



Biblical Exegesis II

A comprehensive journey into advanced biblical interpretation, exploring theological depths and practical methodologies for engaging Scripture with academic rigor and spiritual sensitivity.

Introduction: The Journey of Biblical Exploration

Our Guiding Principle

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." – T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets

Exegesis invites us into a transformative encounter with Scripture—analyzing details while never losing sight of the whole, engaging both trees and forest in our interpretive journey.



Understanding Synthesis: Bringing It All Together

01

Analyze Content

Examine key messages, hierarchy, narrative structure, and visual opportunities within the text.

02

Identify Essential Questions

What is the main point of each section? How do parts complete the whole? Why was this passage included?

03

Formulate Synthesis

Create a coherent reading of the text that integrates analysis with understanding of purpose and function.

Synthesis is a disciplined, creative act of integration—not mere summary, but a conclusion about essential meaning after careful understanding.

Key Questions for Synthesis

Textual Unity

What is the main point of each part, and how do these parts complete the whole? Can this point be located accurately in a word, phrase, or verse?

Original Purpose

Why was this passage included in this biblical book? What was the purpose or function for the original author and audience?

Audience Response

What claims did the text make for its original hearers/readers? What response might the author desire? What effects did it exercise upon them?



Critical Considerations for Analysis

Remember: You are dealing with religious literature. Authors and texts make theological and spiritual claims intended not merely to inform, but to transform readers.

- Is there repetition of words, ideas, or images indicating structure and theme?
- Does the text's structure indicate focus through central points, inclusio, or contrast?
- Do the beginning or ending reveal the text's primary interest?
- What significant relationships exist between textual components?

❏ **Essential Principle:** The search for "main point" isn't relegated to the end of exegesis but is integral to the entire interpretive process—the hermeneutical circle of parts and whole.

Synthesis and Interpretive Plurality

Acknowledging Diversity

Different interpreters arrive at various syntheses of the same text. Even professional exegetes disagree about original textual meanings.

Grounding Interpretation

What matters is grounding reflection in careful textual analysis while engaging text and others with humility and vigor.

Accepting Limitations

Good exegetes present interpretations powerfully yet humbly, recognizing valuable alternative readings and limitations of their own knowledge.

Case Study: Philippians 2:6-11

This famous passage has generated numerous interpretations throughout history. Consider these possible syntheses:



Servant Song Reinterpretation

Christ as degraded then exalted Servant of God (Isaiah 52:13–53:12 parallel)



True Humanity

Christ portrayed as true human being, contrasting with Adam



Divine Self-Revelation

Christ's self-emptying reveals final manifestation of true divinity



Ethical Example

Incarnation and death as exemplar of love and humility for Christian imitation



Sovereign Lordship

Christ not merely as example but as sovereign Lord worthy of absolute devotion

The Comfort of Interpretive Plurality

Theological Vitality

There is great comfort and spiritual vitality in the plurality of biblical interpretations. This perspective acknowledges both linguistic and theological dimensions of meaning.

This doesn't mean abandoning conviction or preaching with uncertainty. Rather, it invites deeper engagement with Scripture's inexhaustible richness.



- ❑ The text's meaning is not simply an objective, unidimensional reality everyone discovers identically. Multiple valid perspectives can coexist while maintaining faithful interpretation.

Theological Interpretation: Five Hermeneutical Postures



Hermeneutics of Antipathy

Views Bible or its effects as dangerous to human freedom and truth-seeking. Questions: "What erroneous worldview does this text perpetuate?"



Hermeneutics of Appreciation

Approaches Bible with literary or historical interest without religious commitment. Questions: "What does this text reveal about ancient worldviews?"



Hermeneutics of Discernment

Actively seeking answers, viewing Bible as one potential source. Questions: "What way of life does this suggest and how satisfactory is it?"



Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Reacts against misuse of biblical authority, especially regarding marginalized groups. Questions: "How does this text promote oppression or liberation?"



Hermeneutics of Consent/Faith

Gives Bible benefit of doubt as God's Word for His people. Questions: "What is God's word for us in this text?"



Reading with Faith, Hearing Others

The hermeneutics of faith or consent doesn't mean closed-mindedness. Those reading with basic acceptance should still engage seriously with other interpretative postures.

1

Courage to Listen

Hearing different approaches requires courage but produces greater appreciation for text and other interpreters.

2

Flexible Engagement

Readers with hermeneutics of acceptance may still read texts with legitimate hesitation and suspicion when warranted.

3

Community Sustainability

Christian communities require basic hermeneutics of acceptance toward sacred texts for long-term vitality.

Theological Interpretation of Scripture

Defining the Approach

Theological interpretation considers Bible not merely as historical/literary document but as:

- Source of divine revelation
- Testimony to God's creative and salvific activity
- Relevant partner in theological reflection
- Understanding God, world, and humanity in light of God

Recent Renaissance

After marginalization in academic circles, theological interpretation has experienced meteoric growth in early 21st century biblical studies.

This renaissance results from dissatisfaction with purely historical-critical approaches and post-modern freedom to make theological interests explicit.

Goals of Theological Interpretation



Bridge to Church

Reconnect academic biblical studies with church practice and community life



Bridge to Theology

Reunite biblical studies with systematic theology after modern fragmentation

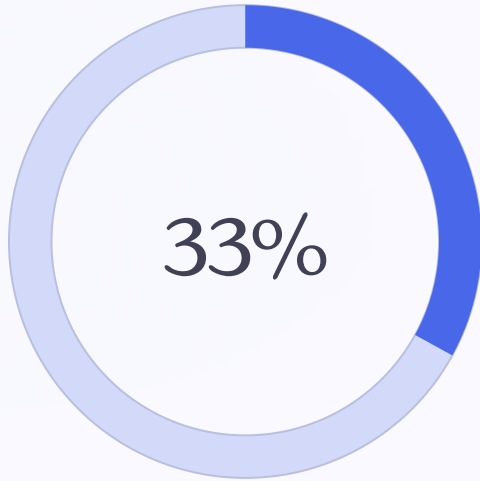


Balance Methods with Dispositions

Balance modern methodological concerns with theological dispositions and practices like humility, prayer, and virtue

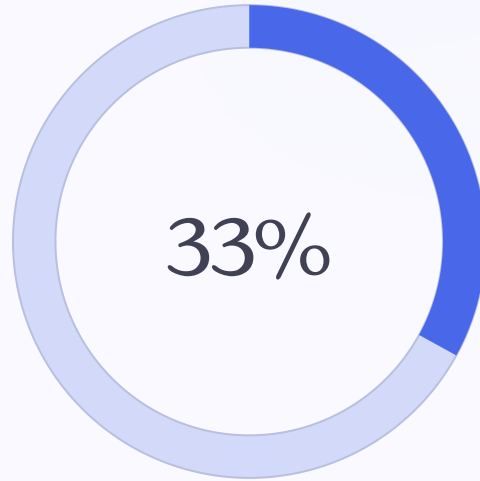


Core Questions of Theological Interpretation



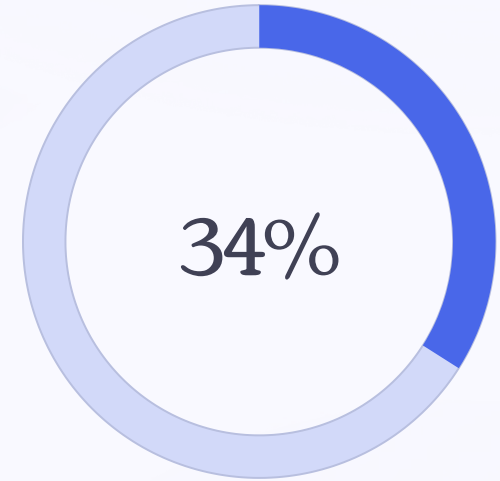
Faith

What does the text exhort us to believe?



Hope

What does the text exhort us to hope for?



Love

What does the text exhort us to do?

- ❏ Theological interpretation's goal isn't merely reading and questioning text, but allowing text to read, question, and form us as individuals and community.



Eight Principles of Theological Interpretation

01

Chalcedonian Principle

Scripture is both fully divine and fully human—analogous to Christ's incarnation. Requires reading as God's Word and human words simultaneously.

03

Communal/Ecclesial Principle

Exegesis is ecclesial discipline occurring within Church, not individual isolation. Includes dialogue with historical interpreters and contemporary community.

02

Catholic/Universal Principle

All Scripture written for all God's people across all eras and places. We are addressed directly, not reading others' mail.

04

Canonical Principle

Read texts in canonical context as divinely orchestrated whole revealing salvation history. Places texts in dialogue with each other.

Eight Principles (continued)

O1

Coherence Principle

Despite diversity, Scripture tells coherent salvation story. Guided by Spirit throughout God's people's history, yielding basic theological convictions in creeds.

O3

Conversion/Transformation Principle

Interpretation is primary means by which God effects Church's ongoing conversion, reformation, and theosis. Goal: community and individuals become living exegesis of text.

O2

Charismatic Principle

Interpretation is Spirit's work. Exegetical skill is charisma, but requires Spirit's grace and guidance for intended end: communion with God and each other.

O4

Constructive Principle

Interpretation contributes to Church's constructive task of articulating convictions and practices faithfully and creatively in changing contexts. Scripture is theology's "soul."

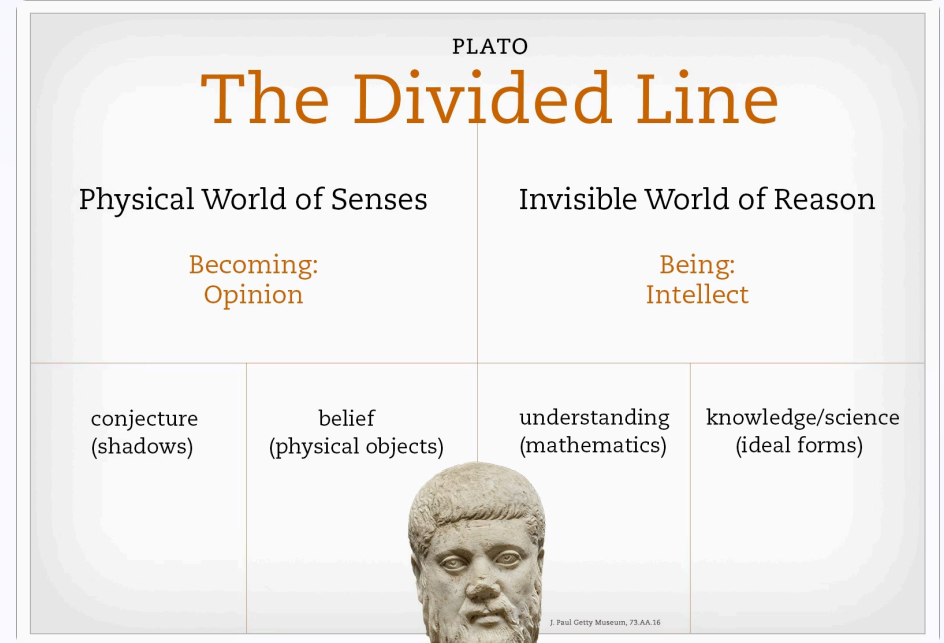
Two Horizons: Innovation and Precautions

Reading for Both Horizons

Theological interpreters deliberately read Bible's "two horizons"—meaning in original context and possible meaning in contemporary context.

This doesn't create complete division between exegesis and reflection. If text has validity as sacred/artistic text, it must:

1. Make continuous claims for contemporary audience
2. Connect those claims with original audience's arraignments



Recognizing our interpretive interest maintains honesty and reduces eisegesis risk. Commitment to text as divine word should guide approach while inhibiting desire to control or reshape it to our image.

Fusion of Horizons

1

Recognition

We're part of same God's people addressed through prophets and apostles. Recognize similarities alongside differences.

2

Engagement

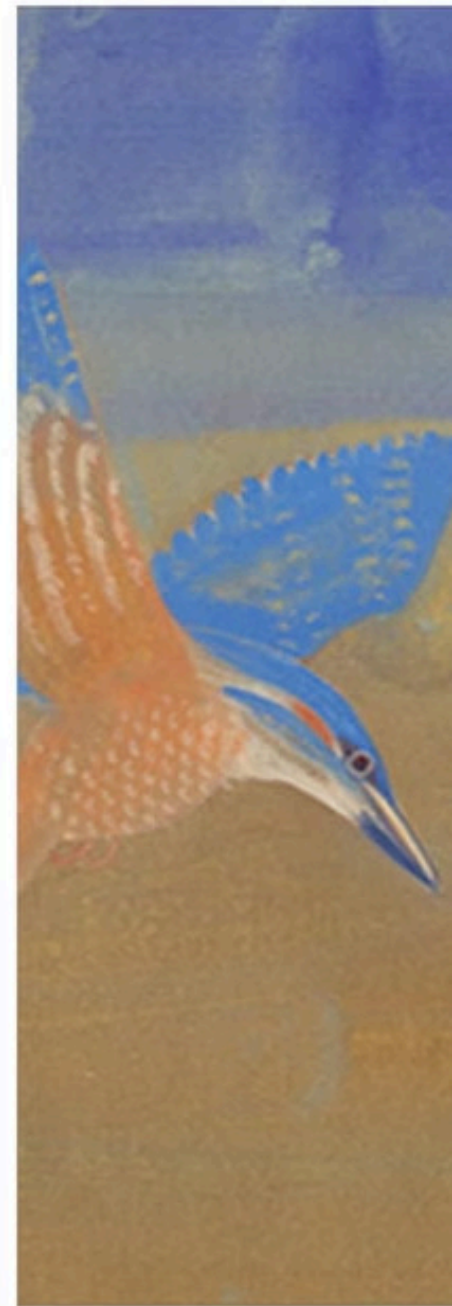
Cannot truly read, interpret, or understand text until engaging it—fusing its "horizon" with ours.

3

Transformation

Reading process incomplete unless fusion occurs. Final goal: comprehensive understanding—living the text.

- ❑ Avoid premature assimilation—applying text without sufficient reflection on distance between horizons. Balance allows text to challenge rather than domesticate us.



Practical Approaches to Two Horizons



Paraphrase Central Meaning

Put text in your own words. Note previous encounters, similar /different biblical texts, historical relevance.



Identify Universal and Unique Themes

What universal hopes, fears, beliefs, values appear? What unique or unusual perspectives emerge?



Explore Theological Dimensions

What does text say about God (Father, Son, Spirit), God's people, sacred history, salvation, mission, virtues, ethics, worship?



Examine Personal Reaction

How do you react? What emotions arise? Does text challenge you or open new horizons? How does your context affect understanding?



Identify Contemporary Parallels

What current issues or situations seem analogous? How are they similar or different?

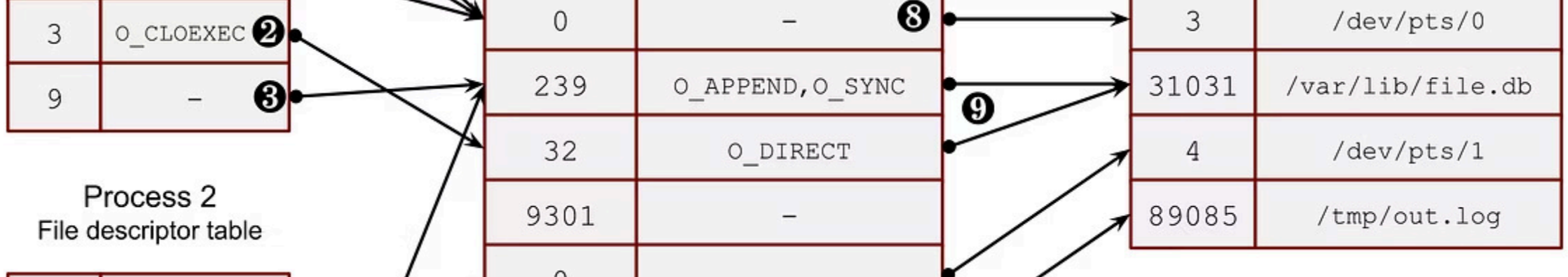
Living Exegesis: Becoming the Text

The final question of exegesis: "If readers took this text's message seriously, how would their life differ?"

This accepts text's invitation to engage on its own terms as transformative word of mind and life. Among faith communities, this invitation is taken seriously—the question of "comprehensive involvement" or "living exegesis."

- **Goal:** Exegete (individual or community) becomes part of text-engaging imaginatively with discernment, continuing text's narrative through world engagement, "performing" Scripture.





Fundamental Questions of Living Exegesis

Formation Question

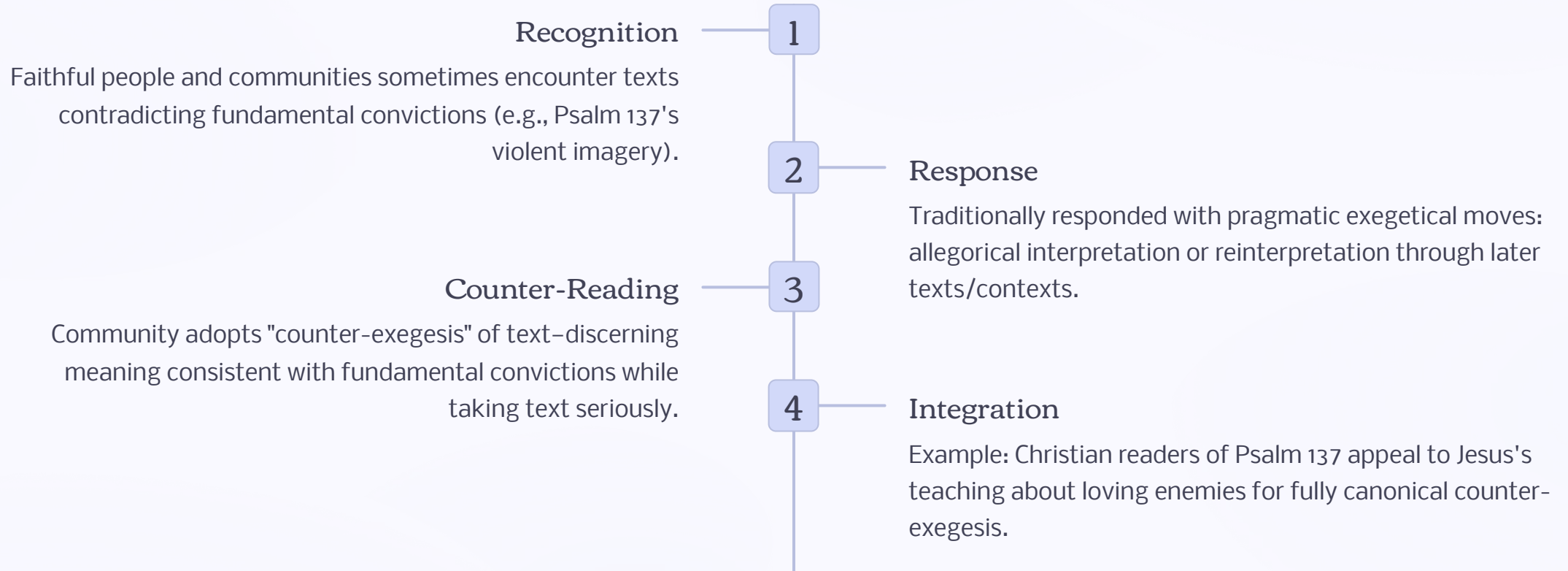
What kind of person and community does this text exhort readers to become?

Capacity Question

What kind of community and individuals are urged to hear this text as divine invitation and embody it with "creative fidelity"?

These questions form hermeneutical circle. Any perceptive reader can ask and answer them. For those hearing Bible's word from God, asking and answering isn't merely possibility—it's divine imperative.

Handling Difficult Texts





Enhancement and Expansion of Exegesis

"Do you understand what you are reading?"

"How can I understand if someone does not explain to me?"

– Philip and Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:30-31

What resources expand and refine exegete's work? How do biblical scholars' writings affect your own? Though exegesis can be done by non-specialists, appropriate resources and specialized guides shouldn't be neglected for responsible work.

Essential Resources for Exegesis



Concordances

Fantastic resource for tracking word usage throughout Scripture. Essential tool for thematic and linguistic analysis.



Specialized Dictionaries

Biblical, theological, and linguistic dictionaries provide crucial context and terminology clarification.



Original Languages

Most depend on scholars working with Hebrew/Greek. Careful exegetes wisely use tools without necessarily becoming language experts.



Commentaries

Start with 2-3 recent scholarly commentaries offering detailed, comprehensive passage interpretation in context.

❏ **Warning:** "A little knowledge is dangerous." Use tools wisely without overreaching limited expertise in ancient languages.

Engaging Scholarly Biblical Works

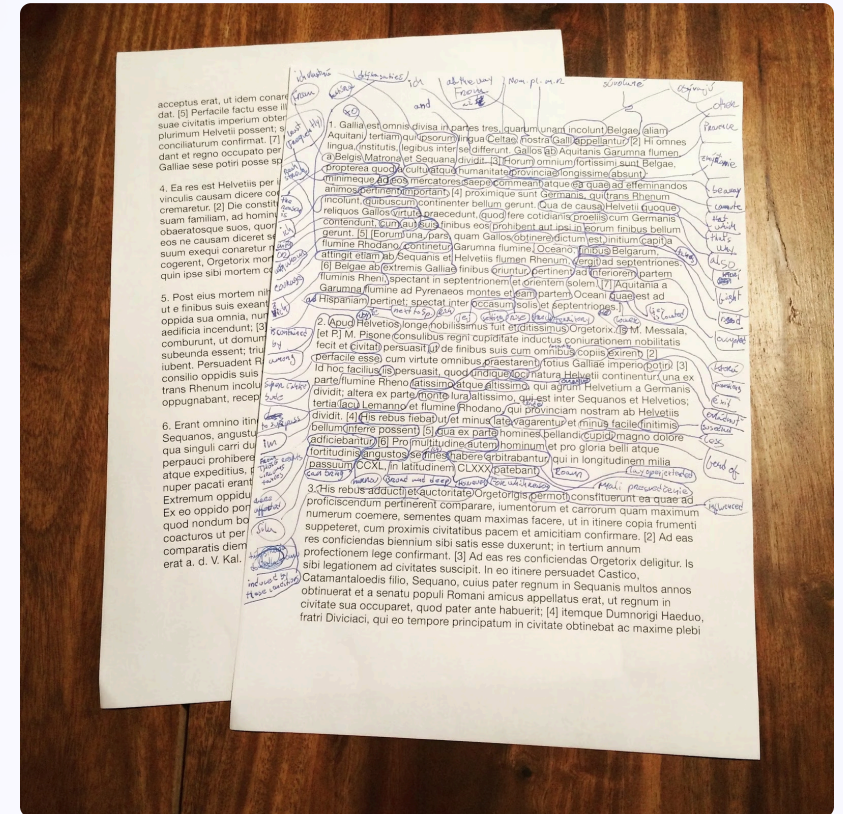
Purpose and Value

Published scholarship can confirm or correct findings, resolve unanswered questions, generate new questions, define unknown terms, show biblical connections, provide historical information, explain grammatical constructions, and suggest textual implications.

How Much Research?

Depends on nature and purpose. Preacher preparing sermon might need 1-2 commentaries. Student writing 10-page paper needs several commentaries and articles.

General guideline: Research paper should have approximately as many bibliography items as text pages (e.g., 10-12 page paper: 5-7 commentaries/books plus 5-7 articles).



Research Strategy and Critical Reading



Start with Commentaries

Begin with 2-3 recent scholarly commentaries. These provide references to other commentaries, books, and relevant articles.



Ensure Current Bibliography

At least one bibliography should be less than 10 years old to avoid outdated works.



Explore Bibliographic Tools

Use standard bibliographic resources for articles and publications. Online scholarly resources are growing exponentially.



Include Historical Works

Don't neglect great exegetes and preachers from past (Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther, Wesley, etc.). Their insights remain valuable.



Read Critically

Scholars often disagree. Read each source critically, in dialogue with your work and other resources. Your interpretation can be as valid as commentator's.

Practical Guidelines for Research Papers

Phase 1: Preparation

Determine appropriate text (viable unit, 5-25 verses). Obtain study Bibles, translations, parallel texts. Create marked copy with wide margins.

Phase 2: Initial Exegesis

Work independently through main exegetical steps. Note observations, questions. Organize findings by element.

Phase 3: Research

Prepare bibliography. Take careful notes. Look for overlooked information, challenges to your work, alternative interpretations.

Phase 4: Consolidation

Combine initial exegesis with research corrections, confirmations, new data. Write conclusions about context, form, structure, analysis, synthesis.

Phase 5: Writing

Begin with contexts, then form/structure/movement, detailed analysis, synthesis, introduction. Document sources. Follow institutional style guide.



Biblical Criticism: Understanding Its Schools

"Criticism is by nature the enemy of stability." – Kerr, 1956

Biblical criticism emerged from 17th-18th century rationalism. By 19th century, it divided into "higher criticism" (composition and textual history) and "lower criticism" (textual analysis for correct readings).

These terms are largely abandoned today. Contemporary criticism has witnessed new perspectives based on literary and sociological approaches in seeking textual meaning.

Defining Criticism: Etymology and Purpose

Word Origins

"Criticism" derives from Greek *krino* ("to cut"), adjectival form *kritikos* ("apt to judge").

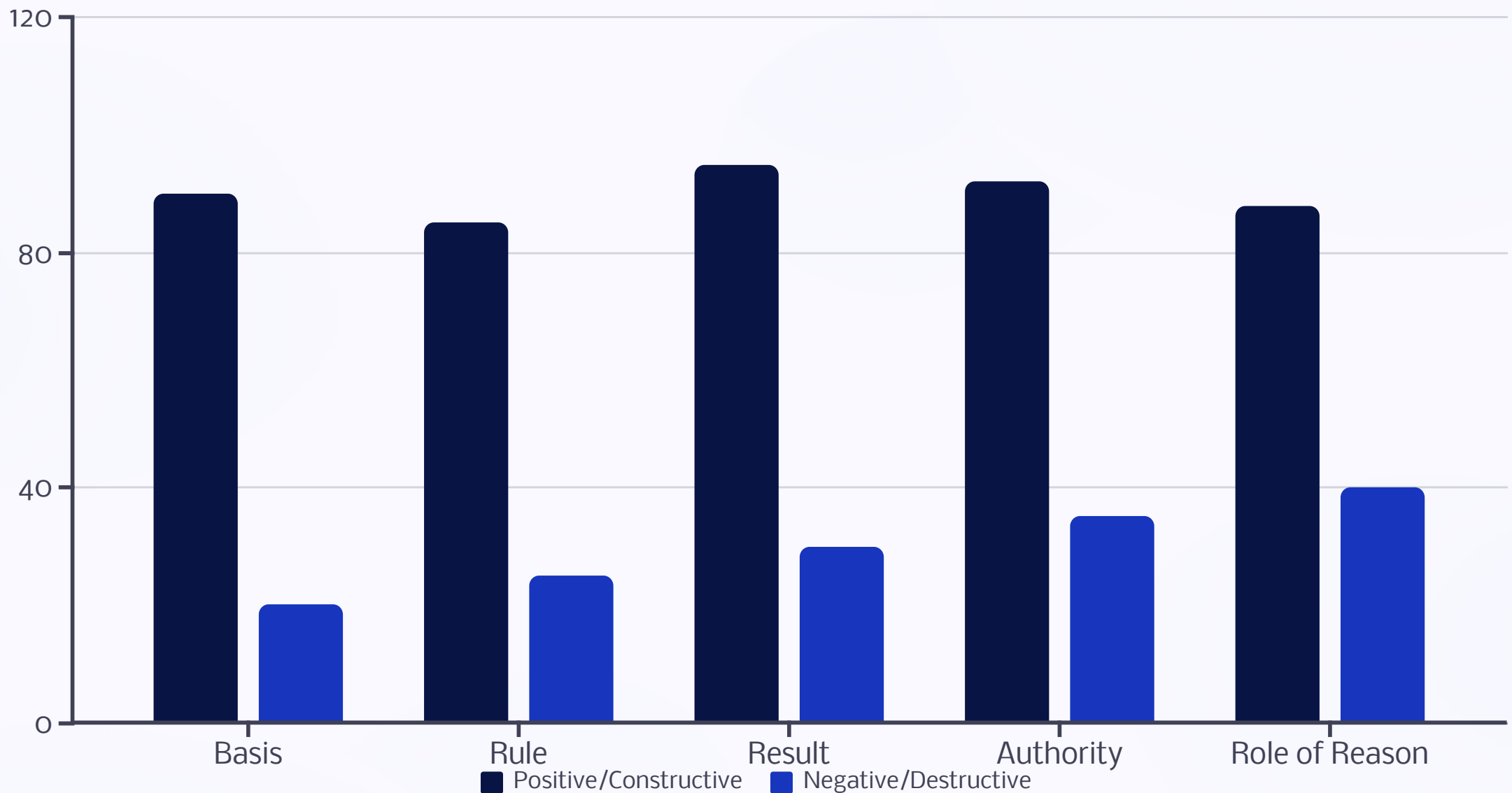
Etymologically: judgment, evaluation, assessment. "Art or faculty of examining and judging works of spirit, particularly literary or artistic character."

True Purpose

Authentic criticism's adjectival meaning is analytical, not condemnatory. Though sometimes used negatively, various critical method branches can provide new insights into God's message for today.

- ❏ Criticism developed as art of forming qualified opinions on literary works. True criticism is before all else an art rather than science, requiring not just knowledge but also experience and discernment.

Positive vs. Negative Criticism



Positive criticism: supernaturalist basis, text "innocent until proven guilty," completely true Bible, God's Word as final authority, reason discovers truth. Negative criticism: naturalist basis, text "guilty until proven innocent," partially true Bible, human mind as final authority, reason determines truth.

Conclusion: The Way Forward in Biblical Exegesis

Balanced Approach

Critical methods are tools—their value depends on the worker using them. In some hands, they obscure text or deny historical value. In other hands, they produce useful insights.

True exegesis requires both faithful commitment and rigorous methodology, both spiritual sensitivity and academic excellence.

Final Encouragement

Good biblical scholarship is prayer, communion (koinonia), and service to Church. Even technical, sophisticated interpretation ultimately aims at Church's formation as community adequate to Christian gospel.

Theological interpretation's goal: Spirit-inspired formation of communities thinking and acting like Christ, discerning their role in God's world action through faithful, creative response to divine direction found in Scripture.

