required to establish absolutely the credibility of a particular conclusion.\textsuperscript{184} Still, one or more faulty or nonrational warrants will not necessarily destroy the complete argument. Rather, it will identify that construction of the text as less sound, and therefore less probably the "correct" interpretation.

As we approach the evaluation of the rational aspects of the various arguments, I visualize a number of different interpretations entering a racetrack-like configuration consisting of five separate barriers or hurdles over which each of the multiple interpretations will proceed, one hurdle at a time. These hurdles are the five standards for rationalness which the arguments must answer in order to be considered formally sound. The critic would ask, "Is the argument advanced in support of the claim backed by legitimate, uncontested, and undisputed evidence, or are elements of the argument insufficient?" "Is the argument directed to the issue at hand, or is apparently crucial evidence presented which is not relevant?" "Is the argument fully supported by all necessary evidence, or are aspects of the argument lacking in evidence or incomplete?" "Is the argument justifiable in the sense that the issues and relationships between warrants stand on valid evidence, or are parts of the argument improbable?" "Is the argument clear and unambiguous, or are some elements incoherent?" As each question is answered in the affirmative, the hurdle is cleared and the argument may venture on to the next test. If a hurdle fails to be negotiated or is knocked down in the attempt, in that the argument cannot meet the test of soundness at that particular point, the critic will take note of the severity of the fallacy and evaluate the argument in light of its failure. The goal of this step of the hermeneutical process is to eliminate from consideration those interpretations which are severely deficient in structural consistency or delimit those interpretations which show characteristics of faultiness in the rational
category. The following figure seeks to demonstrate the movement down the track of rationalness which each interpretational option must make.

Option: #1 #2 #3 #4

- Insufficiency
- Irrelevance
- Incompleteness
- Improbability
- Incoherency

Figure 3.
Test for Rationalness
Throughout the entire second stage of the hermeneutical model the biblical interpreter will be evaluating those arguments which he has identified through discovery and disclosure procedures. The two steps of Evaluation will include tests for reasonableness based on the four types of argument which consist of principle, analogy, consequence, and circumstance, and tests for rationalness based on the five logical principles of sufficiency, relevance, completeness, probability, and coherency. The goal of this stage of the hermeneutical model is to so narrow the field of possible interpretations, through a process of eliminating frail and/or faulty arguments,\textsuperscript{185} that the valid, that is the probable or morally certain, interpretation will be made apparent. Validation is made more certain when there is a convergence of reasonable and rational superiority in a single interpretation, for as Perelman has stated, "When the rational and the reasonable mutually support each other, when reasoning according to principles ends in a satisfying decision, there is no problem [in viewing a decision as acceptable].\textsuperscript{186} If, however, a single interpretation is not validated, the third stage of the hermeneutical model allows for the modification of existing arguments and the Formulation of a new argument in support of what will then be purported to be the correct interpretation.

**Formulation**

The third stage of the hermeneutical model for practical biblical interpretation is that of Formulation. It provides a statement of and defense for the most probable interpretation of a text based on the information that has been identified and evaluated through the previous two stages. The various "... schemata reflect the [interpreter's] current level of understanding and knowledge of the world."\textsuperscript{187} And this new understanding will result in new thinking about the issue at hand. The object of new thinking is to accurately articulate the true meaning of the Text.\textsuperscript{188}

Whereas the Evaluation stage enables the interpreter to understand, in the sense of comprehending, the degree of soundness and strength which any particular interpretation carries, the Formulation stage allows him to state or re-state his conclusions. This Formulation process prepares the single valid interpretation for public Dissemination.
In technical and nontechnical areas of discussion alike, the art of *seeing* what grounds are needed to justify any opinion is a substantive art. The technique of *stating* those grounds in a way that can stand up to public criticism is a procedural technique. But whatever the field of reasoning involved, our arguments will carry weight only if we can both *see* and *state* the grounds for our opinions.\(^1\)

There are three directions which an exegete may follow at this stage of the hermeneutical process. He may confirm an existing interpretation as explaining the meaning of the text. He may modify an existing interpretation or combination of interpretations. Or having rejected the ability of all suggested interpretations to sufficiently legitimize their claims, he may construct a new argument based on his own insights and those gathered from his examination of the existing arguments.

**Confirmation**

Those interpreters who believe they have adequate evidence for confirming an existing interpretation must do so with at least two reservations in mind. First, they must realize that it is possible that some portions of the Scripture will never provide an interpretation which is necessarily comprehensive enough to confirm its acceptance. Zuck has noted this possibility.

The [Holy] Spirit's work in interpretation does not result in [the interpreter's] having a comprehensive and completely accurate understanding of the entire Scriptures. The exact meaning of many passages still eludes many Bible scholars, even after a lifetime of study . . . . The precise meaning of some verses will not be known . . . . Students of the Bible, even though they are devout and are Spirit-taught, must admit that the correct interpretation of at least some passages simply cannot be fully ascertained.\(^1\)

Second, these critics will realize that any confirmation must be held tentatively because of the inherent difficulty involved in the confirming process. Robert LaBreche reminds us that whereas an infinite number of warrants could never confirm an interpretation absolutely (in a scientific manner), only one piece of new evidence could disconfirm an entire argument.

To prove any view absolutely correct is a practical impossibility. That would require testing it against all relevant knowledge. Such a task requires omniscience for one cannot know if he has considered all relevant knowledge unless he has considered all knowledge. On the other hand, disproving or discrediting any view requires only finite knowledge. All that is needed is a single contrary fact, not an infinity of confirmatory facts.\(^1\)

This recognition of the conditionality of the confirmation process need not discourage interpreters from subscribing to the more obvious validity of a given construction. Much of the
Scripture lends itself to only one clearly viable interpretation. The meaning of these passages may be accepted without any reasonable or rational objections. This will be the case for those passages which "form the backbone of the Christian Faith and which have been clearly and consistently understood by the regenerate throughout history. In these instances, firmness of conviction is warranted and essential."\(^{192}\)

In maintaining that a valid interpretation places both critic and audience under a moral obligation, because of its appeal to the conscience and good will of men, as well as the reasonableness and rationalness of its arguments, Douglas Ehninger has outlined three requirements for any construction of a text which stands to be confirmed. Those interpretations may be confirmed which (1) are substantial enough to cause the proponents of other opinions to abandon their present position in favor of the proposed one, or at least to alter, in some fundamental fashion, their disparate arguments; (2) motivate this radical change through necessity (an overwhelming argument) rather than through coercion; and (3) enable the proponents of contrary positions to fully grasp what adjustments are necessary and why they are required. "When the antagonist in a dispute fully understands the reason why his present position is untenable, he has the obligation of revising or abandoning it."\(^{193}\)

The benefit of a confirmed interpretation is that it obligates its advocate(s) to so persuasively present his claim that the exponents of other positions will clearly recognize, and that for the right reason - the establishment of truth, their own moral obligation to readjudicate old schemata in light of a new and valid schema. As a result, old controversies, with their "erroneous assumptions and untenable beliefs," are forsaken so that "the dispute advances to more tenable ground" or is resolved altogether.\(^{194}\) The goal, therefore, of confirmation "is not analytic certainty but the achievement of new meaning, the creation of a new understanding of reality - a creation which partakes of that reality."\(^{195}\)
Modification

The second option for the biblical exegete is to modify, if he is unable to confirm one interpretation, an existing interpretation or combination of interpretations so that the new construction of the text will more reasonably and rationally fit the evidence at hand. Golden and Makau demonstrate the importance of this practice among the Supreme Court Justices. The Justices freely argue among themselves seeking to expose faulty or frail arguments and to strengthen apparently valid ones. Counter arguments are developed to address the challenges of conflicting opinions. Rather than viewing this adversary relationship as "signs of instability and weakness," Golden and Makau maintain that this function of judicial reasoning "mandates one to work on justification through effective modification."198

Although the Justices enjoy the luxury of immediate verbal and written interchange, most preachers are unable to so communicate with the advocates of the variety of opinions which represent the meaning of a passage of Scripture. Their exegetical decision making will take place as they debate intrapersonally. That does not, however, eliminate the possibility of a reasoned modification of extant interpretations. Thinking people are continually carrying on internal debates which result in new ways of seeing and even thinking. Wadsworth, in his critique of Piaget for example, argues that, "Schemata never stop changing or becoming more refined . . . . Since schemata are structures of cognitive development that do change, allowance must be made for their growth and development."197 Not only is it a characteristic of schemata that they invite modification, it is also significant that "not all different interpretations are incompatibly different."198 A classic example is the various approaches to Christian baptism. Whereas some emphasize the mode of baptism (usually Baptists who insist on immersion), perhaps to the exclusion or minimizing of any spiritual statement, others insist that the spiritual meaning of the ordinance far surpasses the method. It is likely that both views are correct, but limited, and that both interpretations could be partially confirmed, but also modified, since one does not fully explain the meaning of baptism once all the evidence is in.199
Rather than thoughtlessly defending a traditional interpretation, the honest rhetor will open himself up to the possibility which other perspectives may suggest. If the most basic commitment of the preacher is to re-present the Word of God in a truthful manner, he will take on the role of the true scientist who is willing to revise when new evidence demands revision. Toulmin emphasizes the importance of this cooperative effort in doing hermeneutics.

Through the cooperation of all the people involved in a linguistic interaction, a reasonableness may be generated that has as its outcome a thoroughly sound line of reasoning. The person who first advanced the claim may then take credit for it and feel good about it, even though a perceptive observer will recognize that this outcome was really a social product. If the interpreter is unable to confirm one of the proposed constructions of a text, therefore, he will seek to modify one or more of the suggestions offered up by the rhetorical process of cooperative argumentation. He will isolate the reasonable and rational arguments of the various options, seeking to combine them in such a way that the modified interpretation will evidence a greater ability to explain the text than do any of the existing interpretations.

**Construction**

A third alternative for the biblical interpreter, if he is unable either to confirm or to modify existing exegesis, is to construct a distinctively new explication of the meaning of the passage. LaBreche writes that

... for some Scriptures no interpretation without defect will be found, or more than one may seem equally reasonable in view of the evidence available. In these cases, flexibility is warranted and essential until the problem is clearly resolved. Any conclusion should be considered no more reliable than the evidence upon which it is based warrants. If the evidence does not overwhelmingly support one and only one interpretation, any view adopted is unreliable to that degree. In fact, in a few cases the only reliable judgment may be that the available evidence is inconclusive, that no interpretation discovered is probably correct. In these cases one should suspend judgment until further evidence becomes available.

Although it is not likely that after twenty centuries of biblical scholarship totally novel interpretations and ones demonstrating such a weight of evidence that they are universally recognized as valid will emerge from the study of an individual exegete, the possibility does exist. Indeed, the very attempt at advancing a novel view ignites the rhetorical fires within the exegetical
community. Still, it is required of an interpreter that all available information be gathered from all reasonable sources, including especially new archaeological and linguistic discoveries, so that this information might be evaluated and applied to the text, and that new connections be sought which could explain the Scripture better than existing suggestions. This is the point at which the personal exegetical skills of the interpreter are most necessary. Only the hard work of reasonable and rational thinking can construct a new interpretation where old ones have failed to clearly win the day.

These three directions which the formulation stage of the hermeneutical model may take, that is, confirmation, modification, or construction, parallel the discovery step of stage one of the process. At stage three, however, there is an inventive factor at work. Whereas stage one seeks to discover existing interpretations, stage three incorporates the genuine invention of arguments whenever it modifies existing arguments or creates new ones. So too the second step of the Formulation stage parallels the second step of the Identification stage. In stage one, those arguments which had been discovered were then disclosed by means of the Toulmin model of argument. At stage three, the argument which has been either confirmed or invented will be prescribed by the interpreter. A comprehensive statement of the argument will emerge at least in the mind of the exegete if not committed to writing. Once again the Toulmin model will serve the purpose of laying out the argument in a way that lends itself to critical analysis. The major difference between stage one and stage three, therefore, is that Identification has as its goal the disclosure of multiple interpretations whereas Formulation seeks the exposure of but one.

Dissemination

Having formulated what he is convinced is the one valid interpretation, the final stage into which the biblical hermeneuticist enters is that of Dissemination. The valid interpretation must be presented to the public as the re-presentation of the meaning of the Scripture. In commenting on the necessity of communicating newly discovered constructions, Michael Polanyi observed that the interpreter will seek to persuade others of the validity of his argumentation.
Like the heuristic passion from which it flows, the persuasive passion too finds itself facing a logical gap... [The formulator's] persuasive passion spurs him now to cross this gap by converting everybody to his way of seeing things, even as his heuristic passion has spurred him to cross the heuristic gap which separated him from discovery.204

At this point the interpreter is playing a gatekeeping role, having edited out all errant possibilities and offering justification for the correct interpretation. The gatekeeping model of mass communication, as designed by Schramm and described by McQuail, demonstrates the function of the interpreter at this Dissemination stage.

A newspaper may illustrate this: the paper receives a vast amount of news items and information every day. The newsmen read, evaluate and decide what to pass on to the reader. During this procedure the texts will be modified, rewritten or rejected by those working in the media organization. If the material gets past the gatekeepers it will be printed and distributed.205

Rhetorical Argumentation

It is in the role of disseminator that the interpreter plays out, or completes his truly rhetorical role. In submitting one argument to the public, from the examination of many, he is attempting to cause others to view the world as he does. Wayne Brockriede, in establishing six characteristics which any successful argument will follow,206 has demonstrated this rhetorical process. These characteristics include an inferential leap from existing beliefs to the adoption of a new belief or the reinforcement of an old one, a perceived rationale to support that leap, a choice among two or more competing claims, a regulation of uncertainty, a willingness to risk confrontation of a claim with peers, and a frame of reference shared optimally. Although the hermeneutical model proposed in this study adheres to all six of these characteristics, it is the fifth which becomes of particular interest at this final stage of the process. The rhetorical influence upon biblical hermeneutics cannot be completed until the formulated interpretation is shared publicly by means of a sermon or a publication of some sort.207 This Dissemination will provide a re-presentation of "Thus saith the Lord" and enter another exegetical explanation into the schemata of still other interpreters. It supplies new fuel for future investigation into meaning. The
importance of submitting conclusions to external adjudicating critics has been summarized by Ehninger and Brockriede.

Decisions arrived at through coercion, chance, intuition, or appeal to authority are disrespectful of the human being. By contrast, the method of argument promotes reflection and so honors qualities characterizing people at their finest. Argument as a general method, and debate as a specific application of it in deciding between two contradictory judgments or policies, is as reflective and self-regulative a method as humankind has yet been able to develop.

Dissemination thus becomes the means by which further refinement of an interpretation is made possible, until an interpretation is disseminated which can be so universally accepted that it is essentially certain. In the meantime, however, the interpretation may take on such certainty that it becomes morally obligatory. Those who have studied the justificatory arguments of the Supreme Court have recognized this moral force of good reasons. As such, the decisions of the Justices not only "expand our knowledge," but also place upon us as citizens the obligation to follow a particular course of action.

Validation of Strength and Soundness

At least two steps are necessary in properly disseminating an interpretation. These steps parallel the Evaluative stage of the hermeneutical process. Whereas the Evaluative stage tested multiple arguments for both reasonableness and rationalness, this final stage will defend the reasonableness and the rationalness of the single proposed solution. Step one of this stage will seek to justify the interpretation's strength according to good reasons and step two will seek to justify its soundness according to the rules of logic. The same criteria used to test at stage two will be employed at stage four to justify. As the interpreter processes his single argument toward the "center" of reasonableness and moves it over the hurdles of the "track" of rationalness, he will be seeking to justify in the same sense that the Justices would in the legal model, for "Supreme Court Justices are obliged to tell the composite audience how and why they reached their conclusions." The goal of this justification is to win the consent of any other interpreters.

It is significant to observe that this complex justification process enables Justices to re-evaluate the arguments they already have created and tested... As they write their opinion...
explicating and justifying their decision, Justices must phrase their arguments in such a way that they will, first of all, win the approval of the other Justices holding the majority view. If, successful, they may even gain the support, or at least the respect, of those Justices who plan to author minority opinions.212

Since all justificatory arguments must be based on an appeal to the rational or the reasonable, the preacher, who in that role acts as the disseminator of the interpretation, must take care not to lift the responsibility of decision making from the hearers,213 but rather to encourage them to thoughtfully consider all relevant evidence and to resist coercive techniques.214

This public justification of the most acceptable interpretation completes the hermeneutical model. The interpreter will have identified the various constructs of the passage in question by discovering the competing options and disclosing the arguments of each claim. He will have Evaluated the individual arguments for reasonable and rational qualities. He will have Formulated a fresh interpretation either by the confirmation of an existing option, or the modification of one or more existing options, or by the construction of a new view of the text. The Formulation stage will include an articulate statement of this recent interpretation. Finally, the interpreter will Disseminate his position, justifying both its reasonableness and rationalness to the interested audience which will themselves consider the validity of the new proposal.

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4Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 968.

5Job, for example, declares, "Hear now my reasoning . . ." (13:6), and, "I would present my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." (23:4). Isaiah, speaking on behalf of the Lord, invites, "Come, let us reason together." (1:18).

6In Acts 17:11, Luke records that the people of Berea were "noble-minded" because they recieved Paul's preaching "with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so."

7Although biblical scholars do not agree on all points, several passages have been brought forth to support the claim that the process of revelation ceased at the completion of the New
Testament canon. Some include the verses 9 and 10 of I Corinthians chapter 13 (a debatable passage at best). Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 21 identifies the two clearest passages on the subject: Jude 3 and Revelation 22:18-19. Exceptions to this doctrine may be noted among some Pentecostal or Charismatic groups who believe they receive inspired messages from God (Oral Roberts being an example of one such phenomenon).


11See, for example, I Timothy 1:4, and 4:7 with II Timothy 2:14-15.

12Ramm, pp. 111-112.

13Zuck, pp. 123, 127, and 126.


"As we find in Scripture unchanging truths about God and his will expressed in a variety of verbal forms, so we find them applied in a variety of cultural and situational contexts. Not all biblical teaching about conduct is normal for behavior today. Some applications of moral principles are restricted to the limited audience, the nature and extent of which Scripture itself specifies. One task of exegesis is to distinguish these absolute and normative truths from those aspects of their recorded application which are relative to changing situations. Only when this distinction is drawn can we hope to see how the same absolute truths apply to us in our own culture." (italics mine).


"... if purpose [significance] determines meaning then the final authority for determining meaning does not reside in the text itself but in factors outside the text, such as the alleged purpose of the author. In this case we would not have a firm objective basis for knowing the absolute truth of God on which man's eternal destiny is dependent. If, on the contrary, meaning is not determined by purpose [significance], but is expressed objectively in the text, then all men who can read (or understand by hearing) are capable of knowing the basic message from God in Holy Scripture."

17So Ramm writes, "It is therefore mandatory for a preacher to realize that interpretation of the meaning of the text is one thing, and the range of application is another, and that he must always keep these two matters separate." p. 113. See also, Hirsch, *Aims*, pp. 79-81.

18Ramm, pp. 112-113.
19Hirsch, *Aims*, pp. 5-9. Hirsch goes so far as to argue that, "The hermeneutic circle...has now been shown to be an inadequate model for what actually happens in the interpretation of speech. The magic circle is breakable." p. 6. He goes on to suggest "the simple expedient of abandoning the hermeneutic circle as the model of interpretation." p. 9.

20Ramm, p. 139.

21Hirsch, p. 166.

22Geisler, p. 243.


24*ibid.*, p. 34.


26Packer, p. 25. "The faithful use of reason in biblical interpretation is ministerial, not magisterial; the believing interpreter will use his mind not to impose or manufacture meaning but to grasp the meaning that is already there in the material itself."


30*ibid.*, 462.

31That this naturalistic approach is the present practice of the Supreme Court is demonstrated in Josina M. Makau's "The Supreme Court and Reasonableness," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (November 1984). The study demonstrates that the Court "balances adherence to doctrinal consistency against the need to invent socially adaptive rules of evidence for cases involving highly volatile interests." (p. 392).

32Cady, p. 460.

33*ibid.*, p. 462.

Allen Scult, "The Relationship Between Rhetoric and Hermeneutics Reconsidered," *Central States Speech Journal* (Winter 1983), p. 223. Scult notes that, "An understanding of the choice to use interpretation as one's method of Invention must begin with a characterization of sacred texts, for it is my contention that sacred texts provide a unique warrant to the interpreter for their rhetorical application."

The interpreter will not only consider the genre of the text in determining his method of hermeneutics, but will also take into consideration the generic constraints of the audience. He must determine what expectations they have of the text and therefore, what approaches to the text are legitimate. See, Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Summer 1973) pp. 162-170, and Thomas M. Conley, "Ancient Rhetoric and Modern Genre Criticism," *Communication Quarterly* (Fall 1979) pp. 47-53.

John Bright, for example, in his *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), argues that whereas one's hermeneutic is relative, the Law is absolute.

"Granted that the minister, being only human, may through ignorance or carelessness misinterpret the biblical teaching. Granted, In any case, that the time will probably never come when all his hearers, without exception, agree with everything that he says. But, if we are truly sons of the Reformation, such disagreement ideally ought not to be a mere clash of free opinion, but an objective question of the correct interpretation of a commonly recognized authority." (p. 166).

In his critical response to Dworkin, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. acknowledges that interpreters have predetermined interests in mind as they come to a text. Rather than relativizing the text as the Naturalist or the Instrumentalist are committed to doing, the Constructivist would be "more interested in getting at the truth of the case .... Their main political interest might be in getting the answer right, getting the interpretation right." See "The Politics of Theories of Interpretation," *Critical Inquiry* (1982) p. 235. Hirsch argues that the text maintains an absolutist authority over the Interpreter at least until the meaning of the text has been verified. Only then will judges or lawmakers be free to evaluate and modify existing law.


This does not mean, however, that they are willing to concede to a relativistic approach to the Constitution. In his "Is the Constitution Out of Date?" *Christianity Today* (August 8, 1986), p. 48, Charles Colson argues that "law, based on objective truth, rules over man." The point is not that all law is absolutistic, but that all law should be based on absolutistic principles. Thus, law is relative to the extent that it is not based on objective truth.

Perelman, *The New Rhetoric*, p. 120.

John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982). Stott warns that although "there is an authority inherent in Christianity which can never be destroyed" this conviction of the universal authority of Scripture "need not lead us into an obnoxious kind of dogmatism . . ." (p. 57).

Weaver, pp. 130-131.

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, for example, included the following points in a 25-point declaration of affirmations and denials: "6. We affirm that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute . . ." "7. We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite, and fixed . . ." For the full statement, see "What the Bible Means," *Christianity Today* (December 17, 1982) pp. 45-48.

We affirm that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God." Ibid., p. 48. (my italics).

Perelman warned that "The nature of the audience to which arguments can be successfully presented will determine to a great extent both the direction the arguments will take and the character, the significance that will be attributed to them." *The New Rhetoric*, p. 30.

Packer, p. 21.

See Ramm, p. 18; Packer, p. 22; and especially Zuck, p. 122 where he argues that "The role of the Spirit in interpreting the Bible does not mean that one's interpretations are infallible. Inerrancy and hence infallibility are characteristics of the Bible's original manuscripts, but not of the Bible's interpreters."

Chaim Perelman, "The New Rhetoric and the Rhetoricians: Remembrances and Comments," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, (November 1984), p. 195. Perelman argued that "the importance of juridical reasoning is essential in order to understand better the theory of argumentation as it applies itself to a particular discipline. The thesis which I have defended for thirty years is that law plays a role in regard to argumentation analogous to that of mathematics in regard to formal logic."


"Man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed. The fit is not always very good. Yet without such patterns the world appears to be such an undifferentiated
homogeneity that man is unable to make any sense out of it. Even a poor fit is more helpful to him than nothing at all." (pp. 8-9).

These constructs will constantly be in a state of revision as new ways of perceiving reality are tested against reality. pp. 23 & 134-135.


59 Golden and Makau, pp. 158-159.

60 Ibid., p. 172.

61 The helical model would suggest that each successive utilization of the process leads to greater insights which, ideally, are reflected by ever more accurate constructions of the valid interpretation. For a discussion of the circular and helical models of communication, see Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl, Communication Models (New York: Longman Inc., 1981). pp. 12-17.


63 Ibid., p. 154.


65 Ibid., p. 190.

66 Jean Piaget, The Construction of Reality in the Child, trans. Margaret Cook (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1954). The burden of the entire volume is to demonstrate how children come to understand objects, space, cause-effect, and time in the world around them. Piaget describes the process of a child's establishing, testing, and confirming of schematic constructions of the universe.


68 Ibid., p. 50.

69 Scult, p. 224. Scult argues that, "For human beings who possess a sacred text, the development of understanding is a function of how they work out the linguistic possibilities that constitute and are projected in understanding their text." What he is acknowledging is that there are numberless conceivable ways of viewing the text, and that understanding comes through first, possessing the options and then, choosing from among them.

70 Conley, p. 51.


The stance of the researcher has been compared to that of a detective in his search for clues. Like the proverbial search for the needle in the haystack, he pursues every avenue with the assurance that the facts can be found if the search is diligent enough. This image seems appropriate for the biblical interpreter. See Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), pp. 51-82.

Steven E. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). Steven Toulmin, English philosopher, with a major interest and background in logic and the philosophy of science, has focused attention on the practical side of argumentation; that is, on informal reasoning processes such as those used in jurisprudence and, for that matter, all the arts and sciences.


Ibid., preface.

Ibid., p. 1.


Toulmin, *Uses*, p. 149.

Ibid., pp. 148-149.

Ibid., p. 147.


89 Ibid., p. 8.
92 Ibid., p. 2.
93 Ibid., p. 10.
94 Ibid., p. 111.
95 Ibid., p. 111.
96 Ibid., p. 12.
97 Ibid., p. 17.
98 Ibid., pp. 94-97.
99 Ibid., p. 97.
100 Toulmin, *Introduction*, p. 25.
103 Toulmin, *Uses*, p. 98.
104 Ibid., p. 100.
109 Ibid., p. 86.
112 Toulmin, *Uses*, p. 103.
113 Ibid., p. 106.

117 I am distinguishing, at this evaluative point, between the source of arguments, be they principles for biblical hermeneutics or topics for rhetorical invention, and the tests of arguments. Tests of reasonableness give attention to the probable acceptability of the arguments by their intended audience(s), while tests of rationality focus on the formal structures of the arguments.

118 Barry J. Wadsworth, Piaget's Theory of Cognitive and Affective Development, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1979), p. 10. Wadsworth argues that any interpreter of life's objects or events organizes the environment in "cognitive or mental structures...schemata" by which he adapts to the world around. If so, it becomes the work of the critic to evaluate how and how well the original interpreter has adapted his interpretations to surrounding phenomena and organized his arguments. He must determine whether or not the interpreter has grasped the environment successfully and accurately. This necessitates an ability to view the world not only from the authors' perspectives, but also from a view which would be acceptable to all reasonable and rational men.

119 Toulmin has employed these two adjectives (sound and strong) to describe arguments that are rational, or formally sound, and reasonable, or substantively strong. See, Introduction, pp. 113-115.

120 Ramm, p. 139.


122 Toulmin recognizes that, "It is often reasonable to start by assuming one particular conclusion in the absence of evidence to the contrary. Similarly, where the evidence is conflicting, it is often reasonable to start by assuming one of two possible positions until these conflicts have been resolved." Introduction, p. 82. The hermeneutical circle does not meet the demand for such a processing of multiple arguments at a time.

123 Zuck warns that "The ministry of the Holy Spirit in Bible Interpretation does not mean interpreters can ignore common sense and logic." p. 126. Thus, the interpreter must demonstrate not only that the parts fit the whole, but also that the entire argument is sound and strong.

124 This adaptation was first suggested to me by Hirsch in his The Aims of Interpretation. He, in turn, credits Jean Piaget who described the process in his The Construction of Reality in the Child. Hirsch, quoting Piaget, demonstrates the schematic function at work in a physical setting.

"Take for example, the following problem. The child is presented with a model, about one square meter in size, representing three mountains in relief; he is to reconstruct the different perspectives in which a little doll views them in varying positions that follow a given order. No technical or verbal difficulty impedes the child, for he may simply point with his finger showing the possible perspectives. Yet far from representing viewpoints, the child always considers his own perspective as absolute and thus attributes it to the doll without suspecting this confusion...[this is a potential problem, by the say, of the hermeneutical circle]... Then, when the child disengages himself from this initial egocentrism and masters the relationships involved in these problems, we witness a totality of transitional phases. To represent to himself space or objects in space is necessarily to reconcile in a single act the different possible perspectives on reality and no longer be satisfied to adopt them successively..."
Now, if it is possible for the child to imagine himself as occupying several positions at one time, it is obvious that it is rather by representing to himself the perspective of another person and by coordinating it with his own that he will solve such a problem in concrete reality. As we have seen, three formative processes are necessary to the elaboration of object concept: the accommodation of the organs which makes it possible to foresee the reappearance of bodies; the coordination of schemata which makes it possible to endow each of these bodies with a multiplicity of interconnected qualities; and the deduction peculiar to sensorimotor reasoning which makes it possible to understand displacements of bodies and to reconcile their permanence with their apparent variations. (pp. 30-31, my italics).

Although John Holt, *How Children Learn*, does not use the term schema, he amply illustrates the process of interpretation as he describes the way in which children come to understand the meaning of words, objects, and events. Reminding us that as interpreters we will "cross the line between ignorance and insight many times before we truly understand," Holt notes that

"In practice, this means that you get a faint hunch, lose it, get it again, test it, lose it again, get it again - and all this many times over. You think that a word says such and such; it seems to work; you meet the word again, and try a new hunch; it doesn't work, causes an inconsistency; you correct the mistake and go on. After many times, you know the word." (p. 158).

Holt offers many other fine examples of interpretation by means of a schematic method. His basic thesis is that everyone comes to an understanding of new phenomenon by identifying and testing as many possible explanations of that phenomenon as possible.

"Here we have very strong evidence that the most elementary aspects of verbal interpretation follow the same ground rules as our perception and interpretation of the world," Hirsch, *Alms*, p. 33.

The Interpreter begins with what he knows. As more information is gathered in and evaluated, he is able to make better and better guesses. See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Philosophy of Composition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 159.


See Lee Odell, "Piaget, Problem-Solving, and Freshman Composition," *College Composition and Communication* (February 1973), in which he explains why and how we seek a better understanding of our world. "We engage in these activities [interpretational activities] because we feel some dissonance, some disequilibrium. We conclude them when, through some combination of assimilation and accommodation, we have eliminated the dissonance." (p. 36).

See discussion below.


The former set of terms appears in his earlier volume, *Uses of Argument*, the latter set in his co-authored *An Introduction to Reasoning*. The essential meaning is the same in either set of terms despite the title change.

Toulmin, *Uses*, p. 15.


Hirsch, *Validity*, p. 70.


Ibid., pp. 159-177.

Ibid., pp. 15-16.


Ehninger and Brockrlede, *Decision by Debate*, pp. 74-89.


Ehninger and Brockrlede, *Decision by Debate*, p. 100.


Paragraph six of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy's statement on biblical hermeneutics, for example, states, "We affirm that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute." *Christianity Today* (December, 17, 1982), p. 47.


Ibid., p. 55.

Weaver, *Ethics*, p. 16.

Weaver, *Language*, p. 212.

Ibid., p. 213.

Ibid., p. 212-213.

Ibid., p. 213.

Ibid., p. 213.

Ibid., p. 214.

Ibid., p. 214.

Ibid., p. 207.

Ibid., p. 215.


Ibid., p. 59.

See, for example, recent publications by Howard Kahane, *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 3-133; Irving M. Copl,

Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, for example, appear ready to abandon a close evaluation of valid or fallacious logical proofs because "an estimation of the strength of a proof is a personal judgment," Decision By Debate, p. 100. See also, Perelman's "The Rational and the Reasonable," where he seems ready to exclude the former in favor of the latter.

Golden and Makau, p. 167.

Perelman, "The Rational and the Reasonable," p. 117. Elsewhere Perelman has distinguished between the rational and the reasonable, asserting that the rational is based on the mathematical model, immutable divine standards, a priori self-evident truths, natural law, and the Kantian Categorical imperative. It seeks formal validity, logical coherence, purposefulness and conformity to precedents. See Golden, The Rhetoric of Western Thought, p. 426.

Stephen Toulmin, "Logic and the Criticism of Arguments," The Rhetoric of Western Thought, p. 396.


Toulmin, Introduction, p. 132.

Ibid., pp. 151-155.

Ibid., pp. 139-149.

Ibid., pp. 135-138.

Ibid., pp. 157-165.

Ibid., pp. 167-175.

John Holt makes this point with the following anecdote from How Children Learn, p. 174.

"The story is told of Einstein that, after the observations of some astronomers seemed to have confirmed his Theory of Relativity, a woman congratulated him on his theory having been proved right. He said, "Madam, a thousand experiments can never prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong." Even when the facts seem to support our reasoning, we must, like Einstein, not assume that we have found the final truth."


Wadsworth, p. 16.

Golden reminds us of "Plato's stress on thinking as a fundamental aspect of rhetorical discourse . . . that the soul is capable of carrying on a dialogue with itself, 'that to form an opinion is to speak,' and that thinking and discourse are essentially the same process," fulfilling "the purpose of arousing the soul, and pointing the way toward justice." "Plato Revisited," (p. 18).

190 Zuck, pp. 128-129.


192 Ibid., p. 13.


194 Ibid., p. 220.


196 Golden and Makau, p. 171, (my emphasis).

197 Wadsworth, pp. 11 and 13.


"When two observers look at a building from different standpoints, they each see quite different aspects of the building, yet, remarkably enough, both observers see the same whole building. They may not even be looking at the same sides, yet each of them imagines (vaguely or explicitly) the unseen sides - otherwise, they would not conceive the object as a building. Thus, while the explicit components of vision are in each case different, what those components refer to may be absolutely identical. A similar phenomenon occurs when an interpreter notices or emphasizes traits that are different from those noticed by another. The explicit components of meaning are different, yet the reference is to a whole meaning, not a partial one, and this object of reference may be the same for both interpreters."


202 The stir caused, for example, by Robert H. Gundry's *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) demonstrates the challenge new ways of explaining a text face. See the numerous articles in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March, 1983), pp. 31-121 and *Christianity Today* (February 3, 1984), pp. 36-38, which reports the expulsion of Gundry from the Evangelical Theological Society based on his interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew.

203 Hirsch reminds the interpreter that, "To verify is to show that a conclusion is true; to validate is to show that a conclusion is probably true on the basis of what is known." *Validity*, p. 171.

McQuail, p. 31.


Allen Scult, "The Relationship Between Rhetoric and Hermeneutics Reconsidered," p. 222, in contrasting views of biblical hermeneutics makes the following observation.

"Gadamer appears to recognize the inextricable connection between interpretive understanding and the communication of that understanding to others. In discussing the relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric, Gadamer states that the defense of the probable through convincing and persuading is 'as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation, as [it is] the aim and measure of the art of oration and persuasion.' In another essay, Gadamer observes that the sermon, not the explanatory commentary of the exegete, is the most complete hermeneutical act because 'the actual completion of understanding does not take place in the sermon as such, but rather in its reception as an appeal that is directed to each person who hears it.'"

Ehninger and Brockriede, *Decision by Debate*, pp. 29-30.


See Golden and Makau, "Perspectives," p. 173, where they argue for a "moral dimension to argumentative validity."

Ibid., p. 169.

Ibid., p. 170.

As the Apostle Paul refused to do at Berea, Acts 17:11.

CHAPTER IV

THE STRUCTURE OF THE ἹΟΠΝΕΙΑ ARGUMENTS

The biblical preacher is confronted with an infinite number of interpretive problems. Numerous exegetical decisions precede every exposition of a particular theological or textual message. Historical, literary, grammatical, linguistic, and contextual questions must be addressed and, to some extent, resolved before the speaker gains sufficient confidence in his interpretation of the text to represent it as "the Word of God."

At times a single word or concept can create major hermeneutical dissension. Within the evangelical community today examples of such words or concepts are not difficult to discover. The term ἱοπνεία, as used by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 to define the only exception to the Scripture's "no divorce" policy, demonstrates the multiplicity of interpretations suggested for a single word. Conservative Bible scholars have promoted at least four separate meanings for the term. Some argue that it refers specifically to adultery and/or the desertion of a marriage partner. Others assert an interpretation which has ἱοπνεία mean that in the case of a cultural mandate for divorce, the faithful mate is not to be held guilty of sin should the unfaithful spouse continue in an unrepentant relationship of adultery. Some say it is an allusion to the unfaithfulness of an engaged or betrothed individual. A fourth group advocates that ἱοπνεία refers to an incestual marriage; that is, marriage to a near relative.

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the argumentation for each of these divergent interpretations of the word ἱοπνεία in order to establish the need for some method of evaluating the validity of distinct and disparate interpretations of a biblical term, concept, or text. The procedure used to delineate each of the various interpretations will be that of Steven Toulmin's
model of practical reasoning. The Toulmin model allows for a systematic mapping out of all the interpretations in detail. Having seen the development of the various arguments, it will be anticipated that the necessity for some method of evaluating particular arguments will be obvious. The first demand of this chapter, then, will be to lay out the structure of the four interpretations of the term *nopvela*. Next, it will be determined whether or not the actual mapping of the arguments is sufficient to determine the valid, that is, the most reasonable interpretation of the word or concept. If the statement and design of the arguments themselves are not sufficient to validate one interpretation over the others, we may then conclude that some additional evaluation will be necessary for judging between competing explanations.

The Problem of *nopvela*

A major moral and pastoral problem within the United States in general and the evangelical community in particular is the problem of divorce. Divorce rates have continued to climb, as reported by the Census Bureau. “Last year (1985), there were 10.2 marriages per 1,000 people, down 3 percent from 1984 and the lowest rate since 1977. At the same time, the divorce rate climbed 2 percent, to 5 divorces per 1,000 people.” From the 1920 ratio of one divorce for every seven marriages, we now have one divorce for every two marriages.

The Christian Church has not been unaffected by this trend. In fact, many denominations are providing for divorce within the Church itself. For example, “Dearly beloved, we are now gathered here to solemnize the end of one time in Matthew’s and Anne’s lives and the beginning of another.”

Thus begins the service on divorce from the new handbook of religious rituals entitled, *Ritual in a New Day*, issued by the United Methodist Church’s Task Force on the Cultural Context of Ritual. It concludes:

Matthew Surrey, do you now relinquish your status as husband of Anne, freeing her from all claims upon, and responsibility to you except those that you willingly give to all other children of God?

I do.
Even the conservative *Moody Monthly* has reported that the divorce rate among evangelicals is rapidly challenging that of the national average. In their book, *Meant to Last*, Paul E. Steele and Charles C. Ryrie argue that "The seeds for this precipitous situation were planted long ago when justification was made for divorces in what seemed to be 'rare' or 'exceptional' cases. Now we are reaping a harvest that will affect the church for generations to come."6

The "rare" or "exceptional" cases referred to may unequivocally be traced to the little word ἁμαρτία as used by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, and commonly known as the "exception clause."7 Biblicists who argue in favor of divorce state that it was Jesus' teaching from these two passages using ἁμαρτία which gives "the only legitimate ground for which a man may put away his wife . . . . It is the one exception that gives prominence to the illegitimacy of any other reason."8 In commenting on "divorce passages" in the New Testament, Ryrie has noted that, "These passages have been the subject of conflicting interpretations, chiefly regarding the meaning of ἁμαρτία . . . ."9

In the following pages, four "conflicting interpretations" of ἁμαρτία will be presented. These four approaches represent the commonly accepted options open to conservative New Testament scholars.10 Each alternative will be represented according to the Toulmin model of practical argument in order to compare and contrast each exposition to the others. This evaluation will take place in Chapter 5 of this study. It is necessary at this point, however, to state the respective positions as clearly, uncritically, and objectively as possible.

**The Erasmian View of ἁμαρτία**

The Claim of the Erasmian interpretation of ἁμαρτία is that divorce is permissible in the case of sexual sin within the marriage; or more especially, adultery and/or desertion by the marriage partner. This view was introduced in 1519 by the Middle Ages theologian and humanist, Erasmus. "The early Christian writers' interpretation of the divorce texts remained the standard view of the church in the West until the sixteenth century when Erasmus suggested a different view that was adopted by Protestant theologians."11 Contemporary evangelical defenders of this
position fall into two groups. There are those who claim a broader meaning for ἁμαρτία and contend for an exception to "no divorce" which allows for the severance of a marriage bond based on a wide range of sexual/marital sins. Another sees only adultery and/or desertion as justification for divorce. Both camps, however, do recognize the total dissolubility of a marriage through divorce precipitated by ἁμαρτία, that is, some general or specific marital unfaithfulness.

This Claim rests on the Grounds of Jesus' use of the term ἁμαρτία in the exceptive clause as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The fact of the matter is that Jesus did say, "No divorce . . . except for ἁμαρτία." That being the case, this group claims that divorce is permissible in instances of marital unfaithfulness, such as adultery and/or desertion.

In order to justify this step from Grounds to Claim, the Erasmian proponents offer at least six Warrants. First, DIVORCE FOR SEXUAL SIN WITHIN MARRIAGE, INCLUDING AND ESPECIALLY ADULTERY AND/OR DESERTION, INTERPRETS ἁμαρτία IN ITS NATURAL, BROAD SENSE. Jay E. Adams, In the Fundamentalist Journal, contends that Jesus' sanctioning of divorce in the Matthean exceptive clauses is predicated on the act of ἁμαρτία (sexual sin) rather than the result, ἁμαρτία (adultery). The reason for this focus is Jesus' desire to include all the possible sexual acts which are grounds for divorce. "Fornication covers incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism as well as adultery. To speak of adultery only, might tend to narrow the focus too much." The generalizations or Backing brought forth to establish this first Warrant are at least five in number.

(1) Lexical definitions allow for a broad interpretation of ἁμαρτία.

Erasmians recognize that the only legitimate grounds for which one mate may divorce the other is ἁμαρτία, translated "fornication." They view the word as a sweeping, generic term encompassing any sexual uncleanness. "This term may be used of all kinds of illicit sexual intercourse. . . . But though it is the generic word that is used here, it is not to be supposed that
the sense is perplexed thereby. What Jesus sets in the forefront is the sin of illicit sexual intercourse.  

R. H. Charles summarizes his conclusions, drawn from a study of πονητα in the New Testament. "Πονητα was used not only of fornication but also of other specific sexual sins . . . . Πονητα was the generic term for sexual sin as a whole." Guy Duty maintains the same conclusion.

Our view of fornication is fully certified by the evidence from the Old Testament, New Testament, Hebrew lexicons, Greek lexicons, Jewish Apocrypha, Early Christian literature, Classical Greek, Rabbinic literature, the Papi, both Eastern and Western church fathers, the Revisions, and all other authoritative sources.

(3) Πονητα is equivalent to μοιχελα (adultery) in several instances.

Although Jesus distinguishes between πονητα and μοιχελα in Matthew 15:19, and although this distinction is generally maintained throughout the New Testament, "there are instances where πονητα would seem to include μοιχελα (Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; Jude 7). The Septuagint uses πονητα to describe illicit relationships after marriage (Hosea 2:2, 4: Amos 7:17; Sirach 22:23)."

(4) Πονητα may include the element of unrepentance.

William Orr sees a close connection between fornication and habitually promiscuous behavior. Although the two words adultery and fornication are related, adultery is said to refer to one specific act of unlawful sexual intercourse, while fornication refers to many repeated acts of infidelity. A fornicator would be one whose life is characterized by sexual sin. The biblical basis for divorce, therefore, is a persistent adultery from which there is no hope of recovery; not an isolated act of infidelity, but the "breaking again and again of the seventh commandment."

(5) Context is a key to a broad interpretation of πονητα.

Charles argues that, "The meaning of πονητα can only be determined from the context. It can be used generically of all sexual sin or of any specific sexual sin." Whereas in some contexts (i.e., Acts 15) πονητα means something more narrow than sexual sin in general, it is
held by the Erasmlan school that in the exception clauses it may be taken in the more general sense, especially in light of the adultery context of Matthew 5:27-30.

A second Warrant set forth to support the Erasmlan Claim is that DIVORCE FOR SEXUAL SIN, ESPECIALLY ADULTERY AND/OR DESERTION, FOLLOWS THE DIVORCE FOR "MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS" PRECEDENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. Three facts serve as Backing for this generalization.

(1) God allowed divorce in the Old Testament for "marital unfaithfulness."

Jay Adams identifies two cases in Deuteronomy (22:13-19 and 22:28-29) in which the crimes of slander and rape are punishable by a "no divorce" marriage regulation. He argues that these penalties would be no penalty if the general rule for all marriage was "no divorce." Adams concludes, "The existence of such a penalty demands acceptance of the view that God recognized the possibility of legitimate divorce after marriage."25

(2) Jesus corrected and interpreted properly the Old Testament basis for divorce.

In his encounter with the Pharisees in Matthew 19, Jesus responded to their test question on divorce by addressing its basic legality. According to Guy Duty, "Christ did not deny the fact of dissolution in the Deuteronomic statute, but He restricted it to one cause."26 Thus, divorce, which in the Old Testament had been legal for any reason, is now correctly limited to *mpvēta* only for those under the New Covenant.

(3) God, in Old Testament contexts, divorced the nation of Israel for "marital unfaithfulness."

Charles contends that, "In the Old Testament this spiritual marriage of Israel with Yahweh was not indissoluble. It is cancelled in Jer. III. 8, and Israel is divorced."27 Adams adds that, "Jehovah's covenant of wedlock was made null and void for all Israelites who did not obey its conditions."28
A third Warrant for the Erasmian view is that DIVORCE FOR SEXUAL SIN WITHIN MARRIAGE RECOGNIZES THE LEGITIMATE DISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE. Five facts Back this assertion.

(1) The Old Testament cure for adultery was stoning.

Using texts such as Deuteronomy 22:22 and Leviticus 18:29, proponents argue that adultery effectively breaks the marriage bond. Stoning was a legal and physical recognition of the fact.

It was Theodorus Beza (1519-1605), the French theologian and Protestant reformer, who first argued that the exception clause would never have been added had the prescribed punishment of death by stoning for adultery still been practiced by the Jews. Christ prescribed a new means of dealing with sexual infidelity within marriage since the old penalty was having no effect.

This basic position is maintain by R. H. Charles in his 1921 treatise on divorce and remarriage as well as present-day Erasmians. This trend has led Heth and Wenham to conclude that "some evangelical Interpreters believe that Jesus substitutes one form of the letter of the law (death for adultery) for another form of the letter of the law (divorce)."29

(2) The New Testament cure for adultery is divorce.

John Murray states that there was no divorce provision in the Old Testament for the crime of adultery. Rather the stringency of the Law required death for marital unfaithfulness. The marriage was dissolved through the death of the guilty party. Only this grim prospect freed the innocent party for remarriage. Jesus, however, "institutes divorce as the means of relief for the husband in the case of adultery on the part of his wife. Here then is something novel and it implies that the requirement of death for adultery is abrogated in the economy Jesus himself inaugurated."30

(3) Sexual sin breaks the marriage bond.
Thus, "Marital unfaithfulness so destroys the one-flesh union between husband and wife that God in his wisdom seems to allow relief to the innocent victim in the exceptive clause."

Again, "It is rather the physical union which makes marriage; and it is the contracting of a physical union outside marriage which breaks marriage."

(4) Even as God divorced Israel so Joseph was about to divorce Mary in Matthew chapter 1.

The fact that God himself claimed to have divorced His own people for their fornication was reason enough for Joseph to likewise divorce Mary in Matthew 1, and for Jesus to offer the exception of Matthew 5 and 19. "Plainly, God knows what adultery and fornication are, always uses the terms properly and does not try to confuse us. If God says that He divorced Israel, pictured as a woman married to Him, for sinful adulteries, then His use of terms makes it clear that married persons can be legitimately divorced."

(5) Jesus assumed the dissolubility of a broken bond when He said, "... let no man separate."

Messiah ruled that what God hath "joined together" the Jews must not "put asunder." This "put asunder" proves that Jesus spoke of divorce as being dissolution. "Put asunder" means "to cut; split; break;" and the Deuteronomic divorce was a cutting of the wedding bond, and Christ recognized it as such.

The fourth Warrant given in support of the Erasmian view is that DIVORCE FOR SEXUAL SIN EXPLAINS THE SURPRISED RESPONSE OF THE DISCIPLES TO JESUS' EXCEPTION CLAUSE. J. Dwight Pentecost summarizes the context of Matthew 19. "Thus there were two schools of interpretation of the law of divorce. The school of Shammai interpreted the law very strictly, whereas the school of Hillel interpreted it very liberally. The Pharisees attempted to embroil Christ in this controversy."

David Smith adds to this explanation.

The Mosaic Law permitted divorce when a wife proved faithless; but the Rabbinical interpreters after their wont disputed over this enactment. The school of Shammai, adhering to the letter of the Law, held that a wife should not be divorced except for unfaithfulness; whereas the school of Hillel, with a laxity very agreeable to the general inclination allowed a husband to put away his wife "for every cause" - if he disliked her, if he fancied another woman.
more, if her cookery were not to his taste. The doctrine of Hillel was the common practice in our Lord’s day. . . .

Against this background, exponents of this fourth Warrant present three items of evidence to serve as Backing for their generalization.

(1) Jesus did not side with the popular (Hillel) position of his day.

Gerald Formanek notes that the disciples’ response, “it is better not to marry,” demonstrates that they held the Hillel persuasion. They too believed that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 permitted divorce for more than the crime of adultery. “The disciples found Jesus’ declaration hard to receive, for He had made the marriage bond more inviolable than that to which they were accustomed. Jesus answered them, ‘Not all accept this statement but those to whom it is given.’” (v. 11).\(^{37}\)

(2) Jesus did side with the strict (Shammaites) position of his day.

“Our Lord embraced the side of the Shammaites,”\(^{38}\) conclude the Erasmians. The literal Hillel position on Deuteronomy is rejected, since it allowed divorce for grounds less culpable than unchastity. The Shammaites correctly concluded, however, that marital unfaithfulness provided the only legitimate allowance for divorce. Jesus confirmed their conservative interpretation.

(3) Jesus, however, did not demand divorce as did Hillel and Shammai.

There are at least two instances in which Jesus’ teaching on divorce differs from that of both Hillel and Shammai. These distinctives may explain the surprised response of the disciples as seen in Matthew 19:10. Neither school of interpretation identified any fault or responsibility on the part of a husband in the proceedings leading to a divorce or its future consequences. Again, both schools taught that in certain cases divorce was not an option, but rather a duty on the part of the offended husband. “Jesus’ teaching contradicts Shammai in both these areas.”\(^{39}\)

The fifth Warrant for the Erasmian interpretation of ἁμείρω asserts that DIVORCE FOR SEXUAL SIN ACKNOWLEDGES THE REALISTIC NECESSITY OF DIVORCE, ESPECIALLY FOR THE INTENT OF REMARRIAGE, IN A SINFUL WORLD. Two forms of Backing stand behind this statement.
(1) God does not expect an innocent partner to live with a sexually perverted mate.

It happens frequently that married persons are convicted of sex crimes so shocking that the public and press are barred from the trial. They are crimes for which God ordered the death penalty under Moses. Does God now require His innocent saints to be one flesh with them? Can these offenders, after serving a prison term for their sex crimes, return and renew their one-flesh relation with their innocent mates who . . . were forbidden to divorce them?40

(2) God does not expect an innocent party to live without a sexual partner.

Erasmlans cannot accept that "the most reasonable One who ever walked the earth [would] have tied an innocent partner to a sodomite, a beast-associate, or a venereal disease spreader."41 They acknowledge that biblical marriage presents an ideal in which, in normal cases, death alone dissolves the sacred bond. In a fallen world, however, in which perverse unfaithfulness abounds, the innocent mate must have freedom to remove himself/herself from a defective bond.

The final Warrant sustaining the Erasmian Grounds that the use of the term *mpveta* in Jesus’ exceptive clause allows for divorce in the case of sexual sin within marriage claims that DIvorce For sexual sin represents the traditional Protestant view since the Reformation. The backing for this Warrant are as many as the Protestant theologians brought forth in support of the interpretation. Even those who oppose the Erasmian view freely admit that within the Protestant tradition, it has been "the popular view from the Reformation."42

William A. Heth has remarked that Erasmus’ interpretation of the exception clauses was adopted and defended by the Protestant reformers as soon as it was made public. "When the Council of Trent met on November 11, 1563 to discuss the sacrament of matrimony, the Protestant interpretation of the divorce texts had been crystallised."43 He further notes that

When commenting on Christ’s words on divorce Luther states emphatically that Christ allowed divorce ONLY in the case of adultery and desertion . . . (Calvin's) interpretation comes close to Luther, but the practical application of his exegesis is more rigid. . . . It was left to Theodore Beza (1519-1605) to systematise and amplify the exegetical results of Calvin. . . . The early English reformer, William Tyndale (d. 1536), interprets 1 Corinthians 7:15 like Beza because he cannot conceive of desertion without adultery occurring. Tyndale’s "exegesis is a comprehensive usage of the basic arguments of Luther." It was through Tyndale that Luther’s interpretation reached England in 1527, and from an exegetical standpoint the English Reformers (Tyndale, Cranmer and Hooper) do not add anything new when compared with the Continental writers.44
The Protestant position was finally codified in the Westminster Confession, Sections V and VI of Chapter XXIV which deals with marriage and divorce. The document read, in part, "In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce (Matt. 5:32), and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead."

It also warned that,

Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied . . . is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage.

And thus Heth concludes that, "The Westminster Confession has been influential in the beliefs and practices of Protestants ever since its emergence in 1648." It is the exegetical position of Erasmus, supported by Luther and the other Reformers, and confirmed by the Confession, that still dominates the Protestant teaching of divorce.

In summary, the Erasmian interpretation of *nopvela* in the exception clause of Jesus allows for divorce in the case of sexual sin occurring within the marriage based on six Warrants. These Warrants authorize the above Claim based on the generalizations of (1) a broad use of the term *nopvela*, (2) the Old Testament precedent of divorce for adultery, (3) the legitimacy of the dissolubility of marriage, (4) the explanation of the surprised response of the disciples to Jesus' divorce statement, (5) an acknowledgment of the realistic necessity of divorce in a sinful world, and (6) the longstanding tradition of Protestant theologians since the Reformation.

**The Patristic View of *nopvela***

The Claim of the Patristic interpretation of *nopvela* is that those who are forced by the mores of the community to divorce a willfully adulterous spouse are not guilty of violating Jesus' absolute prohibition of divorce. "Only where a man has been forced to divorce his wife because of her own unchastity is the husband exempt from being blamed as adulterous for initiating divorce."

William A. Heth, a proponent of the Patristic view, has summarized the position as follows:
Jesus, by means of the legally precise exception phrase, is not adopting his culture's more respecting the need to put away one's unfaithful wife; nor is He giving "grounds" for divorce in this situation as though they were available to the believer today. In all probability, He is saying that He does not hold his disciples guilty for violating his absolute prohibition of divorce (Matt. 19:4-8) should they be forced willy-nilly by the mores of the community around them to put away such a partner. Like Paul, who did not confront head-on the problem of slavery in his day but encouraged believers to find their freedom in the Lord, Jesus exempts his disciples from the responsibility for the divorce which an unfaithful Jewish wife brings about. The exception clause does not consider the "ground" on which a Jewish husband may claim his right to divorce and remarry. Jesus, instead, seems to be reflecting on a situation his disciples would face in a legal and sociological environment that perceived a sexual sin like adultery as first and foremost a sin against God (cf. Exod. 20:14; Prov. 2:16-17). The sin demanded punishment by the community as a whole, and the husband of an unfaithful wife would not be allowed to pardon her. Jesus says that if a separation is compelling in such cases, He does not hold his disciples guilty for breaking his precept of "no divorce."

This Claim rests on the Grounds of Jesus' use of the term μορφη in the context of the exceptive clause as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. In the context of "no allowance for divorce" Jesus gives a key exception. Μορφη, the exception, means the kind of sexual sin within marriage that would "require" divorce. In this sense, μορφη could easily be translated as the Erasmian view translates it, adultery. However, the meaning in context includes the social "necessity" of divorce because of adultery.

In justifying this step from Grounds to Claim, the Patristic proponents offer at least seven Warrants. First, NO-GUILT, REQUIRED DIVORCE INTERPRETS ΜΟΡΦΗ IN ITS NATURAL, BROAD SENSE.

Backing brought forward to establish this warrant are four in number.

(1) Lexical definitions and biblical usages allow for a broad interpretation of μορφη. Hath explains that the use of μορφη is best understood as referring to adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. These sexual sins were not only punishable by death, according to Leviticus 18 and 20, but also were detestable among the Jewish community.

Sexual aberrations which involved flagrant, unthinkable violations of the law, something abhorrent to the Jewish conscience, would be described by the term "immorality" and its related Greek and Hebrew forms. On this point we are basically in agreement with modern-day defenders of the Erasmian view.

(2) Μορφη can be used as an equivalent to μοιχη (adultery).
As G. J. Wenham notes, "It seems that unchastity (μορμοτις) means any sexual immorality, most frequently adultery."51

(3) Context is a key to a broad interpretation of μορμοτις.

The importance placed on context by those who hold to the Patristic interpretation of μορμοτις cannot be overstated. Their criticisms of other positions are based on contextual arguments.52 Also, their presentations of their own interpretation depend, to a great extent, upon an understanding of the norms and values of the culture into which Jesus delivered his message on μορμοτις. Gordon Wenham's three part series on biblical marriage and divorce devotes the first third of the series to "Cultural Background."53 The latter articles, also, dip deeply into customs of the day.54

Heth, therefore, instructs,

... we assume that the reader will agree that it is the context in which a word appears, where it is used on the lips of a particular individual, with a given meaning that he intends to convey - all of this indicates to us the semantic value of a particular language symbol. We are all aware of the mistake made too often in the exegetical practices of the past where a single word virtually becomes autonomous and carries a perceived meaning wherever it occurs.55

(4) Μορμοτις includes any and all sexual sins condemned by one's culture.

Heth concludes that μορμοτις in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is most likely an abbreviated form intended to be understood as a synonym for עיון בזרע (the nakedness of a thing) as used in Deuteronomy 24:1.56 The first century Jewish community recognized this inclusive "definition" as a reference to sexual sins that must be punished by the community.57

Through her own acts of unfaithfulness, a Jewish wife could cause the marriage to end, and her husband would be unable to protest. The marital regulations of the Jewish community would, in such a case, hold the wife responsible for the divorce while the husband would bear no guilt. Thus, Evald Lovestam concludes that, "when the teachings in question are intended for people with this background, they relieve the man in this case of the responsibility for the divorce and its consequences. The wife bears it. That is what the exceptive clause means.58
A second Warrant given in favor of the Patristic Claim is that NO-GUILT, REQUIRED DIVORCE MAINTAINS CONSISTENCY WITH THE ABSOLUTE "NO DIVORCE" PROHIBITION PASSAGES.

Wenham places the exception clause, as interpreted by the Patristic tradition, in congruence with the teaching of the Old Testament. "Jesus binds husbands to their wives with the same exclusiveness as wives were bound to their husbands under the Old Covenant."59 Heth notes that "the Matthean exception clauses" are "congruent with the rest of our Lord's teaching on divorce..."60

"No divorce" interpretations of several proof texts are given as Backing of this particular Warrant.

(1) Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 prohibit divorce.

These two passages are identified as "the texts upon which Jesus based His teaching of the indissolubility of marriage."61

Heth and Wenham discover a foundational principle, one that regulates an entire theology of the marriage relationship, in the first two chapters of Scripture. One's understanding of this primary canon controls the interpretation of both Moses' legislation in the Old Testament and Jesus' teaching in the New.

Here, in the context of the creation of the woman, whose nature, disposition and abilities supplied what was lacking in the man, lies the divine directive of verse 24; "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."62

Abel Isaksson allows Jesus to interpret the meaning of this foundational text when he states, "It is clear from the context in Matt. 19.3ff. that Jesus was referring primarily to what is written in Gen. 2:24 as proof that marriage is indissoluble."63

(2) Leviticus 18 prohibits divorce.

Leviticus 18 addresses the problem of unlawful marriages. These regulations which forbid particular unions (a man with his mother, sister, brother's wife, wife's sister, etc.) are based
not only on literal blood relationships, but also on the "blood relationships" that are created by virtue of wedlock.

Assuming that the ordinances and statutes referred to in Leviticus 18 point back to the Genesis passages, Heth and Wenham conclude that, "Though Leviticus 18 makes it clear that legal divorce does not dissolve the marital union and the relationships established through that marriage, it does not make it perfectly clear whether or not extramarital relations so defile the original union that it is annulled." As a result, the original prohibition is maintained.

(3) Deuteronomy 24:1-4 prohibits divorce.

The issue at stake in Deuteronomy 24 is whether or not a divorced and remarried individual is eligible for remarriage to the original mate in the event of a divorce from or the death of the second partner. Heth and Wenham argue that the crucial point is not whether the interpreter understands the remarriage to the first partner as adulterous or incestuous. What is important is that the "one flesh" marriage bond is indestructible. Neither divorce nor sexual relations with a third party annihilates the original union. Thus, "Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does not teach a dissolution divorce. . . . On the contrary, the passage seems to imply that to seek a divorce is to try to break a relationship with one's wife that in reality cannot be broken."65

(4) Malachi 2:13-16 prohibits divorce.

Heth argues, "It is significant that when the prophet of God addresses the problem of intermarriage in Malachi 2:13-16, along with the rejection of divorce goes an emphasis on single marriage. . . ."66 Wenham elaborates further that in the pre-exilic period of Israel's history divorce had proved to be an expensive endeavor, and thus was limited by economic factors. But during the exile, divorce patterns had begun to alter; divorce was less repugnant and cheaper than ever before. "There are hints in Malachi that the same ideas were spreading in Israel. He found it necessary to remind the people that God hates divorce (2:16) which suggests that it was more commonplace. The prophet could perhaps only appeal to religious ideas in opposing divorce if it had become much cheaper."67
(5) Mark 10:2-12 prohibits divorce.

In the pronouncement recorded in v. 9 (What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder) the third person negative imperative is used and it formulates absolutely Jesus’ prohibition of divorce itself. It involves God Himself in the matter. . . . It is a pronouncement that is not based on Deut. 24:1, about which the Pharisees had inquired, but rather on Gen. 1:27 and 2:24.68


Joseph A. Fitzmyer establishes this Lucan saying a “declaratory legal statement,” resulting in an absolute prohibition of divorce. Having related the passage to its Matthew 5:32 parallel, Fitzmyer concludes that, “. . . the saying is not only a prohibition of divorce but a judgment about the husband’s marriage after the divorce, relating both to adultery, proscribed by Old Testament legislation. . . .”69

(7) Romans 7:2-3 prohibits divorce.

Wenham notes that Paul makes brief references only to marriage and divorce in Romans 7 where the apostle writes that “a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies . . . and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.” Concluding that Paul “appears to concur with the patristic view,” Wenham adds, “Since Paul does not mention the possibility of divorce here, he probably has in mind the law of Christ rather than Roman or Old Testament law.”70

(8) I Corinthians 7 prohibits divorce.

“In I Corinthians 7 he (Paul) discusses the ethics of marriage in some detail, and allows separation but not divorce. This leaves open the possibility of reconciliation later.”71

Heth and Wenham summarize their harmonization of the New Testament teachings on divorce as follows:

1. God intends marriage to be an indissoluble union. “What God has joined together, let no man separate” (Mark 10:2-9 = Matt. 19:3-6).
2. Divorce followed by remarriage constitutes adultery (Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18).

3. Married couples should not separate or divorce (1 Cor. 7:10).

4. In cases of separation or divorce, those involved must remain single or be reconciled (1 Cor. 7:11).

5. Divorce is a kind of adultery and leads the woman to commit adultery, except in the case of unchastity (Matt. 5:32a).

6. "Whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9).

Statements 1-4 are in obvious harmony. Particularly interesting is the way Paul's summary of the Lord's teaching (statements 3 and 4) fits in with the remarks attributed to Jesus in the Gospels (statements 1 and 2). If marriage is indissoluble (1), this means spouses should not separate or divorce (3). Further, if marriage is indissoluble then a second marriage must count as adultery (2). Elsewhere Paul seems to echo the gospel terminology of statement 2 more closely when he says remarriage before the death of one's spouse is adultery (Rom. 7:2-3; cf. 1 Cor. 7:39).72

A third Warrant for the patristic view is that NO-GUILT, REQUIRED DIVORCE MAINTAINS THE PERMANENCE OF THE "ONE-FLESH" MARRIAGE BOND. Four statements of Backing stand behind this generalization.

1. Marriage is based upon a "one-flesh" concept of relationship.

The essence of this principle is that sexual intercourse, within the context of or as the consummation of a marriage, establishes a relationship between a husband and wife that is as intimate as that of parent and child or brother and sister. They become, in the words of Genesis 2:24, "one flesh." While it is accepted in our culture that marriage to one's own flesh and blood is forbidden, based on our understanding of biological blood relationships, it is foreign to our way of thinking to view marriage as establishing an identical set of relationships through marriage. This, however, is the biblical concept, according to Wenham.

Marriage thus creates both vertical blood relationships in the form of children and horizontal "blood" relationships between the spouses. The wife who marries into a family becomes an integral and permanent part of that family in the same way that children born into that family do. Even if her husband dies, or divorces her, she still has this relationship with the family; she is not merely a daughter-in-law but a daughter of the family.73

2. This "one-flesh" concept is not renounced, but corroborated in Deuteronomy 24.
Heth reports that during dialogue between Jesus and his questioners in Matthew 19, Christ pushed back beyond the Mosaic regulation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in order to demonstrate the priority of Genesis 2:24. In fact, "The enduring nature of the 'one flesh' bond, created through marriage, is the very basis for the legislation found in Deuteronomy 24:4."74

Rejecting the notion that legal divorce and remarriage to another dissolves this "one flesh" relationship, Heth argues that Deuteronomy 24 actually indicates the opposite conclusion. To attempt the destruction of the "one flesh" bond through divorce, and even remarriage, is to attempt the impossible. Heth parallels a parent's relationship to his children with the marriage relationship. Even as a father cannot break the blood bond between himself and his child, no matter how immoral and disreputable that child may be, so a husband cannot break the "flesh and blood bond" which has been established through the covenant and consummation of marriage. "Thus Deuteronomy 24:1-4 understands the 'one-flesh' bond of marriage to survive legal or customary divorce as well as sexual relations with a third party. Indeed, this 'one flesh' is the very basis for the legislation found in Deuteronomy 24:4."75

(3) This "one-flesh" relationship is nullified only by the death of a marriage partner.

Whereas several New Testament passages refer to the issue of divorce, in which both partners are still living, Wenham notes two references which actually refer to the dissolution of the "one flesh" relationship. It is neither a sexual act (immorality) nor a legal act (divorce) which annuls the union, however. Death alone has the power to effect a permanent nullification. "Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 both refer to a situation of death which Paul clearly says "frees" a person to remarry. . . . The marriage bond unites both parties until the death of one of them."76

(4) Even sexual sin does not break the "one-flesh" relationship.

Heth acknowledges the apparent possibility that sexual immorality may be the one exception to which Jesus refers in Matthew 5 and 19. He notes that some rightly argue that sexual intercourse, while not the essence of marriage, is the consummation of it, without which there is no "one flesh" or kinship relationship. They then conclude that sexual intercourse with a
third party effectively dismantles that relationship, being a violation of the ground upon which the
marriage was established. Heth considers whether or not this challenge is a substantial one.

The answer... depends on the apparently well-established understanding that "one flesh" in
Genesis 2:24 denotes kin or "blood" relations. But Genesis 2:24 does not give any indication
of whether or not defilement of the "one flesh" thereby dissolves it. This must be determined
from other aspects of Old Testament legislation in which the holy and moral standards of the
covenant-keeping God are reflected. We know of at least two other pieces of Old Testament
legislation (Leviticus 18 and Deuteronomy 24) that are based upon the Genesis 2:24
teaching that man and woman become "one flesh" through marital relations. Neither appears
to lend any support to the view that extra-marital relations dissolve or obliterate the original
"one flesh" union, and the kinship relationships that come into being through it.77

A fourth Warrant argues that NO-GUILT, REQUIRED DIVORCE TAKES INTO ACCOUNT
THE JEWISH "FORCED DIVORCE" CONTEXT.

According to Jewish marital laws the wife could cause the break-up of a marriage by being
unfaithful and the man had no say in the matter. If the wife was unfaithful, it was thus she and
not the man who was responsible for the divorce. When the teachings in question are
intended for people with this background, they relieve the man in this case of the
responsibility for the divorce and its consequences. The wife bears it. That is what the
exceptional clause means.78

Three sets of Backing are given for this Warrant.

(1) Old Testament stoning for adultery had been replaced, by New Testament times, with
divorce.

According to Wenham, many Christians reading the Old Testament are unaware that
before Christ's pronouncements, the seventh commandment was applied only to married women,
not to married men. As interpreted by Jewish leaders, the prohibition against adultery did not
address the indulgence of a married man with a single girl or even a prostitute. "If on the other
hand a married, or even a betrothed, woman had sexual intercourse with anyone except her
husband that counted as adultery, so she and her partner were liable to be put to death (Lev.
20:10; Deut. 22:22-24)."79

That was the Old Testament prescription for marital unfaithfulness. By Jesus' day,
however, stoning was seldom practiced and divorce had become the customary response. Heth
and Wenham quote David Hill's commentary in this regard. "A man was not allowed, he was
compelled, by Jewish law (in New Testament times) to divorce his wife when fornication before marriage was discovered (cf. Matt. 1:19; Deut. 22:13ff.) or adultery detected. . . . 80

(2) Sexual sins were to be punished within the religious community.

The Mishnah would never have been obliged to articulate its precise statutes on adultery if the practice of stoning had been enforced, concludes Lovestam. As it was, certain restrictions and requirements were placed upon the individuals involved in unlawful sexual activity. An unfaithful wife, for example, could not marry her lover. Lovestam notes the crucial severe restriction placed on the husband by the community.

The situation was thus not that the husband through his wife's unfaithfulness had the right of divorce, while he could also choose whether to use this right or not. In fact, his wife was prohibited to him forever. Adultery was thus not just a private matter in Old Israel. It implied a defiance of the God of the Covenant and was therefore the concern of all the people of the Covenant. It goes without saying in Rabbinic discussions on such matters that the wife's unfaithfulness leads to divorce. 81

(3) Divorce without remarriage is not adultery (only remarriage after divorce constitutes adultery).

Arguing that any valid bill of divorcement within the Jewish community allowed for remarriage, Wenham concludes that Jesus rejects divorce on those terms. Christ would permit a couple to separate but they could not marry another without being guilty of adultery. "It should be noted that in all the gospel sayings attributed to Jesus it is divorce together with remarriage, and not divorce on its own, which is regarded as adulterous." 82

Students who hold that the exception clause allows those who are forced by the mores of the community to divorce to do so without violating God's "no divorce" absolute add this fifth Warrant: NO-GUILT, REQUIRED DIVORCE EXPLAINS THE SURPRISED RESPONSE OF THE DISCIPLES. It is clearly recognized that "the disciples object to Jesus' new teaching that legal divorce does not, under any circumstances, open the door for remarriage." 83 Two facts serve as Backing for this particular Warrant.

(1) Jesus did not side with either the Hillel or Shammai view of divorce.
Commenting on verse 9 of Matthew 19, Heth and Wenham see a host of interpretive problems for the Erasmian view which holds that while Jesus repudiates the liberal Hillel allowance, He sides with the conservative Shammai Pharisees. Jesus' exception in that case, that a husband may divorce his wife and marry another if she is guilty of adultery, would not have surprised the disciples in the least. His statements would have offered no new insights and would have left Jesus siding with man against man in the divorce debate. However,

If verse 9 means that a man whose wife proves unfaithful may put her away although not marry again, the disciples' objection becomes intelligible. Jesus is saying something that no Roman or Jewish law contemplated; the innocent party has no second chance to marry again.

Seen in this light Matthew 19:3-12 is coherent and builds up to a challenging climax. Jesus is asked for his opinion on the point at issue between the Shammaite and Hillelite Pharisees, "What cause justifies divorce?" He replies by referring to God's work in creating men and women to be life-long partners, thereby casting doubt on the whole principle of divorce.84

(2) The disciples understood Jesus' position on divorce and remarriage as strict and narrow.

The disciples express their astonishment and Jesus admits the severity of the teaching by saying that it needs divine grace to accept it: "not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given."85

A sixth Warrant for the Patristic interpretation of the exception clause of Matthew 5 and 19 states that NO-GUILT, REQUIRED DIVORCE PARALLELS PAUL'S ADVICE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7:12-15. Evald Lovestam represents the major statement of this Warrant.

Lovestam identifies the parallel conclusions of Jesus in the gospels and of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. Both, he argues, reject the notion that a marriage is made invalid by a "legal" divorce. Lovestam notes Paul's statement "A wife must not separate herself from her husband," and "the husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10ff.). And to the statement about the wife he adds: "if a separation does take place, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband."

In a factual divorce situation Paul gives two alternatives: to remain unmarried (cf. vv. 1, 7, 25ff.) or to be reconciled, but not a third: to remarry, which in the synoptics is characterized as adultery. This is a manifest expression of the same view on marriage according to the will of God as is to be found in the teachings of Jesus in the gospels.86
This Warrant is sustained by three items of backing.

(1) Believers are not to abandon a marriage.

Heth sees Paul as dealing, not with Jewish legality as Jesus did, but with a Greco-Roman legality which also allowed for divorce and remarriage. Still, Paul follows the judgment of Christ. Although the Christian has a legal right, according to the civil laws of the day, that option must be rejected because of a higher loyalty. Thus, the Apostle Paul "clarifies his use of the legal (Roman/Greek) divorce terminology so believers, now under a new Master other than Rome, would not take the legal recourse open to them--the right of divorce and remarriage--by his qualification in v. 11a..."87

(2) Unbelievers might abandon a marriage.

When there is a mixed marriage, one believer and one unbeliever, the situation is somewhat different, according to Lovestam. While the Christian will still refuse to pursue his legal rights, "If the unbeliever separates, let him separate" (v. 15a). When this happens, the believer "is under no compulsion" (v. 15b), to persist in the relationship. Only the unbeliever may desert the marriage. "Paul's answer thus says that the Christian husband or wife in a mixed marriage should not take the initiative to a divorce. A condition for the marriage to be able to go on functioning--also from the point of view of mission--is however that the unbelieving partner is willing to live with him/her (v. 12)."88

(3) If the unbeliever abandons the marriage, the believer is not guilty of the sin of divorce.

Although the assignment of guilt may be difficult to ascertain in many divorce cases, Lovestam sees the responsibility falling upon the unbeliever if he chooses to separate. Accordingly, the phrase "under no compulsion" means two things. First, the believer need not pursue every available means to maintain the marriage. And second, the believer is not held responsible for the termination to the marriage. Rather,
The Christians in Corinth as elsewhere should be whole-heartedly faithful to God and his radical will in the matter of marriage and divorce. But in a case like this (desertion of the unbeliever) they find themselves in the situation not through choice, the responsibility falling on the unbelieving partner. Their situation is in principle in line with what is assumed in the exceptive clause of Matt. 69.

A seventh, and final, Warrant for the Patristic position is that NO-GUILT, REQUIRED DIVORCE REPRESENTS THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CHURCH FATHERS. Three points of Backing are offered in support of this generalization.

1) The Fathers required divorce for sexual sin.

Reviewing the writings of the Church, Heth and Wenham conclude that the Fathers upheld the view of one marriage only so long as both partners lived. Even immoral sexual conduct could not violate the "one flesh" relationship which had been established through marriage. "The marriage bond was seen (by the Fathers) to unite both parties until the death of one of them. When a marriage partner was guilty of unchastity, usually understood to mean adultery, the other was expected to separate but did not have the right to remarry."90

2) The Fathers did not allow for remarriage after divorce.

Citing Canon 10 of the council of Arles (314) which reads,

As regards those who find their wives to be guilty of adultery, and who being Christian are, though young men, forbidden to marry, we decree that, so far as may be, counsel be given them not to take other wives, while their own, though guilty of adultery, are yet living," Heth and Wenham conclude that, "This canon affirms unequivocally the doctrinal position of the early church: remarriage after divorce for adultery is forbidden."91

3) The Fathers were closest to Jesus' time and culture, and spoke Greek.

Great weight should be given to the fathers' Interpretation of Matthew 19:9. Being closest in time to the composition of the gospels, they are most likely to have understood the original intentions of the writers. They thought and wrote in Greek with a fluency no modern scholar can match and therefore what may seem to us to be obscure may well have appeared quite plain to them. Furthermore, they are likely to have preserved memories of dominical precept and apostolic practice that guided their Interpretation of the relevant New Testament passages. It is therefore intrinsically probable that the patristic Interpretation of this verse is the correct one.92

In summary, the Patristic Interpretation of τοπτελα in the exceptive clause of Jesus means that those who are forced by the mores of the community to divorce a willfully adulterous spouse are not guilty of violating Jesus' absolute prohibition of divorce. This Claim is based on seven Warrants. No-guilt required divorce (1) interprets τοπτελα in its broad sense, (2) maintains...
consistency with the passages which absolutely prohibit divorce; (3) maintains the permanence of the "one-flesh" marriage bond, (4) takes into account the Jewish "forced divorce" context, (5) explains the surprised response of the disciples to Jesus' statements, (6) parallels Paul's advice regarding marriage and divorce in 1 Corinthians, and (7) represents the interpretation of the Church Fathers.

The Betrothal View of Περατι

The Claim of the Betrothal interpretation of Περατι is that divorce is permissible in the case of sexual sin committed during the betrothal or engagement period. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and the debate of Matthew 19, "Jesus was teaching that the only justifiable grounds for divorce was impurity in the woman discovered on the first night of the marriage (in which case there would be deceit involved in the contract); and that . . . the man had the right to an immediate divorce under the standards of the Mosaic law. . . ."93

Abel Isaksson in his published dissertation, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple, has identified the major elements of this position.

A Jewish girl was married off by her father. The betrothal generally took place when the girl was 12 1/2 years old. A marriage contract was then drawn up and the marriage thereby became legally binding and could only be dissolved by divorce. A man had to pay a higher price for a virgin than for a widow or a divorced woman. If it turned out after the wedding . . . that the girl was not a virgin, the husband not only could but had to divorce her by public proceedings in a court of law. The injured party in this case was the husband, who had been tricked by the girl's father, if he knew of his daughter's having had pre-marital sexual intercourse with another man, or by the girl if, without her father's knowledge, she had "played the harlot in her father's house" (Deut. 22:21). Although the term divorce was used in these cases, it is more accurate to say that it was a matter of cancelling an unfulfilled contract of sale, because one of the parties had tricked the other as to the nature of the goods, when the price was fixed.94

This Claim rests on the Grounds of Jesus' use of the term Περατι in the exceptive clause as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. Isaksson calls attention to the fact that the word "divorce" was used in cases of betrothal infidelity even though the marriage would not have been consummated. While in actuality the "husband" is merely relieved by the court of any obligation to
fulfill his part of the marriage contract, because of his "wife's" deception, the term "divorce" was the accepted legal designation. The cause of such a divorce, Isaksson argues, is *mpveta*.

If we interpret *mpveta* in the clause in Matthew as referring to premarital unchastity and consider this clause in terms of the historical background, it does not appear to be a strange and hardly comprehensible exception for the rule about the absolute indissolubility of marriage. It is not a question of an exception from the rule that a consummated marriage is indissoluble.95

At least seven Warrants are set forth by the supporters of this Betrothal view of *mpveta* in order to justify their step from Grounds to Claim. The first is that DIVORCE FOR BETROTHAL UNFAITHFULNESS INTERPRETS *mpveta* IN A SPECIFIC CONTEXTUAL SENSE. Arguing that Matthew clearly distinguishes between *μοιχεία* (adultery) and *mpveta* (fornication), Isaksson concludes that adultery was not what Jesus had in mind in the Matthean exceptive clause. This is presented as reasonable based on the following philological observations.

First, a clear distinction was strictly maintained, by both the pre-Christian Jewish writers and the authors of the New Testament, between what was to be regarded as *mpveta* and what was to be regarded as *μοιχεία*. And whereas *mpveta* referred to a variety of forbidden sexual relations, it never was used explicitly to refer to a wife's adultery.

Second, it would be unthinkable for Jesus to fail to distinguish clearly between forbidden sexual sins and adultery specifically. This would especially be true in the case of such an explicit legal pronouncement, one that the church would be expected to understand and obey. If Jesus had intended to refer to adultery (the engaging in sexual intercourse outside the marriage bond by a married individual), He had at His disposal an indisputable term, *μοιχεία*. Instead, He used *mpveta*.

Since *mpveta* in the clause of Mt. cannot . . . refer to adultery, it must have another meaning. . . this word must mean a sexual offense committed by the wife before her marriage. According to Deut. 22:20–21, a girl whom a man had taken to wife in the belief that she was a virgin was to be stoned to death by the men of the town if, when the marriage was consummated, there was evidence that she had already had sexual intercourse with some other man. The crime she had committed was described as unchastity.96

(1) Lexically, *mpveta* carries a broad scope of meanings.
Joseph Jensen identifies a wide range of possible meanings for *nopvela* including marriage within forbidden degrees of kinship, commercial or cultic prostitution, a figurative term for idolatry, impure behavior in general, and pre-marital sexual relations. It would be Injudicious, therefore, to argue that the term must mean adultery in specific uses. Jensen maintains that *nopvela* could refer to betrothal unfaithfulness.

If the Old Testament considered fornication reprehensible, if the distinction between harlotry and fornication is not always clearly drawn, and if the LXX could use *nopvela* to designate wanton sexual behavior, there is no basis for denying that the New Testament could use *nopvela* to designate simple fornication (pre-betrothal, pre-marital, heterosexual intercourse of a non-cultic or non-commercial nature). 97

(2) Context must determine the meaning of *nopvela* in every usage.

Agreeing with the accepted conclusion that *nopvela* is broad enough to cover all kinds of deviant sexual behavior, Theodore Epp sees it taking on a more specialized meaning when contrasted with *μοιχεία*. "In particular, the word 'fornication' refers to sexual sin before marriage, whereas 'adultery' refers to sexual sin after marriage. Jesus used 'fornication' exclusively when He spoke of the Law of Moses' permitting divorce. 98

(3) *nopvela* is explicitly contrasted to *μοιχεία* in several cases.

Charles Ryrie refutes the notion that *nopvela* means *μοιχεία* as Erasmian proponents would suggest. He insists that no New Testament passage equates the two. Rather, specific passages, especially in Matthew, juxtapose the terms.

To be sure, *nopvela* does sometimes include adultery. But that does not indicate its meaning in these divorce texts, in a gospel that is concerned with legal niceties in which Matthew clearly distinguishes the two terms. This is evident in 15:19 where *nopvela* and *μοιχεία* appear side by side. Indeed, Matthew uses *nopvela* only in chapters 5, 15, and 19 and *μοιχεία* in 15 where he distinguishes it from *nopvela*. If he meant adultery in 5 and 19 why did he not use the clear word? The question is not, does *nopvela* ever mean adultery, but does it always mean adultery? Lexical evidence does not require the meaning adultery in the divorce texts unless it can be proved (which it cannot) that the word always means adultery. 99

Other texts that contrast the two terms Include Mark 7:21-22, 1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19, and Hebrews 13:4. 100

(4) *nopvela* is used specifically to refer to pre-marital sexual intercourse.
Epp identifies John 8:41, where the Pharisees mock Jesus saying, "We were not born of fornication," as an instance where the root word παρθένος refers to the pre-sexual, virgin birth of Christ. "Indirectly they were claiming that His mother had committed fornication and that Jesus was her bastard son. According to the context, they used the word 'fornication' (παρθένος) to refer to an act of sin committed before marriage."  

(5) An example of divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness is given in Matthew's own text.

The account of Matthew 1:19, in which Joseph contemplated divorcing Mary after discovering her pregnant by someone other than himself, demonstrates what any "just" Jewish man would do. He would not, in fact could not, overlook the fact of his betrothed's lost virginity.

This verse in Matthew's Gospel shows that in the environment in which this Gospel was written people were familiar with the rule that a man should divorce a girl whom he had taken to wife but who had been guilty of παρθένος (pre-marital unchastity) in spite of the fact that the marriage contract stated that she was a virgin and he had paid for her the higher price a man had to pay for a virgin. However, this verse also gives us an indication of how to interpret the clause on unchastity further on in the Gospel.

A second Warrant used to support the Betrothal Claim is that DIVORCE FOR BETROTHAL UNFAITHFULNESS MAINTAINS CONSISTENCY WITH THE ABSOLUTE PROHIBITION PASSAGES. E. G. Selwyn, having argued that the Betrothal view presents a biblically consistent prohibition of divorce where a marriage has been consummated, offers the final biblical statements of the Apostle Paul as confirmation of his position.

I refer to the evidence of St. Paul again only to point out how it still further endorses this conclusion. If St. Paul had known of any exception to the indissolubility of marriage, or had felt free to allow any exception himself, it is difficult to believe that we should not meet with it in 1 Corinthians. The Apostle has to deal with sexual problems of the most perplexing kind, ranging from an asceticism on the one side which set a ban on all conjugal intercourse as unholy, to a libertinism on the other which regarded fornication as morally indifferent. In such an atmosphere it is unquestionable that there must have been frequent cases where the excepting clause . . . would have seemed to provide an obvious solution for difficulties. Yet St. Paul recognizes neither divorce nor remarriage. Even his advice in regard to mixed marriages . . . gives no indulgence in this respect.

Backing for this second Warrant are drawn from several relevant passages.

(1) Genesis 2:24 prohibits divorce.

Commenting on the Matthean divorce passages, Alfred Edersheim identifies Genesis 2:24 as Jesus' foundational source regarding marriage. God set out an absolute prohibition...
against divorce when He first instituted the concept of marriage. "He, Who at the beginning . . . had made them male and female, had in the marriage-relation 'joined them together,' to the breaking of every other, even the nearest, relationship, to be 'one flesh'--that is, to a union which was unity."

Edersheim acknowledges the reasonableness of Jesus' application, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:9). Genesis 2:24 thus assumes the highest authority for those who would seek God's ideal in a marital relationship, and that ideal includes no divorce.

(2) Deuteronomy 24:1-4 prohibits divorce.

The Deuteronomy passage is often misunderstood. While it acknowledges the existence of divorce in Israel, and regards the second marriage as legal, it strictly forbids the reinstatement of the first marriage under any circumstances, including the death of or divorce from the second partner. Ryrie emphasizes that since the "one flesh" bond with the first spouse still exists, even though the divorce has been enacted, the first marriage is never "dissolved."

In this sense, a true divorce is impossible. As Ryrie concludes, "The Mosaic Law nowhere provided for divorce, though people who lived during that period practiced it . . . in fact the passage only recognizes that divorce was being practiced, but it never prescribes it."

(3) Malachi 2:10-16 prohibits divorce.

The Prophet Malachi reminded Israel that God "hates divorce." Ryrie notes that there are no exceptions listed here which would allow for a "legitimate" divorce. Instead, he identifies four adverse results of divorcing. *(1) it breaks fellowship so that the Lord did not accept the offerings; (2) it breaks the marriage covenant; (3) it violates God's original intention for marriage; (4) it incurs God's hatred.*


Remarking on these two passages in succession, Epp finds Jesus' statements to be strict but evident. Neither is there an indication of any suspension from the clear regulation.
Notice that in Jesus' comments at this point there was no possibility for divorce on any grounds. He simply stated that any man who puts away his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery and that any woman who puts away her husband and marries another is also guilty of adultery. . . . Here again (Luke 16:18), Christ restated the basic principle of marriage and classified all divorce and remarriage as the sin of adultery.107

(5) Romans 7:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 39 prohibit divorce.

J. Carl Laney argues that since death alone frees a married partner to remarry, there is no other such liberating divorce. Divorce is precluded as an option which disentangles the marital relationship.

While Romans 7:1-6 is primarily concerned with the believer's release from the law, Paul's illustration from the marriage union sheds light on his view that marriage is permanent until death. Only death can break the marriage bond and release a spouse to marry another partner. This exact teaching is presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:39 where he declares, "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives" (no exceptions)! Only when the husband dies is she free to be remarried.108

A third Warrant for the Betrothal position states that DIVORCE FOR BETROTHAL UNFAITHFULNESS MAINTAINS THE PERMANENCE OF THE "ONE-FLESH" CONSUMMATED MARRIAGE BOND. Pentecost, in an allusion to this one-flesh notion, says, "The Biblical concept, then, is that marriage is an indissoluble union in which two become one (one-flesh) in the relationship which in the sight of God can be terminated only by death."109

To sustain this Warrant, four generalizations are presented as Backing.

(1) Marriage is based upon the "one-flesh" concept of Genesis 2:24.

This "one-flesh" notion is to be discovered in the early Genesis account of the marriage of the first man and the first woman. According to Laney, becoming "one-flesh" points to the physical or sexual facet of marriage which actually and symbolically identifies two people as becoming one, not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. "The 'one flesh' that the couple becomes in marriage is beautifully illustrated by the offspring. . . . A child partakes of the flesh of both the father and the mother, and the two are absolutely inseparable!"110

(2) This "one-flesh" concept is not renounced, but corroborated in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.
Heth and Wenham assert that the "one-flesh" notion of Genesis 2 provides the foundation for the legislation of Deuteronomy 24. Moses, therefore, does not retract, but rather reconfirms the inseparable unity of marriage.

Just as we cannot "divorce" our children from being our own blood relations, no matter how disreputable they may be, so a man cannot "divorce" his wife who is his own flesh and blood through marriage. Thus Deuteronomy 24:1-4 understands the "one flesh" bond of marriage to survive legal or customary divorce.111

(3) This "one-flesh" concept is nullified only by death according to Romans 7 and Corinthians 7.

Ryrie comments on these passages, concluding that, "As marriage was originally planned there was no provision for ending it except by death."112 Claiming that Jesus, in his answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 19, appealed to the Genesis 2 "one-flesh" notion, Ryrie sees Paul in fundamental agreement with both Christ and Moses.

(4) Even sexual sin does not break the "one-flesh" relationship of a consummated marriage bond, as seen in John 4:18.

Laney maintains that infidelity, desertion, and spouse beating, as evil and destructive as they may be, do not constitute biblical grounds for divorce. Although sexual intercourse consummates a "one-flesh" marital relationship, the act alone neither makes nor breaks the essential unity. This principle is illustrated in John 4.

Becoming "one flesh" physically does not make a marriage, for marriage is an institution recognized by the state, and certain elements must be present and proper procedures must be followed for a relationship to qualify. Notice that Jesus does not refer to the man with whom the Samaritan woman was living as her "husband" (John 4:18). She had been legally married to five different husbands, but was now involved in an illicit affair. Mere sexual intercourse does not make a marriage (but neither can it break a marriage).113

DIVORCE FOR BETROTHAL UNFAITHFULNESS TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE JEWISH BETROTHAL CONTEXT is the fourth Warrant given in support of the Betrothal Interpretation of popvela. Pentecost understands Christ as referring to contemporary Jewish custom in his Matthean statements on divorce. In the culture of Jesus' day, marriage began as a legal contract drawn up by the father of the groom and the father of the bride. Although the marriage was not
consummated for at least twelve months after the betrothal contract was drawn up, the couple were recognized as husband and wife on the basis of the contract.

The waiting period served two purposes, deemed necessary by the low state of morals which existed. The twelve months gave sufficient time to reveal whether the woman had been pregnant prior to the initiation of the contract. It also provided an opportunity to determine whether the wife would remain faithful to her husband once the contract was in force.

The result was that, "if the wife proved to be immoral, the marriage need not be completed; the contract could be broken by divorce. However, so binding was the betrothal contract that it could be broken only by the husband appearing before the judges to accuse the woman of immorality." 114

At least three generalizations are offered as Backing for this Warrant.

(1) Matthew, the only gospel writer to record the exception, wrote specifically for a Jewish audience.

Calling attention to the generally accepted conclusion that Matthew was written primarily to Jewish readers, Epp maintains that Matthew includes statements on marriage and divorce that should not be expected to appear anywhere else in the New Testament. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mark and Luke, written primarily to Gentile readers, omit the exception statements of Jesus spoken to Jewish questioners.

Inasmuch as Mark and Luke were writing primarily with Gentile readers in view, divorce and remarriage are strictly forbidden in their Gospels. This is because divorce was permitted during the time of the Law only because of the hardness of the Israelites' hearts, but since divorce was never arranged for by God, it was not mentioned to the Gentiles. The distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles and their relationship to the Law explains why divorce is mentioned only in the Gospel of Matthew. 115

(2) Jewish betrothal laws were binding in nature.

According to Edersheim, the bridegroom, personally or by proxy, delivered to the bride a price of money or a letter at the time of the betrothal. This exchange signified invariably that the man had formally betrothed the woman.
From the moment of betrothal both parties were regarded, and treated in law (as to inheritance, adultery, need of formal divorce), as if they had been actually married, except as regarded their living together. A legal document . . . fixed the dowry which each brought, the mutual obligations, and all other legal points.  

(3) A Jewish betrothal could be broken only by formal divorce.

Whereas a modern engagement is a non-binding agreement to marry, with no legal ramifications if broken, Heth and Wenham note that in Jewish society, betrothal instituted a formal, legal relationship in which the couple were acknowledged to be "husband" and "wife." The one lawfully belonged to the other. "Betrothal was a formal act by which the woman became legally the man’s wife; unfaithfulness on her part was adultery and punishable as such; if the relation was dissolved a bill of divorce was required."  

A fifth Warrant advanced by the Betrothal proponents is that DIVORCE FOR BETROTHAL UNFAITHFULNESS MAINTAINS CONSISTENCY WITH THE "DEBATE" CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 5 AND 19. Pentecost notes that "there were two schools of interpretation of the law of divorce" and that "the Pharisees attempted to embroil Christ in this controversy."  

Shepard identifies at least two possible strategies, on the part of the Pharisees, as they question Jesus on the issue of divorce and remarriage.

First, if they could force Jesus into taking sides either for Hillel or for Shammal, they could easily alienate him from those who held the opposite position. The religious leaders would have welcomed few things more than a raging controversy between this maverick teacher and one of the popular Rabbinical schools.

Second, the only thing better than a theological altercation would be a run in with Herod Antipas, the wicked ruler who was living in open sin with his brother’s wife. "If they could get Jesus to denounce openly this Herod and the wicked Herodias, they might succeed in doing away with Him soon. They had worked that plan successfully in John's case, and that right at the height of his ministerial success." If they could succeed in getting Herod to do their dirty work for them, their purpose could be accomplished without personal risk. Thus, they challenge Jesus in public debate.
At least three statements serve as Backing for this fifth Warrant.

(1) Matthew 5 reveals a "debate" format of "you have heard" vs. "but I say."

In the third movement of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17-48) Jesus sets out to define and illustrate the essence of true righteousness. This defense had become necessary because the Pharisees had, through the years, set up an external standard of righteousness based on a humanistic code of ethics. Christ rejects this Pharisaic approach by countering their false interpretations of the Law and affirming a correct understanding. In so doing Jesus sets Himself against his detractors.

In repudiating Pharisaic righteousness, Christ had to show that their righteousness did not conform to the demands of the Law and that keeping their tradition did not constitute one righteous. Christ also had to show why the observance of Pharisaic rules did not fulfill the law of God. . . .

. . . Our Lord gave specific illustrations in order to show that the Pharisees did not understand the intent of the law. He thereby proved that by keeping their traditions they were not fulfilling the righteousness demanded by the law. Six times He said "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago. . . . But I tell you" (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).120

(2) Matthew 19 reveals a "debate" context of entrapment and conflict.

The third verse of Matthew 19 reveals an explicitly controversial setting. Here we see that "the Pharisees also came to him, tempting him, and saying unto him, 'Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?'" Epp notes that this sets the stage for the combative exchange which follows.

It was characteristic of the Pharisees to constantly test Jesus by posing questions which they thought would cause Him to answer in a way that would blaspheme God or go contrary to the Mosaic Law. However, it was characteristic of Jesus to answer in such a way that the real charge was turned against the Pharisees instead of Himself.121

(3) Jesus' exception is spoken in sarcasm to unbelieving, hardened hearts.

With that consummate skill which He ever displayed in encounters of this sort, Jesus avoided entanglement in the Rabbinical controversy and appealed to the Scriptures. "Have ye not read," He asked ironically charging them with ignorance of those Scriptures whereof they were the official guardians and interpreters. . . .122

Those who hold to the Betrothal interpretation of ἁπατέω add a sixth Warrant to their argument: DIVORCE FOR BETROTHAL UNFAITHFULNESS EXPLAINS THE SURPRISED RESPONSE OF THE DISCIPLES. This position is summarized by Pentecost, who reminds us of
the disciples' reply, "If this is the situation (that is, if it is not possible for a husband to divorce his wife even if she later proves to be unfaithful and immoral) it is better not to marry" (Matt. 19:10).

Pentecost remarks, "Thus the only possibility of divorce allowed by Christ was a cancellation of a marriage contract during the Jewish betrothal period before the marriage had been completed. This evidently was the way the disciples understood our Lord's instruction."123

At least two statements can be identified as Backing for this Warrant.

(1) Jesus does not side with either the Hillel or Shammai view of divorce.

Paul Steele sees the disciples falling into the very trap the Pharisees had set for Jesus. The Pharisees were not honestly seeking a resolution to the divorce question. Actually they were hoping that Jesus would take the Shammai side of the controversy. But whereas Jesus refused to choose sides, the disciples did in fact line up with the conservative Shammai school. Had Jesus done the same, His answer would have placed Him into a position of disfavor with the vast majority of the people. "But Christ refused to take sides . . . Christ's standard was clearly higher . . . If Christ was only supporting the rabbinical school of Shammai (the one the disciples were anticipating He would support) then why the astonishment (on the part of the disciples)?124

(2) Jesus' only exception to "no divorce" is extremely narrow.

Clearly the disciples saw no possibility of obtaining a divorce with divine approval after marriage had been completed. Because the disciples recognized the low state of society and since it was utterly repugnant to them to be inseparably united to a faithless wife, they concluded it was best not to marry at all. Such a conclusion would not have been drawn if they had understood Christ to permit divorce after marriage.125

A final Warrant offered in support of the Betrothal position is that DIVORCE FOR BETROTHAL UNFAITHFULNESS ADVANCES BEYOND OLD TESTAMENT LAW TO NEW TESTAMENT GRACE. Ryrie presents the argument that Jesus articulated a fresh and morally superior teaching regarding marriage and divorce; one which elevated the status of women by protecting them from the trauma of divorce altogether. Jesus not only went further in his teaching than the strictest Jews of his day, He also went back beyond the concessions of Moses to the ideal of "no divorce" as implied by Genesis 2. "The perfect and permanent union until death of
man and woman who become one flesh and who are therefore equal and yet different is the chief emphasis of Christ's teaching concerning divorce, and this was far superior to any other teaching of His day.126

Backing for this seventh Warrant is offered from at least two generalizations.

(1) Old Testament betrothal unfaithfulness resulted in stoning according to Deuteronomy 22:13-29.

We read in Deuteronomy 22:13-14 that "If any man take a wife and go in unto her, and hate her, and give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid (virgin) . . . ." Then verses 15-19 tell how this charge was to be tested and what punishment was to be given to the man if the charge was proven false. The record continues, "But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shall thou put evil away from among you" (vv. 20-21). Epp summarizes that

This was the commandment concerning the law of divorcement in the Old Testament . . . . If the husband found that his wife had been immoral before marriage, that is, if she had committed the sin of fornication, he could return her to her father with a divorcement paper. But in this case the result was death, if the accusation was substantiated.127

(2) New Testament betrothal unfaithfulness may result merely in divorce according to the noppela exception.

Pentecost observes that the betrothal contract was so legally binding that it could be broken only by the appearance of and the sustained accusations of the husband before the court. Only in this way could the contract be revoked. But it would also, according to the Law, necessitate the death of the guilty party. "It was in light of this context that Christ granted the exception (19:9). If one who was betrothed to a wife found in the betrothal period that she was guilty of fornication, that is, that she was an immoral woman, the marriage need not be consummated; but it had to be dissolved by a divorce."128
In summary, the Betrothal interpretation of *mpveta* in the exception clause of Jesus allows for a divorce, which is essentially an annulment of the marriage contract, in the case of sexual unfaithfulness committed during the betrothal period. This claim is based on seven Warrants. Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness (1) interprets *mpveta* in a specific, contextual sense, (2) maintains consistency with the absolute prohibition passages, (3) maintains the permanence of the "one-flesh" consummated marriage bond, (4) takes into account the Jewish betrothal context, (5) maintains consistency with the "debate" context of Matthew 5 and 19, (6) explains the surprised response of the disciples, and (7) advances beyond Old Testament law to New Testament grace.

The Rabbinic View of *mpveta*

The Claim of the Rabbinic View of *mpveta* is that divorce is permissible in the case of an incestual marriage. J. Carl Laney has summarized this position as follows:

According to this view . . . the "except for *mpveta*" would refer to marriage within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18:6-18. There in the context of God's demand for practical holiness among His people (Lev. 18-20), we find that marriage to a near relative is forbidden. The phrase used repeatedly, "to uncover the nakedness of," is a Hebrew euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. Deut. 22:30), and apparently refers here to marriage (Lev. 18:18). The unions condemned in Leviticus 18 would be the result of sexual passion rather than genuine love and affection. According to this interpretation of the exception clause, one who has married a near relative in violation of Jewish law should seek annulment, but for all others divorce is disallowed. Jesus, then, is basically teaching "no divorce," but one unique exception may be recognized when marriage has taken place within the prohibited degrees of Leviticus 18:6-18.129

This claim rests on the grounds of Jesus' use of the term *mpveta* in the exceptive clause as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. As Steele and Ryrie conclude, "Hence, the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 anticipated the possibility of a next-of-kin marriage that might be legal in one's culture, but inconsistent with the plan of God. In this instance divorce was allowed."130

At least seven Warrants are offered by the proponents of this Rabbinic view of *mpveta* in order to justify the step from grounds to claim. First, DIVORCE FOR INCESTUAL MARRIAGE INTERPRETS *mpveta* IN A SPECIFIC CONTEXTUAL SENSE. Isaksson has recognized the
existence of this Warrant, maintaining that the post-biblical Hebrew term רְשָׁע was used in this way exactly. Thus, a woman who contracted a forbidden marriage would be designated רְשָׁע. The New Testament also, according to Isaksson, offers several examples of מָפְרֶטָה being used to signify a forbidden marriage. The fact that the context of the Matthean exception clauses and the context of the council decision at Jerusalem in Acts 15 are patently Jewish must be given special consideration.

Having considered the other options available, Isaksson concludes, "There is a somewhat better linguistic foundation for the theory . . . that מָפְרֶטָה here means marriage in a forbidden degree, i.e. an invalid marriage." The particularly Jewish environment, therefore, necessitates a "no divorce" reading of Jesus' statements, except in the case of a forbidden marriage. In that case, divorce was mandatory, especially if the individual wished to belong to a Christian church with strong Jewish elements.

The generalizations or Backing presented to establish this first Warrant are at least five in number.

(1) מָפְרֶטָה carries a broad scope of meanings.

Laney acknowledges the broad use of the term מָפְרֶטָה. Its substantive, מָפְרֶת, was derived from a root word meaning "to sell." Thus,

The original concept was to offer one's body for a price. The word מָפְרֶת was especially used of slaves and meant "a harlot for hire." From this comes the Greek מָפְרֶטָה, found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, which basically refers to unlawful sexual intercourse - "prostitution, unchastity," and "fornication." It may also refer to sexual aberrations, for it is used in the contexts of homosexuality (cf. Rom. 1:29) and incest (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1).

(2) Context must determine the meaning of מָפְרֶטָה in every usage.

Paul Steele, recognizing the numerous legitimate interpretations of the word, argues that context must determine the meaning. "In my opinion the word מָפְרֶטָה is much too complex to cast it off with one interpretive word." For although, "The Authorized Version translation, 'fornication,' is perhaps the safest because at least it allows for the wide variety of possible
meanings of pomelia . . . they (the Greeks) also used it in a specialized way to speak of specific acts.133

(3) *Pomveta* does not mean *moxeta* in several cases.

While Isaksson admits to a wide range of meanings for *pomveta*, he denies that there are any unequivocal uses which refer to adultery. Rather, a clear distinction between *pomveta* (unchastity) and *moxeta* (adultery) was very strictly maintained by both pre-Christian Jewish literature and the New Testament writings. This would be true, especially, of Jesus' logia on divorce; statements worded in the context of Law, and intended to be adhered to by the church. With this background, Isaksson concludes that

It is inconceivable that in a text of this nature the writer would not have maintained a clear distinction between what was unchastity and what was adultery: *moxeta* and not *pomveta* was used to describe the wife's unchastity. From the philological point of view there are accordingly very strong arguments against this interpretation of the clauses as permitting divorce in the case in which the wife was guilty of adultery.134

Highlighting the narrowness of *moxeta* in contrast to the breadth of *pomveta*, Laney observes that the former refers, usually literally though sometimes figuratively, to sexual unfaithfulness to one's commitment in marriage specifically, while the latter refers to any and all kinds of unlawful sexual activity. "The difference between these terms is evidenced by their use in several biblical passages to describe two different sins (cf. Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:22; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19; Heb. 13:4)."135

(4) *Pomveta* does mean incestual marriage in several cases.

Heth and Wenham note that ". . . this variation understands *pomveta* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 to be the equivalent of Hebrew *no* which in the context of the divorce sayings refers to illegitimate marriages within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity and affinity found in Leviticus 18:6-18. F. F. Bruce, J. A. Fitzmyer and others find support for this restricted nuance of *pomveta* in 1 Corinthians 5:1; Acts 15:20, 29 and 21:25."136
This more restricted meaning of *mpvětel* traces its source to the Hebrew laws of holiness as found in Leviticus 18:6-18. Laney notes that these regulations which prohibited marriage to a near relative were faithfully observed by the church.

There are one or two other places in the New Testament where fornication may have this technical sense. ... We find that this is the meaning of *mpvětel* in 1 Corinthians 5:1 which has reference to a man's marriage to his father's widow, a flagrant violation of Leviticus 18:8. Interpreting the exception clause to refer to incestuous marriage would also follow the meaning of *mpvětel* in Acts 15:20, 29 where certain practices are forbidden because of the offense to the Jews.137

(5) Examples of divorce being required for incestual marriage are found in the New Testament context.

Maintaining that both Jesus and Paul had clearly condemned illicit sexual intercourse, Laney acknowledges that marriage to a near relative continued to be a problem for some. Although prohibited by Leviticus 18, some, among the Gentiles especially, had begun to view the practice as optional. The issue, therefore, received particular attention.

It is clear that such a marriage was denounced by Paul in the 1 Corinthians 5 passage. But even before it was recognized as a problem among the Gentile church, *mpvětel*, in this sense, had been censured by the pre-Christian John, and that in the Gospel of Matthew.

John the Baptist had been arrested, imprisoned, and eventually executed for speaking out against Herod Antipas who had divorced his wife and married his niece, the former wife of his brother Philip. Recognizing this marriage to be in violation of Jewish Law, John declared to Herod Antipas, "It is not lawful for you to have her (Matt. 14:4) ... John the Baptist condemned Herod Antipas not only for divorcing his wife, but also for marrying another woman in violation of Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21.138

A second Warrant presented as evidence of the Rabbinic interpretation of *mpvětel* is that DIVORCE FOR INCESTUAL MARRIAGE MAINTAINS CONSISTENCY WITH THE ABSOLUTE PROHIBITION OF DIVORCE PASSAGES. Ryrie has overviewed the basic argument, tracing the interdiction through Old and New Testaments.

God's original design for man was one wife and no separation (Gen. 2:23-24; Matt. 19:6). And yet the Mosaic law did permit or tolerate divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). Actually this passage does not approve of divorce. Rather, it states that when certain things happen (those mentioned in vv. 1-3), a certain prohibition follows (v. 4) ...
... At the close of the Old Testament period, the prophet Malachi condemned the increasing divorce rate among the people (Mal. 2:13-16). One of the reasons given is that divorce is contrary to God's original purpose for marriage. ...

... The Lord's teaching on this subject is contained in Matthew 5:32-33; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; and Luke 16:18. The principal question raised by these passages is the apparent exception to what otherwise seems to be a complete prohibition against divorce. The exception, fornication, appears in both of the Matthew passages but not in Mark or Luke. ...

Whether one concludes that fornication means unfaithfulness in marriage, unfaithfulness during betrothal, or marriage of near relatives, it is perfectly clear that the Lord did not allow for divorce for any other cause. One is driven to the conclusion that either the second or the final view is the correct interpretation of the exception clause, and that our Lord did not allow for divorce after marriage. ...

... Paul seems to agree with this conclusion about Christ's teaching, for he taught no separation of believers (1 Cor. 7:10). ...

... To sum up: our Lord apparently taught the indissolubility of marriage as the norm. Marriage between near relatives may be annulled, or engagement may be broken because of unfaithfulness, but marriage is permanent. 139

Backing for this Warrant is drawn from several biblical proof texts. 140

(1) Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 prohibit divorce.
(2) Leviticus 18 prohibits divorce.
(3) Deuteronomy 24:1-4 prohibits divorce.
(4) Malachi 2:13-16 prohibits divorce.
(5) Mark 10:2-12 prohibits divorce.
(7) Romans 7:2-3 prohibits divorce.
(8) 1 Corinthians 7 prohibits divorce. 141

DIVORCE FOR INCESTUAL MARRIAGE MAINTAINS THE PERMANENCE OF THE "ONE-FLESH" MARRIAGE BOND is a third Warrant of the Rabbinic proponents.

The term "one flesh," as found in Genesis 2:24, refers to the relationship of kinship which is established by a consummated marriage. This relationship survives even the death of husband or wife, so that if one dies, the other is not at liberty to marry one of the deceased's family without being guilty of incest.
Steele and Ryrie see this foundational principle as the basis for the prohibition of Leviticus 18. Arguing that the "one-flesh" concept is directly referred to no less than three times in the New Testament, they conclude that, "Man quite simply does not have the right to dismantle the 'one flesh' that God has established." Jesus' allowance for divorce in the instance of an incestual marriage merely recognizes the absence of a "one-flesh" marriage in the first place.

Four generalizations are set forth as Backing for this third Warrant.

1. Marriage is based upon the "one-flesh" concept of relationship of Genesis 2:24.
2. This "one-flesh" concept is not renounced, but corroborated in Deuteronomy 24.
3. This "one-flesh" relationship is nullified only by the death of a marriage partner according to Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7.
4. Even sexual sin does not break the "one-flesh" relationship.

Those who interpret ἁμαρτέλα as referring to a forbidden next-of-kin marriage add a fourth Warrant: DIVORCE FOR INCESTUAL MARRIAGE TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE JEWISH "MARRIAGE LAWS" CONTEXT. Among the other defenders of this position, F. F. Bruce notes that such a use of ἁμαρτέλα was

... intended not in the common sense of the word (for abstention from that was in any case stringently enjoined on all Christians), but in the sense of transgression of the degrees of consanguinity and affinity prohibited in Leviticus 18:6-18. These marital prohibitions were basic to the Jewish marriage law and have been a part of Christian canon law from the time of the Jerusalem decree.

Five statements of Backing are given in support of this Warrant.

1. Matthew wrote specifically for a Jewish audience.

The question of why Matthew alone, and neither Mark nor Luke, records the exceptive clauses has perplexed some who have studied the divorce issue. Laney, however, reminds his readers that Matthew is distinctively and wholly Jewish in its approach. At least three observations seem to support this contention: (1) the use of a specifically Jewish genealogy in tracing the ancestry of Christ, (2) the emphasis on fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, and (3) the uninterpreted use of Jewish terminology with which a non-Jewish audience would be unfamiliar.
Matthew wrote with Jewish readers in mind, making numerous distinctive contributions to Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce that would have been of particular interest only to those who knew and followed Old Testament regulations. Thus, Laney writes that, "the matter of ἐμπυέτα would be a problem primarily for Jewish readers acquainted with the Old Testament Law, and would account for its inclusion in Matthew (to Jewish readers) and its absence in Mark and Luke."146

(2) Old Testament law of marriage forbade incestual marriages.

Taking into account the distinctive Jewishness of Matthew, Steele and Ryrie ask what the word ἐμπυέτα would have meant to the Jew of Jesus' day. In order to answer that question they look for an example of the term, used in a specifically Jewish context, in which the clear meaning is neither adultery nor general immorality, concluding that the meaning there would shed light on its meaning in Matthew.

They discover such a usage in Acts 15:20, 29. The context is the council of Jerusalem in which the church, which was still mainly Jewish, wrestled with the question of the necessity of circumcision for Gentile salvation. The council's decision was that circumcision was in no way necessary for salvation. However, in the interest of unity between Jews and Gentiles in the Church, the council requested that the Gentile believers refrain from specific practices which could prove offensive to the Jewish believers.

Among those behaviors to be banned was ἐμπυέτα. The content of the other taboos reveals that ἐμπυέτα, in Acts 15, refers to the law forbidding incestual marriages. Steele and Ryrie summarize the list of regulations and draw the conclusion that ἐμπυέτα meant, to the Jews, marriage to a near relative.

The four practices James listed were prescribed by the holiness code of Leviticus 17-18.
  * the eating of meat offered to idols (Lev. 17:8-9);
  * the eating of blood (Lev. 17:10-12);
  * the eating of strangled or improperly butchered animals (Lev. 17:15; Exod. 22:32);
  * sexual intercourse with close kin (Leviticus 18:1-17).

To be sure, Leviticus 18 goes on to forbid polygamy, adultery (v. 21), offering children to idols (v. 21), homosexuality (v. 22), and bestiality (v. 23). But these practices already were
abhorrent to Jewish and Gentile believers alike and did not need to be included in James' letter.147

(3) The incestual marriage issue was a contemporary issue.

John the Baptist soundly condemned the incestuous marriage of Herod Antipas. Laney adds that John's, "It Is not lawful," unequivocally alluded back to the Levitical prohibition against *teveta*. Jesus avoided direct confrontation with Herod when He made allowance for divorce in such cases without specifically accusing the political leader.

Laney's conclusion is that John's condemnation and Jesus' allowance point to the presence of incestual marriages within the Jewish culture, even though the practice was consistently denounced. The problem was even carried on into the early church.

There would have been no question about the illegitimacy of illicit sexual intercourse . . . but marriage within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18 was apparently a live issue (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1). The continuation of such a practice by Gentiles in the early church would obviously have been a grave offense to the Jews.148

(4) The Apostles recognized incestual marriages as a moral issue.

The list of taboos in Acts 15 calls attention to the fact that the Apostles used the term *teveta* to refer to an incestual marriage, and that they viewed the practice as morally offensive. Much is made of the two orderings of these forbidden behaviors and their corresponding Levitical references. James suggests the following order in Acts 15:20:

JAMES

| Idol Sacrifices | Lev. 17:8-9 |
| Things Strangled | Lev. 17:13-14 |
| Blood | Lev. 17:10-12 |

Next, we see the actual order given by the council in their official letter to the churches in Acts 15:29.

THE COUNCIL

| Idol Sacrifices | Lev. 17:8-9 |
| Blood | Lev. 17:10-12 |
| Things Strangled | Lev. 17:13-14 |
| *teveta* | Lev. 18:6-18 |
Laney makes the following observation based on his study of the two orderings in Acts 15. "It is quite apparent that James was thinking of the Leviticus 17-18 restrictions, but suggested them in the wrong order (Acts 15:20). Then when the Council formulated its decision, the restrictions were recorded in their correct order according to Leviticus 17-18 (Acts 15:29)." 149

(5) Jesus' exception may have dealt with a local, and, therefore, Jewish problem.

The four restrictions of the Jerusalem council were not problem areas for Gentiles generally. This was especially true of incestual marriages as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 5:1, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among the Gentiles: A man has his father's wife."

The problem had arisen, however, in Gentile communities where there had been significant Jewish influence. Ryrie notes that

... for a decade or two, especially in places like Antioch, where Jew and Gentile met and where the agitation which led to the decree arose, marriage within the prohibited degrees was a live issue, and ἀποκνομή was the word by which it was known.

Turning to St. Matthew, the problem we have to account for is the obscuring of the plain rule of St. Mark by an exception which seems inconsistent with the teaching of our Lord even in St. Matthew. If the foregoing argument holds, the reference is to the local Syrian problem. 150

A fifth justification for the Rabbinic Interpretation of ἀποκνομή is found in the Warrant which states that DIVORCE FOR INCESTUAL MARRIAGE MAINTAINS CONSISTENCY WITH THE "DEBATE" CONTEXT.

An ongoing theological and practical controversy between two Pharisaic schools had made the divorce issue a topic of serious debate. The popular Hillel Interpretation of דָּרָכֶה וְרַבִּים from Deuteronomy 24:1 made the words read a very liberal, "uncleanness, or anything else." Shammai's more conservative interpretation limited the meaning essentially to adultery. Ryrie sees a deceitful purpose in the challenge put to Jesus by his enemies, concerning his position. "By asking the Lord to take sides on this question, the Pharisees hoped to lessen His popularity with the people, whichever side He took." 151
Three generalizations serve as Backing for this Warrant.152

(1) Matthew 5 reveals a "debate" format of "You have heard" vs. "but I say."

(2) Matthew 19 reveals a "debate" context of entrapment and conflict.

(3) Jesus' exception is spoken in sarcasm to unbelieving, hardened hearts.

Warrant six for the Rabbinic view holds that DIVORCE FOR INCESTUAL MARRIAGE EXPLAINS THE SURPRISED RESPONSE OF THE DISCIPLES.

Ryrie observes that

... the disciples' reaction to the Lord's teaching when the exception was included (Matt. 19:10) was not the kind one would expect if they understood the exception to mean immorality in general, for they were greatly startled by His teaching. They evidently thought He was teaching the indissolubility of marriage so clearly that they suggested it might be wiser not to marry at all. In reply the Lord did not recommend celibacy as the better course of action, but the very fact the disciples reject (v. 10) this conception of life and marriage shows that they understood His teaching to be different from what they knew in Judaism. And the Lord did not suggest that they had exaggerated or misunderstood His teaching.153

At least two proposals serve as Backing for this Warrant.

(1) Jesus does not side with either the Hillel or Shammai positions.

It seems apparent that in the challenge of Matthew 19:3, "Is it lawful?" the challengers were not seeking a resolution to the question, but rather the entrapment of Jesus. They evidently calculated that Christ would side with the conservative Shammai. Even his disciples expected their leader to choose a position. Steele and Ryrie comment however, that, "The eunuch saying in Matthew 19 indicates that Christ was not sided with either Hillel or Shammai but was presenting a concept revolutionary to the minds of the disciples."

(2) Jesus' only exception to "no divorce" is extremely narrow.

Laney argues that the disciples' reaction to the teaching of Jesus concerning marriage and divorce demonstrates that they interpreted his allowance to be extremely narrow.

Jesus went beyond the "letterism" of the Pharisees to the spirit of the Law. While divorce was recognized and regulated by Old Testament Law, it was not instituted by Old Testament Law. The disciples, who apparently had been following the Pharisaic view of either Shammai or Hillel, recognized that Jesus' teaching in essence allowed for no divorce!155
DIVORCE FOR INCESTUAL MARRIAGE TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE "LEGAL"
CONTEXT represents the seventh Warrant offered by the supporters of the Rabbinic view of
mpveta. Steele argues that the legal ramifications of Matthew 19 are remarkably apparent. The
questions, "Is it lawful?" (verse 3), "Have you not read?" (verse 4), "Did not Moses command?" (verse 7) along with the statement, "Moses . . . permitted," (verse 8), and the audience of canon
experts all point to a decidedly legal setting. The debate, in fact, centers around the legal
interpretation of a single word.

Now this meaning of mpveta would be understood by the Jews to be legal terminology and
not classical usage, since the context is that of a discussion of the law. What mpveta meant in
such a case was that there were marriages which were not considered valid because they
were outside the prohibited Levitical decree.156

Three generalizations are given as Backing for this Warrant.

(1) Matthew 5 looks back to the Law and its proper meaning.

The divorce saying of Matthew 5:31-32 appears in the middle of the Sermon on the
Mount, in a section that addresses Jesus' relationship to the Law. Though some would accuse
him of abolishing the Law, Jesus claims to fully support and properly interpret the spiritual intent of
every Old Testament precept. At issue here are the legal requirements of true, as opposed to
Pharisaic, righteousness.

There are six different issues declared here by Christ with the words, "Ye have heard that it
hath been said . . . but I say unto you." After which are the words, "Be ye therefore perfect
(τελειοί), even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect . . . Christ does not nullify the law
by His statement, anymore than His raising the standard on murder and adultery nullified
those laws.157

(2) Matthew 19 addresses the question of what is "lawful."

Ryrie concludes that, "The Lord Jesus affirmed the fact that the law did not sanction
divorce but only permitted it (Matt. 19:3-9)."158 When the Pharisees questioned Christ regarding
the legality of divorce, He took them back to the fundamental law of marriage as found in Genesis
2:24. The answer of Jesus is appropriated from the legal literature of the Old Testament.

(3) Incestual marriages were illegal according to the Law.
In reference to Leviticus 18, Steele interprets Moses as laying down God's law for the people of Israel. A number of activities are singled out as reprehensible to God. Among these were several related to sexuality.

He gives a number of areas of unlawful sexual relationships. Thus, this was taken by the Jews (and rightly so) to be also a matter of forbidding marriage in certain areas. Verses 6-18 deal with the subject of incest. In fact, incest of all kinds, going far beyond the present-day understanding of incest, even including a daughter-in-law and sister-in-law. God flatly calls it "wickedness" (verse 17).¹⁵⁹

In summary, the Rabbinic Interpretation of  *mopvela* in the exception clause of Jesus allows for divorce in the case of an incestual marriage as proscribed by Leviticus 18. This Claim finds support in seven Warrants which generalize from (1) the specific, contextual use of *mopvela*, (2) the absolute prohibition passages of Scripture, (3) the permanence of the one-flesh marriage bond, (4) the Jewish marriage laws context, (5) the "debate" context, (6) the surprised response of the disciples, and (7) the "legal" context in which the exception was given.

**Conclusion**

In the preceding pages the detailed arguments of four different interpretations of *mopvela* have been mapped out according to the Toulmin model of reasoning. Although a systematic arrangement of these arguments enables one to better understand the particular interpretations of the seven positions presented, it does not provide a means for judging between the competing explanations in order to determine which among them is the most analogous with the original authors' meaning. What is needed now is an evaluation which will sanction a choice between the disparate constructions which the Toulmin model has presently brought to light.

The primary step in this process of interpretation, then, has been to clearly identify the various interpretive options. The next phase, and the more difficult, is to judge between them. A mere arrangement of the disparate constructions of meaning, though beneficial from the point of understanding the alternatives, falls short when we begin the process of eliminating the possible but not probable interpretation of the text and identifying the most reasonable or certain one.
What is needed, then, is a process of adjudication, allowing the interpreter to compare and contrast the juxtaposed arguments of each interpretation. Through this evaluative process of weighing evidence against evidence, it should become possible for less likely arguments to be eliminated and more likely ones retained. It is to this evaluative stage that we turn in the next chapter.

1 Steven Toulmin, English philosopher with a major interest and background in logic and the philosophy of science, has focused attention on the practical side of argumentation; that is, on informal reasoning processes such as those used in jurisprudence and, for that matter, all the arts and sciences.


6 Steele and Ryrie, p. 5.


9 Charles C. Ryrie, "Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage," Grace Theological Journal,

10 See Barbieri, pp. 63-64; William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, pp. 5-9; and Steele and Ryrie, pp. 96-98.

11 Heth and Wenham, p. 73.


13 John Murray, Divorce; R. H. Charles, The Teaching of the New Testament on Divorce (London: Williams and Norgate, 1921); A. T. Robertson,

14 Duty, among others, notes that "the exceptions have strong authoritative support for their rightful places of both the texts found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9," p. 73. The authenticity of
Jesus' statements are not at debate throughout this study. Textual critical studies would be necessary to decide the issue.

15 Steele and Ryrie, p. 98.


18 Charles, p. 109.

19 Duty, p. 62.


22 Charles, p. 118.

23 See Steele, p. 11-12.

24 See Duty, pp. 52-62 for a detailed study of the word from the Erasmian perspective.


26 Duty, p. 135.


28 Duty, p. 125.

29 Heth and Wenham, p. 84. Cf. Duty, p. 68.

30 Murray, p. 27. Cf. Formanek, p. 38; Shaner, pp. 15 & 50; Adams, pp. 74-75.


33 Adams, p. 56.

34 Duty, p. 68.


37 Formanek, p. 54.


41 Shaner, p. 29.

42 Steele, p. 11.

43 Heth and Wenham, p. 79.

44 Ibid., pp. 79, 81-82.


49 See F. Hauck and S. Schulz, "Prona ktl.," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., vol. 6, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 592, where the authors state, "The drift of the clauses then, is not that the Christian husband, should his wife be unfaithful, is permitted to divorce her, but that if he is legally forced to do this he should not be open to criticism if by her conduct his wife has made the continuation of the marriage quite impossible."

50 Heth, p. 137.


52 Heth and Wenham, pp. 126-29, 168, 178.


55 Heth and Wenham, p. 133.
56Ibid., p. 168.
60Heth and Wenham, pp. 196-97.
61Ibid., p. 29.
62Ibid., pp. 100-101.
63Isaksson, p. 17.
64Heth and Wenham, p. 112.
65Ibid., p. 110.
66Ibid., p. 162.
69Ibid., p. 201.
71Ibid., p. 7.
72Heth and Wenham, pp. 13-14.
74Heth, p. 140.
75Ibid., p. 144.
77Heth, p. 143.
78Lovestam, p. 61.
197


81 Lovestam, p. 59.


83 Heth and Wenham, p. 65.


85 Ibid.

86 Lovestam, p. 63.


89 Ibid., p. 65.

90 Heth and Wenham, p. 22.

91 Ibid., p. 43.


94 Isaksson, pp. 139-40.

95 Ibid., p. 140.

96 Ibid., p. 135.


99 Ryrie, p. 186.

100 Fitzmyer, pp. 208-209.


102 Isaksson, pp. 138-39.
103 E. G. Selwyn, “Christ’s Teaching on Marriage and Divorce: A Reply to Dr. Charles,” Theology, 1927, pp. 99-100.


105 Ryrie, p. 179.

106 Ibid., p. 182.

107 Epp, pp. 64-65.


110 Laney, p. 56.

111 Heth and Wenham, p. 110.

112 Ryrie, p. 179.

113 Laney, p. 117, parenthesis are mine.

114 Pentecost, Words and Works, p. 357.

115 Epp, p. 36-37.

116 Edersheim, p. 275.

117 Heth and Wenham, p. 170.

118 Pentecost, p. 354.


120 Pentecost, pp. 176-77.

121 Epp, pp. 55-56.

122 Smith, p. 356.

123 Pentecost, p. 358.

124 Steele, pp. 7 & 9.

125 Pentecost, p. 358.

127Epp, p. 34.

128Pentecost, pp. 357-58.

129Laney, pp. 71-72.

130Paul E. Steele and Charles C. Ryrie, "Are Divorce and Remarriage Ever Permissible? No."

131Isaksson, p. 129.

132Laney, p. 66.

133Steele, p. 11.

134Isaksson, p. 135.

135Laney, p. 68.

136Heth and Wenham, p. 154.

137Laney, pp. 72-73.

138Ibid., pp. 75-76.

139Charles Caldwell Ryrie, You Mean the Bible Teaches That? (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974),
pp. 45, 47 & 51-53.

140These Backing are essentially the same as those stated by both the Patristic and Betrothal
proponents. The reader's attention is therefore directed back to the second Warrants for those
positions, pp. 159-162 and pp. 172-174.

141See also, Laney, pp. 15-89; Steele and Ryrie, pp. 96-98; Heth and Wenham, pp. 100-148.

142Steele and Ryrie, p. 65.

143Again, these Backing are comparable to the Patristic and Betrothal positions and may be
reviewed under the third Warrants of each argument, pp. 162-164 and pp. 174-175.

144See also, Steele and Ryrie, pp. 64-68; Laney pp. 21-22, 25, 56, and 117; Isaksson, pp. 17-
27; Heth and Wenham, pp. 100-110.

287-88.

146Laney, pp. 74-75.

147Steele and Ryrie, p. 113.

148Laney, p. 74.
149ibid., p. 73.

150Ryrie, *Role of Women*, p. 47.


152The Backing for this Warrant are the same as those provided for the fifth Warrant of the Betrothal view to which the reader is here referred, pp. 177-178.

153Ryrie, p. 183.

154Steele and Ryrie, p. 115.

155Laney, p. 65.

156Steele, p. 11.

157ibid., p. 7.

158Ryrie, *You Mean the Bible*, p. 46.

159Steele, p. 12.
CHAPTER V

AN EVALUATION OF THE ἈΡΓΟΝ ΕΙΔΗ ARGUMENTS

Having identified the structure of the various arguments for the four interpretations of ἀργονεία in chapter four, the present section offers an evaluation of each argument. Just as the identification of the structure of the arguments followed the prescribed model of chapter three, the Toulmin model, so the evaluation of the arguments will adhere to the standards of reasonableness and rationalness as presented in the third chapter.

The goal of this evaluative section is to determine which, if any, of the four arguments is the more probable, valid, or morally certain. With that task accomplished, either one of the existing arguments will be confirmed, or a new argument which more accurately reflects the known facts will be constructed.

Erasmian View of Ἀργονεία Evaluated

CLAIM: Divorce is permissible in the case of sexual sin within the marriage; or more especially, adultery and/or desertion by the marriage partner.

GROUND: Jesus used the term ἀργονεία in the exception clause of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

WARRANT #1: Divorce for sexual sin within marriage, including and especially adultery and/or desertion, interprets ἀργονεία in its natural, broad sense.

This first Warrant seeks to establish the Claim on the basis of principle or definition. By grounding the argument in the field-dependent, lexical evidence for ἀργονεία, Erasmians offer their most reasonable proof in support of their Claim. Problems with this warrant do not exist in the realm of reasonableness, for the principle of lexical studies is a well established strategy in the
practice of biblical hermeneutics and appeals to definition are especially strong. Rather, the issue with this warrant surfaces in the area of its rationalness, as will be made evident by an examination of the Backing offered in its support.

The failure of the Erasmlans in establishing this warrant is that they are unable to offer any evidence which establishes that in every case 

\[ \text{mptva} \]

must be translated broadly. Though Adams, for example, states that limiting the term to a single sexual sin or a single act "might tend to narrow the focus too much,"1 he offers no rational proof in support of that assertion. His assessment alone is not sufficient to authorize its acceptance. To say that 

\[ \text{mptva} \]

could be translated broadly is not to say that it must be. The argument, standing unsupported, is incomplete.

BACKING (1) Lexical definitions allow for a broad interpretation of 

\[ \text{mptva} \].

Although this statement is universally uncontested, as an examination of any Greek lexicon would easily demonstrate, it fails to establish that 

\[ \text{mptva} \]

must in every case carry the same broad meaning. The argument is unsound in that it generalizes too hastily that allowance for a broad interpretation is tantamount to insistence on a broad interpretation. Since the right kind of evidence is offered here, but not enough of it to establish the point, the argument fails the test of sufficiency.

BACKING (2) Biblical usages allow for a broad interpretation of 

\[ \text{mptva} \].

This second statement of Backing, like the first, fails the test of sufficiency. Again, the evidence is uncontested as far as it goes, but the fact that the Bible often uses 

\[ \text{mptva} \]

in a broad enough sense to include all kinds of sexual sins, does not indicate that the word must always carry that same generic meaning. Once more the failure is that of offering too little evidence or hasty generalization.

The issue is not how many different sources agree that the term is used in its broad sense,2 but whether or not any source can demonstrate that the word must be understood that way every time it is used. Erasmlans fall to establish that crucial point.
BACKING (3) *Provela* is equivalent to *muqṣṭa* (adultery) in several instances.

The rational failure is the same in this third instance of Backing. The statement is unsound in that it is insufficient. It brings forth evidence which is uncontested, but which fails sufficiently to establish the argument. Erasmians make a hasty generalization when they suggest that since the term *provela* is often equivalent to the term *muqṣṭa* it must always be identical in meaning.

BACKING (4) *Provela* may include the element of unrepentance.

This element of Backing is both irrelevant and incomplete. In the first place, it misdirects the discussion by introducing what is at best a subjective approach to the definition of *provela*. The issue of whether the sinful act of sexual intercourse is a limited infraction or an habitual violation has nothing to do with whether or not the term must always be interpreted in its broadest sense. Also, the subjectiveness of determining when an act becomes habitual places this particular argument into the realm of the irrelevant.

Second, this statement of Backing is nothing more than a bare-faced assertion, totally void of supporting evidence. Although the suggested distinction made between *provela* and *muqṣṭa* could be an acceptable one, the only argument brought forth in support of it is the statement itself. Arguments with missing grounds are incomplete and fail the test of rationalness.

BACKING (5) Context is a key to a broad Interpretation of *provela*.

This piece of Backing is Irrelevant in that It fails to prove anything regarding the use of *provela* in Matthew 5 and 19. The statement does not demonstrate that the term must be translated in its generic sense in the exception passages. As a matter of fact, the proponents of both the Betrothal and Rabbinic views illustrate a very narrow usage of *provela* in Matthean and Jewish contexts, with no contradictory evidence forthcoming from the Erasmians.

This final element of Backing is not only irrelevant, but also insufficient. Though the statement is uncontested as it stands (context is a key to interpretation generally), evidence is lacking which demonstrates that Jesus and Matthew always use *provela* in the broad sense. In fact, in his discussion of context, Charles admits to a narrower use of the term. This admission
tends to offset the entire argument of the first Warrant of the Erasmian view. It is for this reason that the first Warrant of this view must be held suspect. When the Erasmian asks, "Could the term ἐγκυρία carry a meaning more narrow than its broadest possibilities?" he is forced to answer, "Yes." If he then fails to establish sufficient arguments to support his Claim of a broad use of the term, his argument fails the rational test of completeness.

WARRANT #2: Divorce for sexual sin, especially adultery and/or desertion, follows the divorce for "marital unfaithfulness" precedent of the Old Testament.

This Warrant emerges out of a contextual, theological, and literal examination of the text. It adheres to these most basic principles of biblical hermeneutics when it investigates the Scriptural uses of the terms "marital unfaithfulness" and "divorce". It seeks to place these concepts within the context of all of its biblical references, to establish a consistent theology of divorce and remarriage throughout the progress of revelation, and to interpret these references in a strictly literal sense.

The reasonableness of this Warrant is based upon an argument from analogy. Erasmians undertake to demonstrate that God's allowances for and practices of divorce and remarriage in the Old Testament interpret Jesus' position in the exception clause.

Although this Warrant appears to support the Claim of the Erasmian view, a careful examination of its Backing will reveal the existence of some rational problems which ultimately undermine its reasonableness as well. The major hermeneutical problem is that the statements of God's divorcing Israel are portrayed as a literal event as opposed to a theological figure. The major rational problem is that the Backing is both improbable and incomplete.

BACKING (1) God allowed divorce in the Old Testament for "marital unfaithfulness."

This piece of Backing is improbable in that it assumes a consensus that is far from unanimous. Even though differing proponents may acknowledge with the Erasmians that the particular crimes of slander and rape resulted in a "no divorce" situation, they would not agree that God, therefore, logically recognized the legitimacy of divorce in the instance of marital
unfaithfulness. Holding that "no divorce" is a proper and legal punishment of some crimes does not prove that its opposite is a proper and legal response in other cases. More evidence would be necessary before the proponents of other views on the divorce issue would be willing to accept this assumption.

The decisive question at issue here is whether the Deuteronomy 24 passage allows for divorce, thereby encouraging its practice, or merely regulates the practice of divorce which was already being practiced without God’s sanction. Syntactical arguments seem to favor the latter interpretation. Until the Erasmians present more convincing evidence in support of their position, this first piece of Backing must be considered improbable.

BACKING (2) Jesus corrected and interpreted properly the Old Testament basis for divorce.

This statement is one with which all views would easily agree. Jesus certainly did correct and interpret properly the Old Testament basis for divorce. The argument, however, is incomplete in that it totally fails to demonstrate what that proper interpretation was. It merely argues in a circle that since the “correct” interpretation is one which allows for divorce in the case of adultery/desertion, Jesus’ correction means that the only basis for divorce is the existence of adultery/desertion.

The issue is not whether or not there was a misunderstanding in Jesus’ day as to the proper interpretation of the Old Testament laws of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The question centers around the content of the correction offered by Jesus. Though the statement is made by Erasmians that the divorce limitation of Jesus, through the use of ἐν πασιν, restricts the cause of divorce from almost any reason to adultery/desertion, no evidence is offered in support of that contention. This piece of Backing fails to advance the argument toward the claim to any degree.

BACKING (3) God, in Old Testament contexts, divorced the nation of Israel for “marital unfaithfulness.”
This third statement of backing falls in the realm of the probable. It is at this point that the reasonableness of the argument suffers, and suffers for lack of rationalness. The Warrant at issue here seeks to establish the Claim on the basis of argument from analogy. The problem is that the analogy is a false or improper analogy. The statement is improbable because it overlooks the theological and literary purposes of the biblical writer.

When the Prophets of the Old Testament refer to the idolatry of Israel as adultery or marital unfaithfulness and the disciplinary response of God as divorce, the literal method of exegesis will attest to an obvious use of figurative language to make a theological point. That Israel's sin and God's judgment are cast into figurative terms should surprise no reader of the Prophets. Rather it should be anticipated. Evidence that the figurative analogy is not to be pressed into a literal understanding and application exists in all the prophetic writings where Israel is continually loved and ultimately restored. Erasmians push the figure beyond its theological purpose, and in so doing offer an analogy that is improper and improbable.

If it could be demonstrated that the language was intended to be taken literally, that is not as a figure, this backing would still stand on uncertain ground. The argument could prove to be insufficient in that the example of God divorcing Israel could well be an exception to the rule, an argument based on accident. Much more evidence would be necessary to prove that the Old Testament Prophets established a precedent of divorce for adultery/desertion.

WARRANT #3: Divorce for sexual sin within marriage recognizes the legitimate dissolubility of marriage.

This third Warrant is also based on analogy, and again it proves to be false or improper analogy. Sufficient evidence is lacking to support the contention that marriage is dissoluble outside of the death of one of the marriage partners. The argument seeks to establish itself through an appeal to the historical-cultural considerations of the Old and New Testaments. In so doing, however, it overlooks some logical fallacies. The major error is that the argument follows a circular pattern.
BACKING (1) The Old Testament cure for adultery was stoning.

This statement is one that is not debated by any of the proponents of the multiple views on the interpretation of *mopêla*. In the case of stoning the marriage would be dissolved, but by death rather than by divorce. Since the Old Testament nowhere indicates that divorce dissolves a marriage, this piece of Backing represents an argument that is incomplete. It establishes neither the Warrant nor the Claim.

BACKING (2) The New Testament cure for adultery is divorce.

A nonrational leap is made at this point. In seeking to draw an analogy between the Old Testament cure and a New Testament cure for adultery, Erasmians argue in a circle. They assume two things which are not necessarily acceptable to all of the various divorce proponents.

First, they assume that since *mopêla* means adultery, an assumption which they have not established, the subject of Christ's statements in Matthew 5 and 19 is specifically centered on "a cure for adultery" rather than, say, "a basis for marital faithfulness." Second, they assume that the New Testament is seeking a "cure" for adultery in the same way that the Old Testament gave a "cure" for adultery.

The argument assumes a definition that has not been substantiated and a subject analogy that is uncertain. The Backing here is incomplete in that it fails to advance evidence in support of both the definition proposed and the supposedly analogous subject matter.

BACKING (3) Sexual sin breaks the marriage bond.

This piece of Backing is totally circular in nature. It asserts that since the essence of marriage is physical union, then the practice of sexual sin, that is extra-marital physical unions or possibly desertion wherein the original and legitimate physical union cannot be maintained, destroys the marriage bond. Or in other words, the marriage bond is broken by sexual sin because sexual sin breaks the marriage bond.
Evidence is lacking to demonstrate that the essence of marriage is physical union and that sexual sin can break a legitimately established one flesh relationship. This Backing is incomplete in that it begs the question.

BACKING (4) Even as God divorced Israel so Joseph was about to divorce Mary in Matthew 1.

There are two fallacies evident in this statement. The first relates to the unresolved and therefore improbable evidence that God divorced Israel. The Prophets’ use of figurative language to make a theological point renders this interpretation of God’s response to Israel unlikely. Essentially the analogy fails because the evidence for a literal interpretation of Israel’s divorce fails. At any rate, the strictly literal construction of these extraordinary Old Testament passages has not been established as the most probable explanation.

A second issue has to do with the special circumstances of Joseph’s divorce of Mary. This consideration of divorce occurred during the time of betrothal, a time before physical consummation had cemented the one flesh relationship.

If anything, this is an analogy based on accident. God had almost certainly consummated his (figurative?) marriage with Israel before the divorce statements of the Prophets. Then, too, the example of Joseph would most likely be an exception to the fully consummated marriages that were in mind in Matthew 5 and 19. And even if not, this argument offers a stronger support for the more narrow Betrothal view rather than the broad Erasmian Claim. This piece of Backing is insufficient because it lacks sufficient evidence to establish its Claim.

BACKING (5) Jesus assumed the dissolubility of a broken bond when he said, “... let no man separate.”

This statement is merely circular. Erasmians argue that “to put asunder” or “to separate” means “to break” or “to dissolve.” Therefore, to have Jesus saying, “Let no man put asunder,” is the same as admitting that divorce actually does dissolve a marriage. This, however, is a circular definition of the terms and an argument which fails because it is incomplete.
Erasmians must bring forth evidence which could serve to substantiate the present assumption that divorce is equivalent to dissolution. As it stands, this statement of Backing is unsupported and simply begs the question.

WARRANT #4 Divorce for sexual sin explains the surprised response of the disciples to Jesus' exception clause.

This fourth Warrant offered in support of the Erasmian Claim is based on an historical-cultural and contextual study of the exception clause in Matthew 19 and addresses an argument based on circumstance as found in that text. The failure of this Warrant is that although a possible explanation for the disciples' surprised response is offered, other exception clause interpretations employ essentially the same argument. Lack of sufficient evidence to undergird the Erasmian position only leaves this Warrant on shaky ground.

BACKING (1) Jesus did not side with the popular (Hillel) position of his day.

This position is not debated among the various proponents of the divorce issue. However, although the statement is uncontested, as it stands it offers up no real evidence with which to establish the Warrant. The argument is, therefore, Incomplete.

BACKING (2) Jesus did side with the strict (Shammai) position of his day.

Evidence offered in support of this statement is circular in nature. Erasmians assume that the disciples held the Hillel position. They base this assumption on the surprised response of the disciples to Jesus' more narrow view as demonstrated by his supposed siding with the Shammai position. However, the way Erasmians know that Jesus sided with the Shammai is by arguing that he took the same position as they did. Shammai held to no divorce except for adultery or desertion. Jesus held the same view. This is known by the surprised response of the disciples to the more narrow view of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus sided with the Shammai.10

No convincing evidence is offered to establish this statement. Although Erasmians may rightly assume that the disciples held the most liberal as well as the most popular view of the day, a point that cannot be known with any degree of certainty because of the lack of biblical evidence,
and although they may be accurate in their assessment therefore, in saying that the mere rejection of the Hillel position caused the stir among the followers of Jesus, Erasmians offer no real evidence which demonstrates that Jesus sided with the Shammai position. The issue in debate here is not whether the disciples were surprised with Jesus' statement, but whether or not he sided with Shammai. This point, therefore, fails the test of rationalness in that its lack of grounds leaves it incomplete.

BACKING (3) Jesus, however, did not demand divorce as did Hillel and Shammai.

This statement of Backing, like the first of this Warrant, is not debated, but rather accepted as universally uncontested. Even though the Patristic view has Jesus making a concession to the forced divorce rule of the day, that is not the issue at stake here. As a result, this Backing offers nothing of significance to the present argument and is to be rejected as incomplete.

WARRANT #5: Divorce for sexual sin acknowledges the realistic necessity of divorce, especially for the intent of remarriage, in a sinful world.

This argument fails both the test of reasonableness and rationalness. It allows principle (biblical ideals in regard to marriage: one mate so long as both live) to be abrogated by circumstance (changing behavior patterns of a society: common divorce practices). Also, its argument is irrelevant and incomplete in that it both evades the issue at hand and fails to bring forth any real evidence in support of the Claim. In that it rests on none of the accepted principles of biblical hermeneutics, it may be classified as eisegesis rather than exegesis.

BACKING (1) God does not expect an innocent partner to live with a sexually perverted mate.

This statement of Backing misdirects the argument by setting up a straw man. None of the proponents of the various divorce views holds that God expects marriage partners to live with perverts or criminals. That does not appear to be an issue at all. God has provided social institutions such as family, church, and government to deal with harmful and sinful conditions
within a marriage. This argument is irrelevant for none of the positions holds that divorce is the only option to a malicious marital situation.

At issue is whether or not God intended a way out of one bad marriage with the freedom to enter another. The second statement of backing, therefore, is at least addressed to the right point.

BACKING (2) God does not expect an innocent party to live without a sexual partner. This statement, although to the point, fails to advance any biblical or theological evidence in support of the Claim. The argument is merely a bare-faced assertion which begs the question.

Although it may seem reasonable that a defective marriage partner could be abandoned for another, proponents of other divorce views have noted that Matthew 19 and I Corinthians 7 argue the opposite. Until these biblical arguments are refuted, the Erasmians fail to establish their point because of the incompleteness of their assertion. Once again the problem is the use of elsegesis, arguing from circumstance, rather than exegesis, arguing from principle.

WARRANT #6: Divorce for sexual sin represents the traditional protestant view since the reformation.

This Warrant also fails the tests of reasonableness and rationalness. It is argument based on circumstance rather than on principle. The statement is also irrelevant being based on appeals to authority as the last word and popularity. Even though it is freely admitted by the proponents of all of the divorce views that the statement of this Warrant is uncontested, the argument fails to advance the Claim. Undisputed, but irrelevant arguments cannot hold their own in the arena of rational thinking.

Summary

When the arguments for the Erasmian view of ἀνεπέλατο are evaluated for reasonableness and rationalness, the position does not make a particularly strong showing. Warrant #1, though uncontested as it stands, fails to advance evidence in support of the Claim that ἀνεπέλατο must have been used by Jesus in its broadest sense. Warrant #2 lacks sufficient
consensus concerning the evidence given in support of the Claim as a result of a false or improper analogy between God's figurative divorce of Israel and the actual practice of divorce in a literal marriage. Warrant #3 is also based on at least two false or improper analogies, one between the Old Testament "cure" for adultery and the supposed New Testament "cure" and the other between God's divorce of Israel and Joseph's divorce of Mary, as well as several instances of begging the question. Warrant #4 fails because the evidence either begs the question or argues in a circle. Warrants #5 and #6 both argue from circumstance and are based on irrelevancies.

This is not to suggest that Erasmian proponents are deceptive in any way or are inconsistent in their position. Nor do they appear to have presented arguments that are patently unacceptable. Many of the assertions made are clearly uncontested and not debatable. The major weakness of the Erasmian position is that it does not go far enough in presenting evidence which bridges the gap between the Warrants and the Claim.

**Patristic View of τοπρελα Evaluated**

CLAIM: Those who are forced by the mores of the community to divorce a willfully adulterous spouse are not guilty of violating Jesus' absolute prohibition of divorce.

GROUNDS: Jesus used the term τοπρελα in the context of the exceptive clause as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

WARRANT #1: No-guilt, required divorce interprets τοπρελα in its natural, broad sense.

This Warrant is essentially the same as the Erasmians' first Warrant. The appeal is to definition, or principle, based on lexical evidence. In this sense, the argument appeals to the strongest reasonable proof. It fails, however, to make the full step to its Claim because its grounds is incomplete. Although τοπρελα may be used in a broad sense, that does not mean that it must be so used by Christ in the exceptive clause. The argument is nonrational in that it fails to advance evidence in support of the Claim.
BACKING (1) Lexical definitions and biblical usages allow for a broad interpretation of ἄπωτα. The statement is uncontested, but rationally insufficient for although it offers evidence which is of the right sort, that evidence is insufficient to establish the Claim. Just because ἄπωτα can mean any and all sexual sin does not indicate that it must carry that broad meaning in a particular case. No evidence is offered to demonstrate that Jesus must have used ἄπωτα in its broadest sense.

BACKING (2) ἄπωτα can be used as an equivalent to μοίχεια (adultery). This assertion fails at the rational level also, and for the same reason as the first statement of Backing; it is unsound in that it is insufficient. It is a hasty generalization to suggest that since the term ἄπωτα is often equivalent to the term μοίχεια it must always carry that same meaning. The evidence offered here is uncontested, but fails to establish the argument.

BACKING (3) Context is a key to a broad interpretation of ἄπωτα. This piece of Backing is universally uncontested, but offers no evidence to sufficiently support the Patristic Claim. No arguments are brought forth to demonstrate that the context of Matthew or of the exception statements demands a broad interpretation of ἄπωτα. In addition, the Jewish context of Matthew and the debate tone of the exception context could easily argue in favor of a narrow view of the term.11 The statement is, therefore, both insufficient and irrelevant.

BACKING (4) ἄπωτα includes any and all sexual sins condemned by one's culture. Although those who hold to the Patristic position place much emphasis on the fact that ἄπωτα was likely an abbreviated term intended to be understood as a synonym for עָרָבָה (the nakedness of a thing),12 this assertion adds nothing conclusive in the way of evidence. It is merely a circular argument in which the Greek term means the same as the Hebrew term because the Hebrew term means the same thing as the Greek term. Although the two terms may have been used interchangeably and although it is possible that Jesus used ἄπωτα with this broad
meaning in the exception clause, no evidence is offered which demands the generic use of the term or excludes a more narrow interpretation. The statement is, therefore, incomplete.

WARRANT #2: No-guilt, required divorce maintains consistency with the absolute "no divorce" prohibition passages.

From the perspective of reasonableness, the essence of this Warrant is analogy. It is argued that the Patristic view is consistent with, and analogous to, the no divorce biblical ideal. However, while there is little doubt that the biblical principle is no divorce, as even Erasmians are forced to admit, it is difficult to understand how the Patristic proponents can argue that divorcing, even if under constraint, is the same as not divorcing.

Though properly asserting that God's ideal is no divorce, this view fails to establish that forced divorce is the same as no divorce. While the evidence offered by the following statements of Backing tends to refute the Erasmian view and support both the Betrothal and Rabbinic views, it does not lead to the Patristic conclusion. Thus, this Warrant fails the test of rationalness in that it is incomplete, for it offers no real evidence in support of its primary Claim.

BACKING (1) Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 prohibit divorce.

These two passages serve as the foundation for a theology of marriage. Patristic proponents see in them a prohibition against divorce. Although it could be argued that the principle discovered here is based on argument from silence (just because the intent was that the two should become one flesh does not mean that the two could not be divorced), Jesus' references to these foundational texts in tandem with his "What God has joined together let no one separate," seem to establish the no divorce ideal. What is not proven, however, is that forced divorce meets this no divorce standard. The Backing is incomplete.

BACKING (2) Leviticus 18 prohibits divorce.

Those who maintain the Patristic view hold that the many regulations of this passage indicate that the marital union cannot be dissolved by legal divorce. But the evidence in support of this contention is lacking. This argument fails for lack of support. What is clear here is that
marriage establishes a relationship not only with the partner in marriage, but also with the partner's family. While it adds support to the one flesh concept, it does not directly address the divorce issue. The argument is irrelevant.

BACKING (3) Deuteronomy 24:1-4 prohibits divorce.

The strong inference of this passage is that divorce is wrong for it seeks to break what is unbreakable. Although it seeks to regulate existing divorce and remarriage practices, the text's overall message is that divorce cannot and does not dissolve the one flesh marital relationship. As a result, divorce may be legal, but it does not come up to the original no divorce ideal.

Once again, the Backing makes its point, but only so far as it goes. The Bible does appear to militate against divorce in this text. However, that forced divorce is equivalent to no divorce is not established, rendering the statement incomplete.

BACKING (4) Malachi 2:13-16 prohibits divorce.

There is little question but that the pronouncement by God, "I hate divorce," indicates the divine attitude toward the practice. The ideal of no divorce is once again established. From a Patristic point of view, however, the argument falls short and for the same reason as in the first and third statements of Backing.

BACKING (5) Mark 10:2-12 prohibits divorce.

This biblical prohibition is absolute. There are no exceptions to no divorce in this statement of Jesus. His declaration is based on the ideal of Genesis 2:24 and includes the clear warning in verse 9, "What God has joined together, let man not separate."

Although some Erasmians would counter at this juncture that such a marital separation could be caused prior to a divorce through an unlawful sexual act, the burden of proof seems to be on the Erasmian to demonstrate that point rather than on the Patristic advocate to prove that sexual sin does not break the marriage. The apparent message of Mark 10 is that both divorce and remarriage after divorce are prohibited. So, the argument stands, though it does not support
the Patristic Claim that forced divorce equals no divorce. This Backing, therefore, like the preceding, is incomplete.


Although the statement of Christ in Luke 16 is not as clear or as forceful as that of Mark 10, the essence appears to be the same. Once again the burden of proof is on the Erasmian to demonstrate how and why the prohibition is against remarriage rather than divorce. In so doing he would have to explain how remarriage after divorce is adultery if there is no sin, but merely dissolution, in the divorce itself. Therefore, what was said of the previous Backing fits here as well. The argument stands as uncontested, but it does not advance evidence in support of the Patristic Claim.

BACKING (7) Romans 7:2-3 prohibits divorce.

This pronouncement by Paul supports the biblical ideal of Genesis 2:24. Divorce is prohibited in that the marriage partner is “bound to her husband as long as he is alive.” Any remarriage while the partner is still living results in adultery. This statement stands uncontested, but, like the others, fails to establish the Claim of the Patristic proponents.

BACKING (8) I Corinthians 7 prohibits divorce.

Although separation is possible, according to this statement by Paul, divorce is not an option. The reason divorce is never an option is because it tends to limit the possibility of restoration. When a husband and wife no longer consider themselves married, they do not sense the need to heal the separateness that has occurred.

This statement of Backing follows the trend of the second Warrant for the Patristic position. Except for the second piece of Backing which does not demonstrate the no divorce biblical Ideal, all the preceding arguments support the contention that the Scriptures consistently militate against divorce. Yet this evidence, on its own, is unable to substantiate the ultimate conclusion of the Patristic view and renders the argument incomplete.
The primary failure of this Warrant is that while demonstrating the no divorce ideal, the exponents of the Patristic position are unable to demonstrate that no divorce is equal to forced divorce. To do so they would have to prove one of two possibilities. First, they would have to prove that what is not right for the individual, that is divorce, is right for the community. There is no biblical indication that such is the case. Or second, they would have to show that God made a concession to the practices of the Jewish culture. This too seems farfetched. Although God has apparently allowed certain sinful practices, there seems to be no evidence that Jesus condoned an abrogation of the ideal. In fact, this same kind of argument is refuted by the Patristics when they read the Deuteronomy 24 passage. To say that Christ made a concession to what is in other places sin, appears to be a supreme contradiction. That such was the case in Jesus' exception statements seems beyond credibility. In that it so fails the test of rationality, this Warrant tends to create more harm than help for the Patristic view, and is much better suited for the Betrothal or Rabbinic views.

WARRANT #3: No-guilt, required divorce maintains the permanence of the "one flesh" marriage bond.

This third Warrant seeks to establish the argument on the basis of analogy; required divorce is like maintaining the one flesh relationship. The theological principle of biblical hermeneutics leads the Patristic proponents to a doctrine of marriage which includes the one flesh concept of marital relationships. It is argued that the idea of a couple forced to divorce, yet who remain unmarried, is analogous to the one flesh biblical principle. Included in the argument of this Warrant is the hermeneutical principle of lexical-syntactical studies. The term one flesh is viewed as a technical term with narrow meaning and significance. It is the foundation for the biblical doctrine of marriage.

If it could be demonstrated that Jesus perceived forced divorce the same as, the equivalent of, or even similar to the maintaining of a one flesh marital relationship, then the argument would be sound. As it stands, however, the Patristics fail to establish their claim. The
Warrant is improbable in that there is no consensus that divorce of any kind maintains the one flesh biblical principle. The comparison here is inappropriate for we are never told how it could be that divorced partners could be considered in fulfillment of the biblical mandate. Although the one flesh concept appears to be a legitimate interpretation of Genesis 2:24, the principle argues more effectively for the Betrothal or Rabbinic view than for the Patristic. It clearly argues against the Erasmian view.

BACKING (1) Marriage is based upon a "one-flesh" concept of relationship.

This piece of Backing appears to offer a strong argument from the perspective of reasonableness. It stands as one of the two most crucial elements of the entire debate, the other being the degree of narrowness with which *maproeta* is to be interpreted. The statement is based on principle in that the text of Genesis clearly states that the marriage partners take on a one flesh relationship. Proponents for this position maintain that one flesh establishes a life long monogamous bond that cannot be broken. Not only does the marriage produce vertical blood relationships as children are born into the family, but also horizontal "blood relationships" are secured as one marries into a family. As a result one discovers the restrictions on marriage to one's in-laws as found in Leviticus 18, Luke 3:19, and I Corinthians 5:1-5.

Added to the weight of the statement is the evidence of Jesus' pronouncements in the Gospels concerning the permanence of the marriage bond. Jesus appears to adhere to the one flesh position when he refers his listeners back to Genesis 2 and warns that no one should seek to separate that which God has joined together.

The major problem encountered by the Patristic view at this point is its failure to demonstrate that forced divorce maintains this one flesh requirement. That two people in a separated and divorced context can be said to be one flesh in the biblical sense requires an improbably technical definition of the concept. They may not have formed another one flesh relationship, but they are hardly a functioning one flesh. Thus, although the statement of Backing
appears to be a valid one, it alone is insufficient to establish the Claim of the Patristics. The argument is insufficient.

BACKING (2) This "one-flesh" concept is not renounced, but corroborated in Deuteronomy 24.

The explanation of the Deuteronomy 24 text offered by the Patristic as well as the Betrothal and Rabbinic views makes sense. Rather than interpreting the text as merely an allowance of divorce, this position takes it as a regulation of remarriage after divorce. The passage clearly states that if a couple gets married, and if a divorce occurs, and if a third party marriage follows, and if that marriage suffers divorce or the death of the third party, then it is wrong to go back and marry the first party again. In these verses there is no command to divorce and no condoning of divorce, but rather a recognition that it was being practiced. There is, however, a regulation of the options after divorce and a remarriage.

Why does the regulation exist? Remarriage to a former mate after a previous marriage to another mate is forbidden because it would be like going back and marrying one's brother or sister. It would be marrying back into the one flesh relationship. This construction of Deuteronomy 24 is both reasonable and rational.

Although the explanation of the Deuteronomy text by the Patristic proponents could evoke broad acceptability, it is a rationally insufficient argument for the Patristic Claim since it fails to establish that forced divorce is the same as or maintains the one flesh bond. The statement is uncontested as far as it goes, but it is not sufficient to complete the argument. In fact, the entire Warrant is of little significance, for at no point is that necessary correlation made.

BACKING (3) This "one-flesh" relationship is nullified only by the death of a marriage partner.

Once again, the statement appears to be uncontested based on biblical principle, but is insufficient in that it fails to establish the Claim that forced divorce is analogous to keeping one flesh. In all of Scripture there is but one act which breaks the one flesh bond; the death of a
partner. It is never stated that immorality or divorce annuls the union. It is affirmed, however, that the bond can be voided. Both Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 state that death frees a person to remarry.

It could be charged that this is an argument from silence; that just because death breaks the bond we are not left to conclude that death alone annuls one flesh. That challenge would have some validity if immorality and divorce were never handled in the context of one flesh references or if there were clear statements that other causes of bond breaking existed. But no such instances are found, and plenty of opportunity exists if such statements were meant to be made. It appears more likely that the direct statements of Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7 are the only ones which specifically identify any cause for the ending of a one flesh relationship.

There seems to be no evidence then which contradicts the statement of this Backing. The Patristic view has observed an apparent biblical principle here. Still, the argument falls and for the same reason as the previous statements of Backing. Since the grounds are insufficient to establish the Claim, the argument is incomplete.

BACKING (4) Even sexual sin does not break the "one-flesh" relationship.

Having established that the one flesh concept is a firmly rooted biblical principle supported by the remarriage regulation of Deuteronomy 24 and the annulment by death statements from Paul's epistles, the Patristic proponents place the burden of proof onto the shoulders of the Erasmians. It is up to them to demonstrate that there is biblical evidence that immorality breaks the marriage bond. Yet no such arguments exist.15 The Patristics believe that the point will be carried for lack of evidence against the established principle.

Once again, the statement of Backing seems to be broadly acceptable. But once again, the point at issue fails to establish the Claim of the Patristic view. All the evidence appears to be uncontested so far as it goes, but it comes short of demonstrating the affinity between a one flesh marriage and a forced divorce situation. Patristics must do more than validate the clear biblical
principle; they must prove that divorce without remarriage is the same as being fully married in the one flesh sense.

WARRANT #4: No-guilt, required divorce takes into account the Jewish "forced divorce" context.

The fourth Warrant of the Patristic view of πορνεία argues from a historical-cultural perspective. In so doing, however, it fails the test of reasonableness and rationalness. First, it argues from circumstance. It has Jesus making a concession to the practice of the day. It argues, much like the Erasmians argue, that Jesus, willingly or not, accepted the cultural mandates of the day and shaped his responses to fit the requirements which were more or less forced upon him. Since the rules of society required divorce in the aftermath of immorality, believers were coerced into divorcing their mates (forgiveness and restoration being excluded as a general rule) even though "God hates divorce." But, why would Jesus feel forced into a concession in this particular case when he so often appeared to delight in the refutation of human standards? Why would Jesus become a slave to circumstance? No evidence is brought forward to explain Jesus' supposed submission to the mores of society.

Second, this Warrant is lacking in rationalness. Not only is the argument improbable in that evidence is lacking to justify Jesus' concession, but also the evidence brought forward in support of the Warrant fails to establish the Claim of the Patristics. Not one of the three statements of Backing are debated by the proponents of other views. The points they make are insignificant until it can be demonstrated that Jesus did indeed make a major concession to the forced divorce element of his day. The Warrant is incomplete, therefore, in that it fails to advance evidence in support of the Claim.

BACKING (1) Old Testament stoning for adultery had been replaced, by New Testament times, with divorce.

Historical evidence demonstrates this statement of Backing to be generally undisputed. While apparently overlooking the possibility that some segments of society maintained the
stoning standard, as is evidenced by the near stoning incident of John 8 where the woman was taken in adultery, Patristic advocates are able to demonstrate that there was a consensus of opinion in Jesus' day that divorce ought to replace stoning. That fact, however, does not demand that Jesus necessarily accepted the dictum. Nor does it demonstrate that such a replacement was the biblical intent. After all, what right did the people have in overturning the Law? And why would Jesus feel constrained to condone the very practice condemned in the Scriptures?

Nowhere do we have evidence that Jesus rejected the Old Testament prescription for adultery and nowhere do we have evidence that Jesus accepted the custom of substituting divorce for stoning. The Patristic argument is incomplete in that it merely argues in a circle.

BACKING (2) Sexual sins were to be punished within the religious community.

Once again it is not difficult to demonstrate the validity of this statement. But again, the question is not whether or not the religious community practiced discipline in regard to immorality. The real question is whether or not Jesus submitted himself to the laws of man in this regard. Since no such evidence is brought forward to establish the point, one must conclude that this statement of Backing is incomplete also.

BACKING (3) Divorce without remarriage is not adultery (only remarriage after divorce constitutes adultery).

This piece of evidence, though uncontested in that it is not debated among the proponents of the various views, is irrelevant. The issue is not whether or not divorce without remarriage is adultery, the issue is whether or not divorce is wrong. The statement of this Backing tends to misdirect the discussion. Clearly there are other acts besides adultery that do harm to a marriage and work contrary to a genuine one flesh relationship. This argument presents no evidence to establish the Patristic Claim.

WARRANT #5: No-guilt, required divorce explains the surprised response of the disciples.
This argument is similar to the fourth Warrant of the Erasmian view. It looks to the historical-cultural and contextual principles of biblical hermeneutics to establish its Claim. Within the text we discover the surprise of the disciples to Jesus' exception statement. This Warrant seeks to explain that response based on the cause-effect sequence in Matthew 19. Ultimately it presents itself as argument from circumstance.

The problem which surfaces at this point is all but impossible for a modern interpreter to overcome. If it were possible to discover the disciples' position on divorce and remarriage prior to the exceptive statement of Jesus, an interpreter would have grounds for validating or invalidating this statement of Backing. But we cannot know the thinking of the disciples in this regard. One is left to conclude that any statement more narrow than the disciples' own would cause surprise.

In support of their view, the Patristics assume that the disciples held that divorce would open the door to remarriage. When Jesus indicated that such a position was not correct the disciples registered their surprise. We do not know, however, that the disciples held such a position in the first place. Thus, the argument is circular and fails to pass the test of rationalness in that it is incomplete.

BACKING (1) Jesus did not side with either the Hillel or Shammal view of divorce.

Because of the debate context of the exceptive statements it is not difficult to accept this piece of Backing. The arguments are convincing which have Jesus refusing to take sides with any human judgment in the divorce/remarriage conflict. It is apparent that he states a new, unheard of position.

Yet even if we accept the statement as undisputed, it does not make the case of the Patristics. The most that can be said is that this is a better explanation than the Erasmian proposal which has Jesus in agreement with his enemies. But the Betrothal and Rabbinic views will follow the same line of thinking and come to a different conclusion as to the narrowness of Jesus' statement. Although this Patristic position represents the most broad of the three more narrow interpretations, in that it allows for forced divorce in a number of cases depending on the mores of
the society, it is not possible to come to any firm conclusions without knowing the disciples' thinking prior to Jesus' revelation. The Backing, lacking this evidence, is incomplete.

**BACKING (2)** The disciples understood Jesus' position on divorce and remarriage as strict and narrow.

There is little doubt that this statement is not contested. It does not, however, address the issue at stake. All of the divorce views have Jesus taking a more narrow position than that of the disciples. Each suggests that its interpretation of the relative narrowness of Jesus' claim explains the surprise of his followers. So again, the statement must be judged incomplete because it fails to demonstrate the primary thinking of the disciples. There is no real evidence to support the Claim.

**WARRANT #6:** No-guilt, required divorce parallels Paul's advice in I Corinthians 7:12-15.

Patristic proponents seek to argue by analogy here. They suggest that theology and context point to a strict correspondence between the statements of Jesus in the Gospels and Paul to the Corinthians. They make the teaching of Paul equal to the teaching of Jesus on the subject of divorce and remarriage.

The argument, however, appears improbable in that the analogy breaks down. Whereas Jesus was supposed to have allowed divorce if it were required by one's cultural mores, Paul makes no allowance for divorce at all. The Apostle argues that couples may separate, but he forbids divorce. He never hints that divorce is sanctioned either by himself or by the Lord. The argument rests on the unconvincing assumption that separation is analogous to divorce.

**BACKING (1)** Believers are not to abandon a marriage.

This statement of Backing is accepted as uncontested and not debated by the proponents of any of the divorce views. It is insufficient for that very reason. The argument, without further evidence, remains insufficient to establish the Claim of the Patristics over the Claims of others.

**BACKING (2)** Unbelievers might abandon a marriage.
The same may be said of this Backing as was said of the previous statement. It is accepted as uncontested, but is insufficient because it cannot establish the Claim it seeks to establish.

BACKING (3) If the unbeliever abandons the marriage, the believer is not guilty of the sin of divorce.

Not all the various proponents would agree with this piece of Backing. It is this disagreement which identifies the crucial issue of this sixth Warrant. Whereas Patristic proponents would have the believer not guilty of divorce if the unbelieving mate should separate from him, others see the believer as not being bound to perform the conjugal duties of a marriage partner every time the unbeliever returns from his willful separation. The weakness of the argument surfaces in the ostensibly futile effort to equate separation and divorce. The analogy is improbable.

WARRANT #7: No-guilt, required divorce represents the interpretation of the church Fathers.

This Warrant, like the sixth of the Erasmian view, fails the tests of reasonableness and rationalness. The statement is based on argument from circumstance and is irrelevant in that it appeals to authority and popularity. With the possible exception of the third piece of Backing, which may easily be countered, this Warrant contributes nothing to the advancement of the argument.

BACKING (1) The Fathers required divorce for sexual sin.

This well-documented statement, though uncontested among the proponents of the various divorce views, does not establish the Claim merely because of its appeal to authority. Just because the Fathers held to the view that those whose mates commit sexual sin must divorce those mates does not make the argument necessarily sound. This Backing is irrelevant.

BACKING (2) The Fathers did not allow for remarriage after divorce.
The same may be said for this second piece of backing as was said for the first. It is irrelevant for its appeal to mere authority cannot, on its own, advance an argument. Just because the Fathers held the view does not make it relevant to the Claim at issue.

BACKING (3) The Fathers were closest to Jesus’ time and culture, and spoke Greek.

This statement is incomplete. It makes an interesting and somewhat relevant point, but one that surfaces no real evidence in support of the Claim.

It would be difficult to refute the claim that the Fathers were better equipped to handle the Greek language than were later scholars who have not enjoyed and do not benefit from the fluency with which the early Fathers worked. On the other hand, it would be less than wise to imagine that mere facility with a language enables one to interpret accurately any statement made in that language. It could just as easily be argued that the Fathers were too far removed from the Jewish culture into which the exception clause was spoken to have grasped the significance of the pronouncement to its Jewish audience. Ultimately this argument contributes nothing in the way of evidence to the establishment of the Claim.

Summary

As a whole, the Patristic view of the exception clause appears somewhat stronger and sounder than the Erasmian view. The second and third Warrants add a particularly strong reasonable element to the argument, though ultimately they fail to withstand the tests of rationalness. The first, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh Warrants, however, manifest weaknesses similar to the Warrants of the Erasmian position. The most difficult component of the Patristic position to accept is the proposal that Jesus would have made a concession to the mores of the Jewish culture in which he found himself. This key element is lacking in evidence and seems highly improbable in light of the non-concessionary positions Jesus characteristically took throughout the Gospels.

Turning to a brief summary of the evaluation of the Patristic view, it has been noted that Warrant #1 fails to advance evidence in support of the Claim that ἐστὶν must have been used by
Jesus in its broadest sense. Though it is agreed that the term carries a broad meaning, there was no reason given to demand such an interpretation in the case of the exception clauses. Warrant #2 demonstrated that the exception clause was indeed an exception to the otherwise absolute prohibition in Scripture against divorce. This argument from analogy strongly suggests a very narrow construction of the exception clause. The problem for the Patristic proponents, however, is to demonstrate that forced divorce is the same as no divorce. This aspect of their argument is not as sound as it might be. Warrant #3 is crucial in that it is based on biblical principle. All views of divorce/remarriage must handle this piece of evidence. The issue for the Patristics is to explain how one can be divorced and at the same time meet the requirements of a one flesh marital relationship. While Warrants #2 and #3 are telling arguments, those who adhere to the Patristic view must not only present the basic argument, they must also demonstrate that their position is consistent with these contentions. Warrant #4 is merely an argument from circumstance and has Jesus making a concession to the demands of his culture. Warrant #5 also is based on circumstance and lacks evidence to demonstrate the original position of the disciples. The point is incomplete because of this lack of grounds. Warrant #6 fails to make the analogy apparent. Evidence is wanting to demonstrate that forced divorce is analogous to biblical separation. Warrant #7 is merely circumstantial. The fact that the Church Fathers held to one position over another is irrelevant to the issue at hand, for appeals to authority are no evidence at all.

The Patristic Claim brings important elements of evidence into the debate. The consistent prohibition of divorce throughout the Scriptures and the one flesh principle of Genesis 2 are matters that demand the attention of any who would properly interpret the exception clauses of Matthew 5 and 19. The major failure of the Patristic proponents, however, is their inability convincingly to link their view to these two most crucial pieces of evidence. The most obvious indication of this deficiency is that the Patristic view never actually defines ἐνέπληθος, but rather abandons the term to essentially the same broad meaning as that set forth in the Erasmian definition.
Betrothal View of ἐπιθυμία Evaluated

CLAIM: Divorce is permissible in the case of sexual sin committed during the betrothal or engagement period.

GROUNDS: Jesus used the term ἐπιθυμία in the exceptive clause as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

WARRANT #1: Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness interprets ἐπιθυμία in a specific contextual sense.

As with the Erasmian and Patristic views of ἐπιθυμία, the Betrothal view seeks to establish its first Warrant on the reasonable basis of argument from principle. This appeal to the lexical principle of biblical hermeneutics is not only strong in that it works to establish its Claim on the basis of definition, but it also appears to be more sound than both the Erasmian and Patristic positions which limit the meaning of ἐπιθυμία to only its broadest possible sense.

Betrothal proponents deliver evidence which demonstrates that the term ἐπιθυμία carries a narrower meaning than the broad "sexual immorality of any kind" definition. The proofs from lexical definitions and biblical usage, as well as the Matthean example of divorce in the context of betrothal unfaithfulness, cause this Warrant to pass the tests of reasonableness and rationalness in contrast to the two previous proposals. It would suggest too much to say that the evidence is conclusive, but these proofs do appear to be more substantial than those which have been presented thus far.

BACKING (1) Lexically, ἐπιθυμία carries a broad scope of meanings.

This first piece of Backing is merely a concession to the fact which the prior two views have already established; ἐπιθυμία can stand for either sexual immorality in general or a wide range of sexually immoral activities. Standing alone this statement would offer relevant, but insufficient evidence to establish its Claim. It would be considered insufficient. In fact, without further consideration this fact would argue against the Betrothal position. What must be demonstrated is
that other, more narrow, interpretations of *nopveta* are not only possible, but that a specifically narrow meaning was what Jesus intended in the exception clause.

**BACKING (2)** Context must determine the meaning of *nopveta* in every usage.

All the proponents of all the views agree with this general hermeneutical principle. To that extent it is a relevant argument. But standing alone it also is insufficient, for it fails to establish any claim until the legitimate context of the particular use of *nopveta* has been convincingly demonstrated. Betrothal advocates must provide evidence which authenticates Jesus' specific espousal intention in the issuing of the exception clause.

**BACKING (3)** *Tlopvela* is explicitly contrasted to *p o ta to* in several cases.

This statement of Backing is presented to refute the inference of the previous two views that *nopveta* is merely a general reference to any sexual sin within the context of marriage, the equivalent to adultery. Although the truthfulness of this piece of evidence is established by the Betrothal advocates, it fails to convincingly demonstrate that a narrower meaning was what Jesus had in mind when he used the term *nopveta*.

While the Backing here may be considered insufficient from a rational perspective, the point of refutation has been made by the promoters of the Betrothal view. *Tlopvela* cannot always be said to carry the broad meaning of adultery for it must sometimes have a more narrow meaning than *μούχτελετα* to which it is sometimes contrasted, especially in the Gospel of Matthew.

**BACKING (4)** *Tlopvela* is used specifically to refer to pre-marital sexual intercourse.

Betrothal proponents make a positive point for their case when they demonstrate that the use of *nopveta* in John 8:41 is a reference to the supposed pre-marital sexual intercourse of Jesus' mother. When the enemies of Christ sought to discredit him they accused his mother of the sin of betrothal unfaithfulness. The word they used to describe that particular sin was *nopvelas*, the same word, though in different form, that Jesus uses in the Matthean exception clauses.

This important piece of evidence adds credibility to the Betrothal Claim. Although it cannot be demonstrated that Jesus must certainly have had this particular meaning in mind in
Matthew 5 and 19, the proof offered by this Backing adds both strength and soundness to the Warrant.

BACKING (5) An example of divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness is given in Matthew’s own text.

An example of a man divorcing his espoused because of betrothal unfaithfulness is to be found in the Gospel of Matthew. This piece of Backing adds even more weight to the Betrothal position. In Matthew 1:19, Joseph determines to divorce Mary when he discovers that apparently she has been unfaithful to her betrothal vows. Although the word nopvela is not used in this context, it is clear that the sin was not adultery, in that the couple was not yet fully married, but rather pre-marital infidelity, and that the widely accepted procedure for handling such an infraction, Joseph being considered a “righteous” man, was divorce.

Betrothal proponents argue that it is more than coincidence that Matthew alone, of all the Gospel writers, would include this example of divorce for (apparently) nopvela. The argument takes into consideration the Jewish custom of breaking off the preliminary betrothal contract if the woman involved failed to maintain or prove her virginity during the betrothal period. Although it would demand a divorce to so break the contract, it would be accomplished before the final marriage contract had been consummated.

A substantial case has been made by the Betrothal advocates. They have offered evidence against an unnecessarily broad interpretation of nopvela and for a demonstratively narrow interpretation of the term. This evidence must be answered and refuted before another position could be seriously considered. Their more specific interpretation of nopvela appears more reasonable and rational than the interpretations previously evaluated.

WARRANT #2: Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness maintains consistency with the absolute prohibition passages.

This Warrant tenders essentially the same argument as does the second Warrant of the Patristic view. It seeks to establish the Claim on the basis of analogy. In this case, however, in
contrast to the Patristic presentation, the analogy appears to stand. The correspondence
between the biblical ideal of "no divorce" is maintained by the Betrothal position which allows for
no divorce once the marriage has been finally contracted and fully consummated.

The argument is strong in that it is analogous to the biblical principle of "no divorce." It is
also sound in that the analogy is apparently appropriate; a legitimate correspondence being
identified between the biblical ideal and the Betrothal Claim.

BACKING (1) Genesis 2:24 prohibits divorce.

Arguing from analogy, this passage militates against divorce, as was noted in the Patristic
discussion. The Betrothal position is consistent with this biblical ideal.

BACKING (2) Deuteronomy 24:1-4 prohibits divorce.

The Backing offered here was also considered in the Patristic discussion. The Betrothal
view is analogous with this restriction passage as well.

BACKING (3) Malachi 2:10-16 prohibits divorce.

Again the text demonstrates the biblical perspective on divorce, and the Betrothal Claim is
in line with the foundational principle.


The Betrothal Interpretation of Jesus' Matthean statements regarding divorce are
consistent with these clear statements of prohibition from the other two Synoptics.

BACKING (5) Romans 7:1-6 and I Corinthians 7:10-11, 39 prohibit divorce.

The Apostle Paul's position was also no divorce, as was demonstrated in the Patristic
discussion. The Betrothal view of μομεντα maintains perfect congruity with Paul's mandates.

Whereas the Erasmian view is forced to have Jesus making a concession to the
sinfulness of man by changing the ideal standard of no divorce, and the Patristic view has difficulty
in demonstrating that forced divorce is analogous to no divorce, the Betrothal view encounters no
such quandries in establishing its Claim that divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness maintains the
consistent biblical prohibition against divorce. Thus, this argument, made on behalf of the
Betrothal position, is not only reasonable in that it is based on strong functional arguments, it is also rational in that it escapes the fallacies of unsound formal structure.

WARRANT #3: Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness maintains the permanence of the "one-flesh" consummated marriage bond.

This Warrant parallels the third Warrant of the Patristic position, and like the second argument of both the Patristic and Betrothal views, it is argument based on analogy. Yet whereas the Patristic Claim failed to be established, for it is difficult to perceive of a divorce of any kind as maintaining the one flesh principle, this Warrant works for the Betrothal view.

Since the one flesh relationship apparently is not instituted until the marriage is finally contracted and fully consummated, the divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness position maintains this biblical perspective. The argument appears to be both strong and sound.

BACKING (1) Marriage is based upon the "one-flesh" concept of Genesis 2:24.

This statement was validated in the Patristic discussion. There the term "one flesh" was defined as a life long relationship between two married people consisting of horizontal and, if children are born, vertical blood lines. This bond is permanent in nature in that only death can dissolve it.

Divorce for espousal infidelity only is consistent with this biblical or one flesh marriage. It allows for no breaking of the fully consummated relationship. It maintains the essence of marriage as the indivisible union of two persons into one.

BACKING (2) This "one-flesh" concept is not renounced, but corroborated in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

The contention here is exactly the same as in the Patristic discussion. Deuteronomy 24 enhances the one flesh principle. The advantage to the Betrothal position is that one can easily understand how this principle is maintained by the "divorce for breach of the betrothal contract" proponents. There can be no dissolution of a union before it has been formed.
BACKING (3) This "one-flesh" concept is nullified only by death according to Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7.

Again this Backing follows the same line as that of the Patristic discussion. The Scripture articulates but one means by which the one flesh relationship can be broken: death. Once more the evidence fits the Betrothal view without the difficulty which the Patristic proponents encounter. It is unambiguously consistent with the biblical principle.

BACKING (4) Even sexual sin does not break the "one-flesh" relationship of a consummated marriage bond, as seen in John 4:18.

Whereas Erasmians would argue that adultery of any kind dissolves the one flesh bond of marriage, Betrothal proponents demonstrate that Jesus' own view contradicts the Erasmian interpretation. Legitimate marriage, that which consists of more than mere sexual intercourse with another, establishes a relationship that continues to exist until the death of one of the partners. That is why Jesus tells the woman at the well that she has five husbands (to whom she has been legally married, and from whom she apparently has been divorced). At the same time she is living with one who is not her husband. Biblical marriage consists of a permanent one flesh which mere sexual intercourse cannot establish, nor apparently violate.

Betrothal proponents apparently are on their side of Jesus when they assert that the one flesh relationship is permanent. Christ still recognizes the first marriage even though others may be added on. When all the evidence for this Warrant is presented, strong and sound arguments are found in support of the Betrothal view as over and against the Erasmian or even the Patristic positions.

WARRANT #4: Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness takes into account the Jewish betrothal context.

This circumstantial argument seeks to establish itself by means of the hermeneutical principles of historical-cultural and contextual study. Still, though identifying the context or contexts into which Jesus uttered the exception clause may help the interpreter to better
understand the meaning of Jesus' statements, it may well be impossible to recognize one contextual suggestion to the exclusion of all others.

There is little doubt, and no debate, that some Jewish people of Jesus' day practiced divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness. There is also little doubt that Matthew tended to emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus' sayings. It is difficult, however, to demonstrate conclusively that this was the determining context of Jesus' exception pronouncements. Thus, this major Warrant is relevant, but does not offer sufficient evidence to establish its Claim exclusively.

BACKING (1) Matthew, the only gospel writer to record the exception, wrote specifically for a Jewish audience.

This piece of Backing is generally accepted by students of the Bible. Mark and Luke clearly had in mind Gentile readers. John's Gospel has nothing to say about divorce and remarriage. With Matthew's emphasis on Jewish customs, it is not to be thought exceptional that he alone would have Jesus referring to a particularly Jewish practice, divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness, while addressing an exclusively Jewish audience as in Matthew 5 and 19. This is the reasoning of the Betrothal proponents.

The suggestion is not without some merit. It is certainly a better contextual proposal than that offered by the Patristic advocates. They have Jesus making a concession to the biblical mandate of no divorce because of the pressure of the culture. Here we have Jesus acknowledging the practice of righteous Jews while at the same time avoiding conflict with the stipulations of the Scriptures. This context seems to fit the consistent biblical portrait of Jesus as a maintainer of the Law.

If this Backing is to be judged insufficient it is because it fails to consider the other possible Jewish influences which could also meet the demands of a highly Jewish context. The Rabbinic view, for example, refers to a specifically biblical practice, that of prohibiting unlawful marriages, which may better fit the strong Jewish influence of Jesus in Matthew.

BACKING (2) Jewish betrothal laws were binding in nature.
There is no lack of grounds to establish this statement of Backing. Its thrust is that divorce would be necessary in order to annul a betrothal contract which had become voided by the unfaithfulness of the female partner. It shows some cause for Jesus’ exception statements, but again fails to sufficiently demonstrate that betrothal unfaithfulness is the most likely explanation of the exception clause.

BACKING (3) A Jewish betrothal could be broken only by formal divorce.

This point is not the focus of debate among the various divorce proponents. It is generally an uncontested statement. Here again, however, the Backing may be proven insufficient, for though it is relevant to the discussion at hand, it lacks sufficient evidence to support the Claim.

The evidence surfaced in this fourth Warrant makes a substantial case for the influence of the Jewish context as it relates to both the statements of Jesus and the record of Matthew. But this alone is inconclusive, for the Rabbinic view also argues in a similar vein from a Jewish context. The specific influence that Jewish context takes has yet to be adequately determined.

WARRANT #5: Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness maintains consistency with the "debate" context of Matthew 5 and 19.

This element of the Betrothal view seeks to establish its Warrant with an argument from circumstance. Although it is, therefore, not strong from a reasonable perspective, the proposal does seem to offer a legitimate resolution to the apparent conflict between Jesus and his detractors.

There is an unquestionable debate context in both Matthew 5 and 19. To have Jesus side with either of his enemies (Hillel or Shammai) at this point, as do the Erasmians, is to ignore the obvious tensions within both passages. At the very least, this Warrant is a strong refutation of the Erasmian view. It also appears to argue against the position taken by the Patristic advocates. It is unlikely that Jesus would take a divorce position which is tantamount to agreeing with both the Hillel and the Shammal factions, as the forced divorce position ultimately does.
Rather, the debate context of the exception clauses elicits a statement from Jesus which is contrary to the accepted positions of the day. Only the Betrothal and Rabbinic views offer this possibility. The apparent weakness of this suggestion is that it fails first, to establish that the counter proposal of Jesus is that of no divorce except for betrothal unfaithfulness and, second, to provide a basis for the elimination of the Rabbinic view.

**BACKING (1)** Matthew 5 reveals a "debate" format of "you have heard" vs. "but I say."

This statement of Backing may be accepted as fact. The language speaks for itself; Jesus is refuting the faulty interpretations of the day, including the faulty interpretation of the Old Testament position on divorce. Placing himself in direct opposition to extant religious authorities, Jesus promotes a distinctive concept of divorce regulation.

Alone, this piece of Backing fails to establish the Betrothal Claim. On the other hand, it serves to undermine the two previous views which have Jesus in a more or less concessionary stance. If the tension of this text remains unaddressed by Erasmian and Patristic advocates, those who hold to the Betrothal view will add one more bit of circumstantial evidence to their cause.

**BACKING (2)** Matthew 19 reveals a "debate" context of entrapment and conflict.

The debate context reveals itself clearly in Matthew 19 as the enemies of Jesus come to "test" or "tempt" him. Argument is followed by counter argument as the two sides do verbal battle. To overlook or disregard these obvious references to conflict misses a possibly crucial literary cue as to the interpretation of ἀποτελεῖ in this most particular setting.

As in the first piece of Backing for this Warrant, the weakness of this statement is that it fails to sufficiently establish the Claim. At the same time, the argument seriously debilitates the Erasmian and Patristic Claims.

**BACKING (3)** Jesus' exception is spoken in sarcasm to unbelieving, hardened hearts.

If this claim could be substantiated beyond reasonable doubt it would strike a devastating blow to the broader interpretations of the Erasmian and Patristic views. Literary principles of
interpretation argue for a strong ironic element in Matthew's Gospel. That Jesus spoke in sarcastic tones and with mocking content to his perennial archenemies is not at all unlikely. But certainty regarding this issue, especially as applied to the exception clause context, does not exist.

Once again we have an argument that invites the most careful consideration and refutation, but one which cannot ultimately establish the Claim of the Betrothal view. At best, it can only hint at a more narrow reading of *ponere* than the two previous positions will admit. Though this fifth Warrant is insufficient, in that the debate context could be merely an accidental detail with no bearing at all upon the interpretation of the exceptive clause, the evidence it produces must be answered by those who hold contrary positions.

**WARRANT #6:** Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness explains the surprised response of the disciples.

The argument here is the same as the fourth Warrant of the Erasmian view and the fifth Warrant of the Patristic view. The reason that all three positions find evidence for their Claim in the surprised response of the disciples in Matthew 19 is that all three argue in a circle on this point. Each assumes a proper knowledge of the disciples' position on divorce before the pronouncement of Jesus. From there they argue that the relatively more narrow view of Jesus explains their surprised response. The argument fails the test of rationalness in every instance for its circular nature renders it incomplete.

**BACKING (1) Jesus does not side with either the Hillel or Shammai views of divorce.**

Because of the debate context in which Jesus' exception statement is uttered it is not difficult to accept this piece of Backing as having some validity. Whatever position Jesus took, it was apparently at odds with the acceptable positions of the day. This perspective makes more sense than the Erasmian view which has Jesus taking sides with his enemies.

The Betrothal reasoning here cannot be clearly distinguished, however, from the Patristic proposal which also has Jesus in disagreement with the two Jewish schools of thought. Thus, the
Backing is incomplete in that it is impossible for this argument to advance any of the Claims as long as no one knows the thinking of the disciples prior to Jesus' pronouncement.

BACKING (2) Jesus' only exception to "no divorce" is extremely narrow.

This statement is universally uncontested among the various divorce views. Still, it cannot establish the Claim, for the term "narrow" is used in a relative sense. Is Jesus' position more narrow than are the popular views of the day? It is likely that it is. Is it more narrow than the disciples' view, which was agreeably more narrow than the "liberal" view of the Hillel and probably more narrow than the "conservative" view of the Shammal? This point, too, is generally accepted by the various divorce proponents. But just how narrow "narrow" is we do not know and, therefore, we cannot draw convincing conclusions using this particular argument. The evidence gleaned from the surprised response of the disciples does not help to determine the meaning of πρακτικα.


The basis for this argument is theological. The appeal to reason is based on analogy. What stoning was to Old Testament betrothal unfaithfulness, divorce is to New Testament betrothal unfaithfulness.

The argument fails the test of rationalness, however, for it merely argues in a circle. It serves more or less as an explanation for the change in punishment, from stoning to divorce, for those who have already accepted the conclusion that πρακτικα refers to betrothal unfaithfulness. The Warrant is, therefore, incomplete in that it fails to advance evidence in support of the Claim.

BACKING (1) Old Testament betrothal unfaithfulness resulted in stoning according to Deuteronomy 22:13-29.

The biblical mandate of stoning for betrothal unfaithfulness is clearly spelled out in the Deuteronomy passage. No one accepting the veracity of Scripture would venture to debate the
statement as it stands. As a result, the Backing is reasonable in that it is based on principle, but it is also incomplete in that it offers no real evidence in support of the Betrothal Claim.

**BACKING (2)** New Testament betrothal unfaithfulness may result merely in divorce according to the *nopvela* exception.

This piece of Backing argues in a circle. It demands the acceptance of the Claim rather than arguing for the Claim. Only if the interpreter acknowledges a "betrothal unfaithfulness" view of *nopvela* will this statement of Backing hold up. This proof is incomplete because it fails to advance evidence in support of the Claim.

**Summary**

The Betrothal view of *nopvela* surfaces several substantial arguments in its favor. The first, second, third, and fifth Warrants appear to be both reasonable and, for the most part, rational. The fourth, sixth, and seventh Warrants are insufficient and incomplete and may easily be discarded. As a whole, the Betrothal proponents have offered a stronger and sounder argument than the Erasmians. They also present evidence which is more precise than the corresponding Patristic suggestion, as noted in the specific definition of *nopvela* in Warrant #1, and offer analogies which appear to be more accurate and in line with the ultimate Claim, as in Warrants #2 and #3.

In review of the Betrothal position, it was observed that Warrant #1 appeared to offer both a reasonable and rational argument for its Claim that *nopvela* means "unfaithfulness during the betrothal period." Lexical definitions, biblical usage, and a Matthean example of divorce for espousal infidelity point toward the possible legitimacy of the Betrothal conclusion. Both Warrants #2 and #3 add credence to the Betrothal view. That view is consistent with the biblical principles of no divorce and one flesh marriage relationships. Divorce for betrothal unfaithfulness only is analogous to both these doctrines. The failure of Warrant #4 is not that the statement is debated. The Jewish context of the Gospel of Matthew and of the statements of Jesus in chapters 5 and 19 is beyond debate. The weakness of the Betrothal proponents in this case is that they are not able
to demonstrate that the Jewish context demands their explanation, and their's alone, of the exception clause. Other interpretations also appeal to the Jewish context as support for their Claim. Warrant #5 seems a more rational proof for the Betrothal view in that the debate context argues for Jesus' taking an adversarial stance against the accepted opinions of the day. This debate context would seem to eliminate both the Erasmian and Patristic views in favor of the Betrothal. Warrants #6 and #7 are totally lacking in effect. Both fail the test of rationality in that they assume unknowable knowledge and argue in a circle. These last two Warrants are incomplete for they fail to advance evidence in support of the Claim.

Overlooking the three Warrants which neither help nor harm the Betrothal cause, this position appears to offer the most reasonable and rational interpretation of nopveta yet offered. The evidence for its rather particular definition of nopveta is more compelling than the evidence offered by the other two perspectives. It also enjoys a consistent agreement with two crucial biblical principles regarding marriage and divorce. The other two positions are unable to maintain such clear harmony. Finally, the adversarial argument tends to undermine the two preceding views which place Jesus in a compromising stance.

Rabbinic View of nopveta Evaluated

CLAIM: Divorce is permissible in the case of an incestual marriage.

GROUNDS: Jesus used the term nopveta in the exceptive clause as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

WARRANT #1: Divorce for incestual marriage interprets nopveta in a specific contextual sense.

The same kind of argument used by the other three divorce positions to support their interpretation of nopveta is employed here to support a fourth position. It is argument based on principle. Whereas the first two opinions take a broad view of nopveta, the last two have Jesus using the term in a narrow and particular sense.
Like those of the Betrothal position, those who advocate the Rabbinic view offer convincing evidence for the more narrow option. The specific biblical uses of nupveta to represent an incestual situation enables this Warrant to pass both the test for reasonableness and the test for rationalness. Although the argument for a more narrow interpretation is not absolutely conclusive, it does present itself as more substantial than is the broad constructions of nupveta.

BACKING (1) nupveta carries a broad scope of meanings.

The argument here is essentially the same as that given by the Betrothal proponents and its evaluation renders a similar conclusion. The challenge put to the Rabbinic advocates is to demonstrate that a narrower interpretation of nupveta is more reasonable and rational than the broader suggestions and that their particular narrow interpretation is a better explanation than is the Betrothal suggestion.

BACKING (2) Context must determine the meaning of nupveta in every usage.

Again, the argument and the evaluation are essentially the same as that of the Betrothal view. Rabbinic proponents must demonstrate, from contextual evidence, the superiority of an incestual reading of nupveta as over and against the other suggestions.

BACKING (3) nupveta does not mean mepxeta in several cases.

Both the argument and the evaluation follow along the lines of the Betrothal position. Here again, the Rabbinic view must provide evidence of its advantage over the Betrothal view in particular.

BACKING (4) nupveta does mean incestual marriage in several cases.

At this point the Rabbinic view takes a distinctive course. The Scripture's use of nupveta to describe sexual relations with or marriage to a near relative is beyond dispute. I Corinthians 5 employs nupveta three times (vss. 1, 9, and 11) to describe the relationship a church member was having with his mother or step-mother. Acts 15:20 and 29 use the term to refer to any of the illicit relationships described in Leviticus 18.
The use of ἀρπεῖαι in Acts 15 is an especially compelling point, for it is the Apostles of Christ who employ the term there. Although this bit of evidence cannot prove conclusively that Jesus meant unlawful marriages when he uttered the term ἀρπεῖαι in Matthew 5 and 19, it is clear that the same men who heard and responded to Jesus' pronouncement in the Gospel applied the very same word to mean unlawful marriages in Acts 15. At the very least, the Rabbinic view demonstrates that Jesus could have used ἀρπεῖαι in the exception clause to describe a marriage that was forbidden by the Law. This piece of Backing adds strength and soundness to the Rabbinic proposal.

BACKING (5) Examples of divorce being required for incestual marriage are found in the New Testament context.

This statement of Backing comes up somewhat short in comparison to the previous point. The problem is that although I Corinthians 5 and Matthew 14:4 imply that a divorce is necessary, neither text employs the explicit language for divorce. That the illicit relationships should end is beyond doubt. To argue that divorce is commanded, however, is to go beyond the text. The Corinthian passage is the weakest here for the text gives no indication as to whether the couple was even married in the first place. If they were not married, but merely living together, then a divorce would have been unnecessary.

The case of Herod Antipas is a little more compelling. History confirms an incestuous marriage. But while John the Baptist condemns the relationship, the text does not explicitly call for a divorce. Thus, this Backing is only as strong as the inference it suggests.

WARRANT #2: Divorce for incestual marriage maintains consistency with the absolute prohibition of divorce passages.

This second Warrant is line for line the same argument as the second Warrants of both the Patristic and Betrothal views. As with the Betrothal view, this statement, given in support of the Rabbinic view, is both reasonable and rational. The analogy between the biblical principle of no divorce and the Rabbinic position of divorce for incestual marriage only is an analogy that holds.
The same could not be said for the Patristic view. It was difficult to imagine how forced divorce could be seen as the equivalent of no divorce.

The Rabbinic argument maintains that an unlawful marriage, though demanding a legal divorce to legally end it, is no marriage at all. So, to bring an official end to a marriage that never existed in the eyes of God in the first place upholds the no divorce ideal of the Scriptures.

The problem which the Rabbinic view faces at this point is the necessity of demonstrating how the no divorce principle of Scripture better supports the incestual interpretation of ῥοπέλα as over and against the Betrothal reading. While this Warrant tends to undermine the broad interpretations of the Erasmian and Patristic views, it is unable to distinguish between the more narrow suggestions of the Betrothal and Rabbinic positions.

BACKING (1) Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 prohibit divorce.
This Backing is uncontested and analogous to the Rabbinic Claim.\textsuperscript{25}

BACKING (2) Leviticus 18 prohibits divorce.
This Backing is irrelevant in that Leviticus 18 does not discuss divorce, but rather unlawful marriages.

BACKING (3) Deuteronomy 24:1-4 prohibits divorce.
This Backing is uncontested and analogous to the Rabbinic Claim.

BACKING (4) Malachi 2:13-16 prohibits divorce.
This Backing is uncontested and analogous to the Rabbinic Claim.

BACKING (5) Mark 10:2-12 prohibits divorce.
This Backing is uncontested and analogous to the Rabbinic Claim.

This Backing is uncontested and analogous to the Rabbinic Claim.

BACKING (7) Romans 7:2-3 prohibits divorce.
This Backing is uncontested and analogous to the Rabbinic Claim.

BACKING (8) 1 Corinthians 7 prohibits divorce.
This Backing is uncontested and analogous to the Rabbinic Claim.

WARRANT #3: Divorce for incestual marriage maintains the permanence of the "one-flesh" marriage bond.

This third Warrant repeats the exact argument the Patristic and Betrothal proponents offer for their third Warrants. The analogy is sound for the Rabbinic position as it was for the Betrothal view, but not for the Patristic. It was difficult to imagine how the forced divorce concept of the Patristic view could maintain a truly one flesh marriage requirement. Here the analogy between one flesh marriage and divorce for unlawful marriage works in that the Rabbinic advocates see an unlawful marriage as no marriage at all and, therefore, no one flesh relationship in the first place.

As was the case with the Betrothal position, the Rabbinic proposal appears both reasonable and rational at this point. The interpretation of mpvctla suggested by the Rabbinic advocates serves to undermine the two primary arguments as it narrows the possibilities of probable meaning. Consistency with the biblical principle of one flesh increases the authority of this Warrant, though the problem of validating the superiority of the Rabbinic view over the Betrothal view still exists.

BACKING (1) Marriage is based upon the "one-flesh" concept of relationship of Genesis 2:24.

This Backing is uncontested and establishes the principle upon which the Rabbinic view stands.26

BACKING (2) This "one-flesh" concept is not renounced, but corroborated in Deuteronomy 24.

This Backing appears to be the best explanation of the Deuteronomy 24 text and maintains the principle upon which the Rabbinic view stands.

BACKING (3) This "one-flesh" relationship is nullified only by the death of a marriage partner according to Romans 7 and I Corinthians 7.
This Backing, too, appears to be the best explanation of the texts at hand and maintains the principle upon which the Rabbinic view stands.

BACKING (4) Even sexual sin does not break the "one-flesh" relationship.

This Backing appears to be supported by the text in John 4 and affirms Jesus' recognition of the permanence of the one flesh relationship. It maintains the principle upon which the Rabbinic view stands.

WARRANT #4: Divorce for incestual marriage takes into account the Jewish "marriage laws" context.

The argument here is the same type as that of the Betrothal proponents' fourth Warrant. Although this portion of the overall argument is less than conclusive, for who is to say how the Jewish context influenced Jesus' divorce statements in Matthew, the point provides a clear motivation for accepting Jesus' statements in a particularly narrow manner.

Since the other Gospel writers record only the no divorce statements of Christ, without the exception, then it seems likely that Jesus' Matthean statements could be expected to corroborate that position by making the exception so narrow that it would apply only in a particularly narrow Jewish context. At the least, the Betrothal and Rabbinic views provide some explanation for the appearance of the exception clause in Matthew exclusively by making note of the Jewish flavor of Matthew. Erasmlan and Patristic proponents would do well to address the issue.

BACKING (1) Matthew wrote specifically for a Jewish audience.

This statement of Backing, though accepted as uncontested, must be judged insufficient for it provides evidence that could lead to other conclusions as well. The argument and the failure is essentially the same as the Backing for this point in the Betrothal view.27

BACKING (2) Old Testament law of marriage forbade incestual marriages.

This statement is not debated among the various proponents of the divorce issue. The principle may be accepted as it stands. Lacking further grounds, however, this piece of Backing
must be seen as insufficient, for although the evidence is relevant, it fails to establish the Claim that this is what Jesus had in mind when he uttered the exception.

BACKING (3) The incestual marriage issue was a contemporary issue.

This statement is accurate as the Matthew 14 and I Corinthians 5 passages indicate. From the palace to the pew, the practice of illicit marriage evoked the condemnation of the Prophets and Apostles. But again, though the evidence is uncontested and relevant, it cannot make the case that this, and this alone, was what Jesus intended by his use of ἀναπτα in Matthew's Gospel.

BACKING (4) The Apostles recognized incestual marriages as a moral issue.

Even though this piece of Backing must technically be categorized as Insufficient, and for the same reason the previous three pieces of evidence were so judged, the statement is striking. There is no doubt but that the statement must be accepted as undisputed. The only question is how much it moves the present Claim toward the probable.

Scholars can be all but certain that the Acts 15 use of ἀναπτα referred to the unlawful marriages of Leviticus 18.28 And it seems unlikely that the disciples of Jesus, now turned Apostles, would use the exact term Jesus used, to a similar Jewish audience, but intend a different meaning. Although the evidence here is inconclusive, it tends to move the Rabbinic view closer to the realm of probability.

BACKING (5) Jesus' exception may have dealt with a local, and, therefore, Jewish problem.

This piece of evidence is purely speculative. It cannot be substantiated, but even if it could, it would not serve to advance the Claim. The argument tends to go in a circle and must, therefore, be judged incomplete.

WARRANT #5: Divorce for Incestual marriage maintains consistency with the "debate" context.

This Warrant is the same in argument and evaluation as the fifth Warrant of the Betrothal view. Its greatest asset is that it convincingly places the answer of Jesus into an adversarial
context, one which would essentially eliminate the Erasmian and Patristic perspectives which have Jesus agreeing with his enemies or making concession to them.

The weakness of the argument is that it cannot demonstrate which of the more narrow interpretations of ἐρασμὸν is more probable. One could argue for a Betrothal or a Rabbinic interpretation from this evidence. Thus, the Warrant is technically insufficient.

BACKING (1) Matthew 5 reveals a "debate" format of "you have heard" vs. "but I say."

The statement is uncontested, but does not prove the Claim. Although it is insufficient, it does appear to undermine both the Erasmian and Patristic views.

BACKING (2) Matthew 19 reveals a "debate" context of entrapment and conflict.

This piece of Backing is also uncontested, but insufficient. While it cannot establish the Rabbinic Claim, it damages the Erasmian and Patristic views.

BACKING (3) Jesus' exception is spoken in sarcasm to unbelieving, hardened hearts.

While this statement of Backing is not as well grounded as the first two of this Warrant, the evidence is substantial enough to demand the attention of opposing views.

WARRANT #6: Divorce for incestual marriage explains the surprised response of the disciples.

Interestingly, all four positions employ this identical argument in favor of their Claim. And for the very same reason, it falls in each case. Since no witnesses record the disciples' divorce position prior to the definitive statement of Jesus, it is impossible to determine what would have surprised them. Any position more narrow than their own would likely have surprised them. The argument totally fails all positions.

BACKING (1) Jesus does not side with either the Hillel or Shammal positions.

This argument is probable in light of the debate context of the exception clauses. Still, it is unable to substantiate the Claim with any degree of certainty.

BACKING (2) Jesus' only exception to "no divorce" is extremely narrow.
The statement is undoubtedly uncontested, but so relative as to be of no consequence in establishing the Claim. This Backing, as well as the entire Warrant, is incomplete.

WARRANT #7: Divorce for incestual marriage takes into account the "legal" context.

Like all the contextual arguments for the Rabbinic position, this statement of proof is technically insufficient for, though it presents relevant evidence, that evidence is unable to establish the Claim. It does, however, move the argument a step closer toward probability in that it surfaces a credible motive for interpreting *nephesa* in a particularly narrow sense. The "Is it lawful?", "Have you not read?", "Did Moses not command?", and "Moses permitted" statements of Matthew 19 as well as the clear references to the Law in Matthew 5 do appear to add a dimension to the exception clause pronouncement which has been overlooked by the other positions. When combined with the Jewish and debate contextual arguments the circumstantial weight of the argument is increased.

BACKING (1) Matthew 5 looks back to the Law and its proper meaning.

This statement is not debated among the proponents of the various divorce views. The argument is, however, insufficient in that the evidence presented is not adequate to support the Claim.

What is significant is that in a clear legal setting where Jesus is contrasting popular, but erroneous, views of the Law to his own correct view, he reveals an exception to the no divorce principle. It appears more than likely, from the context therefore, that the exception itself would be rather strict, as are the other "correct" interpretations, and would be rooted in the Law itself. An interpretation based on the unlawful marriages regulation of Leviticus 18 would fit the legal context well. Rabbinic proponents see more than coincidence here, though they cannot demonstrate conclusiveness.

BACKING (2) Matthew 19 addresses the question of what is "lawful."
The Backing here is essentially the same as the Backing presented above. The statement is uncontested, but fails to establish the Claim. The argument presented does increase the circumstantial evidence for a legalistic interpretation of *mpveta*, however.

BACKING (3) Incestual marriages were illegal according to the Law.

This statement may be accepted as undisputed in that it is not debated by the proponents of the other views and the grounds supporting it may be easily demonstrated. On the other hand, it is also insufficient because it fails to offer sufficient evidence to establish the Rabbinic Claim. At the same time it provides a motive for taking a more narrow interpretation of the exception clause and demands a counter argument from the other positions.

Summary

The Rabbinic interpretation of *mpveta* offers a number of compelling arguments in support of its Claim. The first three Warrants appear both reasonable and rational. Basing its conclusion on biblical principles which are clearly analogous to its own interpretation of the exception clause, the Rabbinic proponents have shown cause for their particular, or at least a more narrow, reading of *mpveta*. And although Warrants four, five, and seven are based on circumstance, the evidence that is amassed in favor of the Rabbinic view seems compelling. In the future, these contextual arguments must be answered by those of opposing views before those contrary views can be taken seriously.

Warrant #1 seems both reasonable and rational. Lexical definitions, biblical usage, and specific biblical examples of the term *mpveta* employed by the Apostles themselves, argue for the narrow interpretation of the Rabbinic advocates. Warrants #2 and #3 present biblical principles of marriage which the proponents of the Rabbinic view find consistent with their conclusions. Divorce for incestual marriages is analogous to no divorce and maintains the one flesh regulation. Warrants #4, #5, and #7 are impaired, not because they are undemonstrable, but because they are inconclusive in and of themselves. However, the circumstantial evidence they provide for the Rabbinic view far exceeds the suggestions of the Erasmian and Patristic
views, and goes beyond even the Betrothal view. Warrant #6 is the only Warrant which fails completely, for it is no different than the argument which each position employs to explain the surprise of the disciples to Jesus' divorce proclamation.

It would appear that the Rabbinic perspective, like the Betrothal, has much to commend it to the interpreter. Its combination of argument from principle and argument from circumstance shows it to be substantially reasonable. And though the circumstantial elements of proof are not technically rational, in that they do not establish the Claim with any degree of certainty, they surface arguments that are yet to be answered and lend a high level of credibility to the ultimate conclusion.

**Conclusions and Formulation Statement**

The Erasmian view of *mopvela* fails to advance evidence either strong enough or sound enough to stimulate ongoing consideration of its Claim. Not one of the six Warrants passes the tests of reasonableness and rationalness. Although the first Warrant argues from definition, the evidence to ground it is insufficient. Warrants two and three suffer from the error of false or improper analogy. The fourth Warrant argues in a circle, and both the fifth and sixth Warrants appeal to irrelevant circumstances. Although the Erasmian interpretation is popular, it is not likely that Jesus had adultery and/or desertion in mind when he spoke the exceptive clause in Matthew 5 and 19.

The Patristic construction of the exception clause surfaces two crucial pieces of evidence, but in the final analysis this view is not significantly different from the Erasmian interpretation of the actual term *mopvela*. Patristic proponents appeal the absolute biblical prohibition against divorce and the permanence of the one flesh principle. The validity of these two proofs is well established. However, advocates of the Patristic view fail to demonstrate the correspondence between these two biblical principles and their own case. Specifically, neither
the no divorce mandate nor the one flesh regulation appears to be preserved by the forced divorce allowance.

Ultimately the Patristic view has Jesus making a concession to the popular interpretation of his day. Such a concession reduces this view to little more than a doctored up restatement of the Erasmlan conclusion. The major distinction between the two views is not that they interpret νυτέλα differently, but that the Erasmusian view allows for remarriage while the Patristic does not.

Those who contend for the Betrothal view of νυτέλα appear to have a more substantial argument than those who hold to the two preceding views. The more narrow definition of νυτέλα proposed by this position is not only demonstrated to be possible by means of lexical proofs, but also illustrated by the Gospel writer, Matthew. On the other hand, the major weakness of this view is that the evidence that Jesus had this particular meaning in mind when he uttered the exception clause is far from certain. Other propositions, however, add to the legitimacy of this possibility. For example, neither the no divorce mandate nor the one flesh regulation of the Scriptures are violated, but rather both are acknowledged by this interpretation. Also, the circumstantial evidence of the contextual arguments of this view make it a more likely option than those previously examined.

The final position, the Rabbinic, presents the most likely explanation of νυτέλα of the four positions examined. Like the Betrothal view, it maintains the integrity of the no divorce mandate and the one flesh regulation of the Scriptures. These two significant arguments serve to undermine both the Erasmlan and Patristic positions. At the same time, the Rabbinic view may be distinguished from the Betrothal on the basis of more textual evidence for its particular interpretation of the term and also on the basis of more convincing circumstantial evidence.

Not only are the Rabbinic advocates able to demonstrate the lexical possibility of their narrow meaning for νυτέλα, they are also able to validate the Apostles' use of the term in exactly the same manner as they suppose Jesus used it. Since the major criticism against the Rabbinic view is its restricted construal of the term, the evidence of the Apostles' limited meaning in Acts
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15 adds credence to this proposal. Then, too, the circumstantial evidence offered by the various contextual arguments begins to accumulate authority in favor of this interpretation. When the Jewish, debate, and legal contexts are taken into consideration together, even the Betrothal view takes a subordinate position to the Rabbinic.

Although it is impossible to argue for any of the four divorce positions with scientific certainty, it does appear that some views fare better than others when placed under the scrutiny of an examination for reasonableness and rationalness. It is not very likely at all that Jesus was making allowance for divorce in the case of adultery and/or desertion. It is possible, but not probable that he was making a concession to the mores of the day by allowing for divorce if the community demanded one. It is much more likely that Jesus was approving the practice of legal divorce in the case of betrothal unfaithfulness. Finally, it is even more likely still that Jesus was recognizing the legitimacy of divorce in the instance of an incestual marriage.

Of course, the biblical preacher is searching for the morally certain interpretation of the text, one that he can represent as the Word of God. In formulating such a position in the present debate, it appears that one of two possibilities exists. First, he could seek to modify the Betrothal and Rabbinic views and reconstruct them into one inclusively narrow interpretation of ἀποκτητα. He could argue that whatever Jesus had in mind, he most likely meant to uphold the biblical standards of no divorce and one flesh. He would then conclude that any interpretation that essentially prohibits divorce is the most probable view of the exception clause. This approach would be satisfying from an applicational view, as the results for a modern audience are ultimately the same whether one follows the Betrothal or the Rabbinic view.\(^\text{33}\) It is a hermeneutically unsatisfying view, however, for it avoids the interpretation of the term in the end. Almost certainly Jesus did not have both the Betrothal and the Rabbinic views in mind at the same time when he uttered the words μὴ ἐντὸ ἀποκτητα.

The other possibility would be to represent the Rabbinic interpretation as the meaning of Jesus as a result of its being the strongest and soundest argument of those presently advocated.
While this position would be held tentatively, because of the acknowledged lack of absolute certainty, it would carry with it the force of moral certainty for it presents itself as the most probable explanation to date. Since no better interpretation has yet been made known, the preacher may represent this view as the Word of God which will direct the affairs of true believers. Until more compelling evidence is forthcoming this view should be recognized as the valid interpretation.

Two points are worth noting before this chapter is concluded. First, it is readily apparent that the goal of absolute certainty of interpretation is a practically impossible task when the disparate arguments are so fully developed. Unless a significant breakthrough in new evidence is surfaced, variant interpretations are likely to stimulate continued debate, but without satisfactory resolution.

This observation leads to a second point. Continual probing of evidence is always appropriate. Refuted arguments demand abandonment. Existing arguments invite modification. New arguments await discovery. The work of interpretation is seldom completed, for morally certain arguments must be held in perpetual suspension. Though it is reasonable to represent the Rabbinic position as the Word of God with its binding moral certainty, it would be faulty hermeneutics to close off further inquiries into this important question of interpretation.

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2 See Guy Duty, *Divorce and Remarriage* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1967), p. 62, where Duty lists a plethora of sources which agree that *pomeia* is often used in a broad sense in the Scriptures.

3 It would be futile to set a specific numerical figure to the element of unrepentance. How many acts of adultery comprise unrepentant fornication? Some may say two acts, some twenty, some two hundred or more. The lack of even moderate objectivity regarding this approach to *pomeia* indicates its unsoundness.

from the context. It can be used generically of all sexual sin or of any specific sexual sin." (Italics mine).


8Biblical marriage includes the leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh process as outlined by the Genesis 2:24 prescription.

9The covenant making of Genesis 12 and 15 could be seen as representing the consummation of God's marriage to Israel. Or, it could be argued that the Mosaic covenant of Exodus 20 represents the marriage of God to the nation.

10Another problem for the Erasmlans is that the 'Betrothal and the Rabbinic views demonstrate a debate context in both Matthew 5 and 19. If Jesus is debating his enemies, and it seems apparent this he is, how can it be said that he ends up siding with some of them? This challenge solicits an answer from the Erasmian advocates.

11Although the Patristic advocates recognize the debate context of the exception passage at Warrant five, they seem to overlook its significance here. See Gordon Wenham, "The Biblical View of Marriage and Divorce: 3-New Testament Teaching," Third Way, November 17, 1977, p. 8. The weakness of this oversight is that after having Jesus involved in disputations with his enemies, it has him making a concession to them. Rather than reinterpreting the cause for divorce, Jesus ends up defining the terms for divorce in essentially the same way as his adversaries. Thus, the force of the debate context is lost to the Patristic argument.


15Attempts are made to establish such arguments, but all of them turn out to be circular in nature. See, for example, Robert J. Piekker, Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 68.


17See, Heth, p.22, where he has argued in regard to the Greek and Latin Fathers' position on required separation and divorce, "The marriage bond was seen to unite both parties until the death of one of them. When a marriage partner was guilty of unchastity, usually understood to mean adultery, the other was expected to separate but did not have the right to remarry."
Heth summarizes that, "twenty-five individual writers and two early councils forbid remarriage after divorce."

See, for example, Matthew 15:19, 1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19, and Hebrews 13:4 where the two terms are juxtaposed.


See Steven Toulmin, Richard Rieke, and Allan Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1984), pp. 209-210. The authors argue that "we shall have to be more sensitive to the limitations in our analysis of reasoning across the boundaries between cultures." The point is made that although contextual elements may not result in rationally certain interpretations, the weight of such circumstantial evidence is substantial.

Epp, pp. 36-37.


For a more detailed analysis of the evaluation for these Backing, see the discussion offered for the second Warrants of the Patristic and Betrothal positions.

For a more detailed analysis of the evaluation for these Backing, see the discussion offered for the third Warrants of the Patristic and Betrothal positions.

For a more detailed analysis of the evaluation for this Backing, see the discussion offered for the first Backing for the fourth Warrant of the Betrothal position.


For a more detailed analysis of the evaluation for these Backing, see the discussion offered for the Backing for the fifth Warrant of the Betrothal position.

See the fifth Warrant of the Betrothal position, the third piece of Backing.

For a more detailed analysis of the evaluation of these Backing, see the discussion offered for the Backing of the fourth Warrant for the Erasmian view, the fifth Warrant for the Patristic view, and the sixth Warrant for the Betrothal view.

Heth and Wenham, p. 168.

Such a decision would be acceptable in legal contexts where more than one interpretation reflects the meaning of the law. Dworkin suggests that
"A thoughtful judge might establish for himself, for example, a rough 'threshold' of fit which any interpretation of data must meet in order to be 'acceptable' on the dimension of fit, and then suppose that if more than one interpretation of some part of the law meets this threshold, the choice among these should be made, not through further and more precise comparisons between the two along that dimension, but by choosing the interpretation which is 'substantively' better, that is, which better promotes the political ideals he thinks correct."

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The work of preaching the Bible is a multifarious undertaking. The preacher must first of all determine the meaning of the text, then discover the legitimate applications of that meaning as they relate to his particular audience, and finally, undertake the homiletical task of arranging the arguments which support his findings, choosing the most clear, appropriate, and captivating language in which to frame those arguments, mastering the content, and delivering the message. While it has been recognized for centuries that the homiletical aspects of communicating the Bible are rhetorical, there has been little emphasis placed on the role that rhetoric plays in the hermeneutical phase. The burden of this paper has been to demonstrate the value and necessity of applying rhetorical strategies to the procedures of biblical hermeneutics. It has been argued that before the preacher can communicate to an audience in the homiletical or public address sense, he first must have come to some justifiable understanding of the text through a process of hermeneutics which employs reasonableness and rationalness as tests for validity. Since his message is expected to be sourced in the authority of Scripture, the preacher's primary place of invention will be his understanding of the Bible. And in order to accurately speak God's words after him, that is, to re-present the Truth, the spokesman must demonstrate that his understanding of the Truth is valid, in the sense that it is the most reasonable and rational explanation of the text.

Without the benefits of rhetorical strategies the hermeneutical efforts of the preacher would be fraught with bias. With the entrance of tests for strength and soundness of arguments,
however, the scholar's objectivity is aided. No longer is he left with best guesses or personal preferences, for there are more substantial grounds upon which to base and defend his conclusions. There can be no justifiable preaching of the Bible without justifiable interpretation of the Bible preceding it. That is why it is imperative that preachers learn rhetorical strategies not only for homiletics, but also for hermeneutics.

Whereas much of the recent interest in biblical hermeneutics has focused on the philosophical (can we know? how do we come to know?), this paper has narrowed its focus to the practical aspects of coming to understand the meaning of the biblical text. Its interest has not been on the application or significance of the text as it relates to a particular audience (a legitimate practical issue itself), but rather on the interpretation or the meaning of the text. The role of argumentation in justifying the many applications of a biblical principle is obvious, but that has not been the interest of this essay. Rather, attention has been given to the practical necessity of interpreting the meaning of the biblical text.

Recently this practical approach to biblical hermeneutics has gained increased attention from the evangelical Christian community, and for at least four reasons. First, for those who hold to the authority of the Scriptures over the life of the Church and the believer, once the issue of inerrancy has been addressed, the next major issue is that of hermeneutics. How one interprets the inerrant text, is the question of the evangelical scholar. The problem is being wrestled with in these times. Second, there is a growing recognition among both clergy and laymen that the preacher must come to terms with a practical process of interpretation which allows him not only to understand the text for himself, but also to communicate his conclusions clearly and persuasively to his congregation. Considering the critical nature of our times, where authority is being challenged rather than accepted unthinkingly, few preachers will sustain a growing congregation without some ability to demonstrate both their interpretation of the text and their reasons for it. Third, the continuing emphasis on unity within the Christian community demands that a consistent
method of hermeneutical inquiry be identified and practiced. Only when those who accept the authority of Scripture can agree upon a method of approaching Scripture will there be any real hope of substantial agreement among the various brands of Christendom. A systematic hermeneutic could resolve many of the interpretational issues which presently divide the Church. Finally, with the growing awareness of the relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric there is some promise that many controversial interpretations of the Bible which have divided the Church for centuries may be held with less dogmatism and more tentativeness. In the present as well as the past, numerous explanations of Scripture have been held with an absolute firmness that allowed for little or no variance of conclusion. The entrance of rhetorical strategies into the hermeneutical process allows for both clear argumentation and probable, that is morally certain, conclusions, rather than absolute, or scientifically certain, assertions. These, then, are the exigencies which have stimulated the present study.

In order to suggest a workable practical hermeneutic, certain presuppositions were identified, definitions of hermeneutics explained, historical approaches to biblical interpretation explored, and the scientific model of problem solving employed. The specific problem of approaching biblical hermeneutics in a systematic fashion was observed. A statement of that problem was articulated. A hypothetical model for doing biblical interpretation was constructed. The anticipated conclusion of discovering a usable method was predicted. The model was tested. Now, this present section seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the model and the study itself. The heart of the study, the model, endeavored to describe how rhetorical strategies enhance the process of biblical hermeneutics. The goals were to map out the actual events which lead to a defensible statement of interpretation, to discover new insights into the hermeneutical process, and to articulate new conclusions about that process. The extent to which these goals were attained will be discussed below.
The major theological assumption of this study was that the Old and New Testament Scriptures are authoritative and binding. Since God has spoken, and spoken accurately in the Bible, it is imperative that His people understand and practice what God has directed. The role of the preacher, therefore, is to study the text until understanding comes, understanding that is justifiable both reasonably and rationally, and then to determine how the truth of the Word of God applies to the life-styles of the listeners to whom he will speak.

The major hermeneutical assumption is that understanding is possible. Even though students of interpretation cannot fully explain how we come to know, it is inaccurate to suggest that understanding is impossible. Although problems exist in describing the hermeneutical process, the skepticism which permeates much of the New Hermeneutic school is inconsistent with the facts of communication. On a regular basis we do understand one another. The necessity of practical biblical hermeneutics must not be sidetracked by the uncertainty of philosophical hermeneutics.

Historically, the word hermeneutics has referred to the various aspects of the science/art of interpretation. Meanings of the term include “to express,” “to explain,” and “to translate.” Each of these uses are apropos to the work of biblical hermeneutics. Although the science/art of interpretation was traced through at least six stages of development from its original interest in biblical hermeneutics to the present concern for systems of interpretation, the focus of our historical probe was on biblical hermeneutics specifically.

Exploring the development of biblical hermeneutics through its seven distinct periods (including Pre-Christian, Primitive Christian, Patristic, Medieval, Reformation and Orthodox, Modern, and Contemporary) resulted in a fairly fixed set of rules and methodology for doing interpretation in the Scriptures. The fundamental rules adhere to the Historical-cultural principle, the Contextual principle, the Lexical-syntactical principle, the Theological principle, and the Literary principle. The major methods reflect a commitment to the Literal approach and the
Hermeneutical Circle. A critical weakness was observed, however, in the hermeneutical circle in that it is self-validating in nature. The circle is dogmatic to the extent that the interpreter can make the parts fit the whole of the interpretation by imposing his bias upon either the parts or the whole. What is needed is a methodology of biblical hermeneutics which allows for a more objective validation of a particular interpretation, especially when other disparate interpretations of the same passage exist. Adapting Piaget's concept of schema, a model was constructed which sought to overcome the dogmatism of the hermeneutical circle and allow for both a reasonable and a rational justification of one's interpretation of the meaning of a biblical passage, especially when disparate interpretations exist.

Drawing from the legal model of interpretation, a rhetorical model for practical biblical interpretation was composed. The model is cyclical in structure, consisting of four steps. The first step, that of Identification, exposes all known existing interpretations of the particular biblical text. In this primary step, two procedures are undertaken. The divergent explanations which have been disseminated by other interpreters are discovered, and, along with one's own interpretation, the essential arguments of each competing proposal are disclosed. Toulmin's model of practical reasoning provides the basis for exposing these various constructions of meaning.

The second step of the model is that of Evaluation. Following the concept of schema, all the arguments are tested against standards for both reasonableness and rationalness as well as against one another. The purpose of weighing competing arguments against one another is to enable the interpreter to handle all possible arguments with as much objectivity as possible. No single disputed interpretation is considered alone, without the challenge of rival arguments. Richard Weaver's hierarchy of values provides the standard tests for reasonableness as each element of the interpretation is evaluated on the strength of its arguments. Arguments from Principle are the strongest, followed by arguments from Analogy, and Consequence. Arguments from Circumstance are the weakest form of reasonableness, but are of some value in the entire
scheme of appraisal. Tests for rationalness follow the fairly universal standards of Sufficiency, arguments that display no missing grounds; Relevance, arguments that provide grounds that are to the point; Completeness, arguments that evidence no defective grounds; Probability, arguments that make no unwarranted assumptions; and Coherency, arguments that are unambiguous. This evaluation of the various interpretations should typically surface one explanation of the text that is superior to the others. If a solitary interpretation does not demonstrate its ascendancy, the next step of the model provides for a consolidation of two or more existing interpretations or the construction of a totally new one.

The third step of the rhetorical model of biblical hermeneutics is that of Formulation. The goal of this step is to prepare an interpretation which emerges superior out of the evaluation process for public dissemination. Three options are available to the interpreter at this point. First, he may simply confirm one of the proposed interpretations as the correct interpretation. This would be the result when one explanation of the text demonstrates itself to be justifiably more reasonable and more rational than all the others. A second option would be to modify one or more of the existing interpretations in order to provide it sufficient strength and soundness. The evaluative process often identifies weaknesses within otherwise reasonable and rational arguments, and the formulation step allows for the mending of these weaknesses. It is possible, as well, that two or more interpretations reflect substantially similar arguments and that a combination of the two would result in what may be a less specific, but more certain conclusion. A final option within the formulation step would be to construct a new interpretation from the remains of arguments rejected by the evaluation step. This could occur if all of the existing explanations of the text failed to demonstrate adequate strength and soundness of argument, but at the same time suggested a fresh way of viewing and constructing the text. Whether by confirmation, modification, or construction, the formulation of the superior interpretation prepares it for dissemination to the public.
Once the exegete has judged an interpretation correct, it must be exposed to public criticism. The audience itself must identify and evaluate the quality of the argument. It is, however, the responsibility of the Interpreter, in our case the preacher, to defend the strength and soundness of his conclusions. He must justify his proposal according to the rules of logic and the good reasons of argumentation. This is an essential requirement of preaching. In order to fairly judge for themselves, the congregation must have proper exposure to the preacher's hermeneutical process. Only then will these new interpreters be sufficiently prepared to carry on the process for themselves and come to their own conclusions as to the meaning of the text.

The rhetorical model of biblical hermeneutics was tested in this study by means of the interpretive problem of the use of *μορφέλα* (fornication) as it appears in the exception clauses of Jesus in Matthew 5 and 19. Four explanations of the term have been advocated by various proponents. These interpretations were identified, having been discovered in the biblical literature regarding Matthew and divorce. The arguments which support these disparate constructions of the meaning were then disclosed according to the Toulmin model. Each position was evaluated individually, according to the standards of strength and soundness, as well as compared and contrasted to each other.

It was determined that the first two interpretations, the Erasmian, which holds that divorce may be transacted in the case of adultery and/or desertion, and the Patristic, which maintains that if divorce is required by the mores of one's culture it is not wrong to divorce, fail in both strength and soundness. The Erasmian view was determined to be the least likely of all the positions. The Patristic view, although it surfaces some substantial concerns, is not able to demonstrate a consistency with the biblical principles it identifies. In the final analysis, it is not significantly different from the Erasmian view.
The Betrothal view of *nopvel* offers a more substantial argument than either of the two preceding interpretations. It has Jesus allowing for a legal divorce only in the case of betrothal unfaithfulness. This explanation maintains the biblical principles which the Patristic view articulates, but is, itself, unable to sustain. Limited circumstantial arguments also appear to favor this interpretation over the others thus far mentioned.

The most likely interpretation of *nopvel*, as used by Jesus in the exceptive clauses, is that identified as the Rabbinic. This view maintains a strict consistency with the biblical principles of no divorce and one flesh. It demonstrates better evidence for its narrow interpretation than does the Betrothal view. Also, the weight of circumstantial evidence favors the Rabbinic view over the Betrothal. It was determined that when Jesus argued for no divorce except for *nopvel* he probably meant that divorce was unlawful except in the case of an unlawful marriage wherein those married are near relatives. An incestual marriage is probably what Jesus had in mind when he uttered the word *nopvel*. This particular argument was confirmed over all of the others. It would, therefore, be the work of the preacher to disseminate this interpretation as a morally binding regulation upon God's people until such time that a better explanation of the meaning of the term could be discovered.

**Conclusions**

At least three broad considerations must be discussed. First, does the rhetorical model of biblical interpretation hold promise as a practical tool for biblical hermeneutics? Second, how can it be made more valuable for those who must work through the interpretational process several times a week? Third, what elements of the hermeneutical process demand further study?

The primary consideration, "Does the rhetorical model of biblical interpretation hold promise as a practical tool for biblical hermeneutics?" poses at least three additional questions. The first asks, "How great is this model's organizing function?"
The rhetorical model of biblical interpretation demonstrates an ability to organize the knowledge of several fields of study into a new way of viewing the task of biblical interpretation. It draws from the inerrancy model of theological investigation, from the schematic model of learning, from the rhetorical model of Brockriede, from the practical argumentation model of Toulmin, from the legal model of Golden and Makau, from the hierarchy of values model of Weaver, and from the model of structural soundness or rationalness which is universally accepted among rhetoricians. From these existing explanations of segments of reality, a new explanation of the process of interpreting the Scriptures has been constructed. The rhetorical model of biblical hermeneutics effectively organizes the existing knowledge of previous investigations in order to discover new insights into the preliminary function of preaching.

The second question to be answered is, "What is the heuristic value of the model?" The model reveals several important characteristics regarding the hermeneutical process. It demonstrates that the work of biblical interpretation is primarily a rhetorical activity. From start to finish, the task demands a knowledge of and a mastery in the use of rhetorical strategies. The model also shows that the work of interpretation is carried out in the realm of the probable, rather than the absolute. Conclusions must be held with some degree of tentativeness in recognition of the arguments of competing viewpoints.

One of the most helpful discoveries the model uncovers is the necessity of observing each and every argument as it is laid out side by side with the others in its fully developed form. It allows the interpreter to identify the specific points of disagreement between the disparate interpretations of a text. It also demonstrates what arguments may be immediately tossed out of the debate in that all sides use the same argument to support differing conclusions.

Besides revealing the structure of arguments, this model enables the interpreter to evaluate both the strength and soundness of the various arguments, not only individually, but also corporately. Without this ability to compare and contrast according to a more objective
standard, the exegete is left with best guesses and personal bias. Thus, this model allows for discoveries which the hermeneutical circle is unable to produce.

A third question asks, “How important are the predictions it yields?” The major contribution of the rhetorical model of biblical interpretation is that it allows for the justification of the preacher’s hermeneutical decision making. It was anticipated that the model would enable a clear observation of the competing arguments and sanction an objective judgment between them. The model appears to provide for those demands.

To the extent, therefore, that this model is able to organize existing knowledge into new insights, to stimulate the discovery of information relevant to the hermeneutical process, and to provide for the justification of particular interpretations, this model may be judged successful. Although it provides merely a beginning, with continued study and modification it could eventually result in an accepted standard of legitimate biblical hermeneutics.

A second consideration, of practical nature, merits attention; namely, “How can this model be made more valuable for those who must work through the interpretational process several times a week?” If ever the model is to gain popular acceptance, it will do so as a result of its practical nature.

It should be clear that the rhetorical model of biblical interpretation provides the preacher the greatest benefit when he encounters two or more possible interpretations of a text. Although many times the meaning of a text will be essentially undebated among varying interpreters, when there is a difference of opinion, the ability to clarify the arguments and judge between them is imperative. Even when the conclusion seems apparent, the preacher may profit from working through the cycle of steps in order to clearly articulate and defend that solitary position. It must not be forgotten that in order to move his audience from no belief and/or behavior, in a specific area of biblical obligation, the homiletician must explain and prove, through rhetorical strategies, his point.
It is possible that, without adequate persuasion, a congregation would reject a new idea, even though uncontested, in favor of status quo, for lack of proper argumentation.

As in any skill, the more the particular tool is used by the individual craftsman, the easier it will become to make it work efficiently. Because of the time pressures which influence the preacher's sermon preparation, a complicated and overly technical approach to interpretation will be quickly abandoned. It is possible that at least two suggestions would help the preacher to best employ this model or some modification of it.

First, in order for the future biblical preacher to initially learn the skill of identifying, evaluating, formulating, and disseminating biblical ideas, he must be taught the skill in his seminary curriculum. Attention must be given to the hermeneutical/homiletical process. The seminary's approach to this requirement must go beyond the mere recognition of the rules of interpretation. It must also include an explanation and demonstration of actually doing the work of interpreting both non-debated and debated passages, as well as the student's supervised practice of the skill. Seminaries must fulfill their obligation of not only teaching their students how to speak, but also of training them in how to discover and defend biblical ideas. At the same time, students must learn how to use their exegetical skills selectively. When to employ the rhetorical model of biblical interpretation, and to what extent, is another skill the preacher must learn. Otherwise he may become frustrated with its time consuming demands and abandon its use altogether.

Second, a commitment to further refinement and simplification must be made. Although a thoroughgoing understanding of the terms and functions of the model, along with practiced skill in its application, will result in greater efficiency of use, it is doubtless a fact that future modifications will provide a still more productive and practical tool. This model is presented tentatively, as a starting point for further evaluation and qualification. It is with this commitment to
refinement in mind that I turn to a final consideration; namely, "What elements of the hermeneutical process demand further study?"

At least six directions for further inquiry have been stimulated by the present study. First, the role of philosophical hermeneutics, and especially its relationship with practical hermeneutics, demands more attention. Some students of interpretation must continue to ask the ontological and epistemological questions, "Can we know?" and "How do we come to know?" Others must concentrate on issues related to the practical interpretation of the law, literature, and the Bible. Both must, at the same time, seek to build bridges of understanding and appreciation between one another. The inability of either perspective to benefit significantly from the other has profited neither and has often led to independent research. This self-sufficient attitude can and should be transformed into a mutually dependent investigation of the entire hermeneutical question.

Second, while the study of the history of biblical interpretation has provided a fairly standard set of rules for that task, it has not contributed to a systematic understanding of the processes of biblical hermeneutics as practiced through the years. An investigation into the actual methods of interpreting the Scriptures as employed by exegetes and preachers throughout Judeo-Christian history could result in descriptive models of biblical interpretation. Although the hermeneutical circle has been the generally accepted method of biblical interpretation for some time, it is likely that other approaches would lend insight into the practice and suggest helpful modifications to the rhetorical model as presented in this study.

A third direction for further study would be the investigation of the role of rhetoric in the hermeneutical aspects of preaching. While homileticians give attention to the role of rhetoric in the style and delivery phases of preaching, much less recognition has been given to the role it plays in the arrangement and especially the invention of arguments. The benefits of the Toulmin model of practical reasoning for sermon structures has yet to be substantially developed. This appears to be a promising area of study. In addition to these structural matters, the role that
rhetoric plays in the discovery and validation of biblically-sourced sermon ideas demands the attention of those who teach homiletics.

A fourth context for further research concerns the relationship between legal and biblical hermeneutics. The commonalities between both the law and the Bible, and the judge and the preacher, suggest that those who are concerned with a justification of their interpretations of the Scriptures may have something to learn from those who defend their interpretations of the law. Especially vital is the investigation of how the law or the Bible is approached by the interpreter. Biblical interpreters must come to grips with the conventionalist - naturalist - instrumentalist debate. They must articulate a sound philosophical basis for their particular perspective on the text.

An area that was not probed at all in this study, but provides a fifth area of additional research, deals with the need for a process of justifying the significance of a biblical idea. The focus of the present model was merely to justify the meaning or interpretation of the text. But the preacher has the added responsibility of applying the message of the text to his hearers. This work, too, demands justificatory arguments. While it is possible that the present model would facilitate such applicational justification, it is by no means certain that it would. This second aspect of the hermeneutical process needs further attention.

Finally, although the rhetorical model for biblical interpretation has sought an objective means of justifying its conclusions, the process falls far short of total impartiality. The subjective aspects of rhetoric, those dealing with the illusiveness of "good reasons" as it varies from audience to audience and time to time, inevitably place biblical interpretation into the realm of the probable. However, the search for more objective means of approaching the Scriptures has not been exhausted. Continued investigation must be made into the role of certainty and probability as seen in the objective - subjective tension of biblical interpretation.
While this work provides merely a beginning in the search for a model of biblical hermeneutics which provides justification for its conclusions, its basic thesis, at least, should be clear. Rhetorical argumentation provides a valid foundation for the interpretation of Scripture. Without the implementing of rhetorical strategies, there would not only be no preaching, but also no interpretation in the first place. The role of persuasion is deeply rooted in the practice of both hermeneutics and homiletics.
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