Dialogue I

Doing Business with the Hebrew Bible: A Hermeneutic Guide

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Lynn and Wallace suggest ten hermeneutic principles for integrating the Old Testament into modern-day commerce. They also provide an impressive list of related verses and resources for further study.

Abstract

The application of the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) to modern-day commerce can be daunting due to differences between ancient and contemporary contexts. The accuracy of biblical integration in business, however, may be enhanced by attending to certain guidelines of interpretation and application. After describing four models of integration, ten hermeneutic principles are suggested under the categories of Beginnings—The Exegetical Process, Broadening the Focus—Theological Reflection, and Applying the Text—Hermeneutic Implications. These ten principles are related to issues of commerce where appropriate. Sources for further in-depth study are suggested as are Hebrew Bible passages dealing with business and economic themes.

Introduction

Commerce and wealth creation are not of modern origin. They are ancient activities, stretching back to the beginning of recorded history. Far from being value-neutral, a culture's commerce—its political economy, merchant trade, and outlook on work and money—is, in practice, deeply imprinted with values and ethics. Thus, it is not surprising that the Hebrew Bible—which reaches back more than 4,000 years to tell the story of Yahweh and Israel—speaks to business issues. This "Old Testament" includes narrative and instruction on topics such as wages, poverty, labor, stewardship, economic transactions, and possessions (see Appendix A on page 35).[1]

Many Christians today desire for their business practice to be biblically informed. But how should ancient Scripture be

applied to today's business? The question is not primarily about the errancy or origin of the ancient text, although these issues are relevant and important to the question at hand. Rather, the primary issue is one of hermeneutics or interpretation. A deep well of biblical hermeneutics exists, but too few biblical integrationists seem to draw from it today.

Our aim is to extend writing on hermeneutics (cf. Beadles, 1998; Chewning, 1998) by providing principles of biblical interpretation that aid business scholars and practitioners in applying Hebrew Scripture to their thought and practice. These principles will be drawn from scholarly and popular sources and will be discussed with an eye toward economic and business scholarship. Because integration is not a venture to be engaged in casually, we begin by considering various benefits and cautions in biblical integration.

Biblical Integration

Benefits

For several reasons, the marriage of Hebrew Scripture to commerce can be attractive for a business practitioner or scholar confessing Judeo-Christian faith.[2] Bringing the two realms of faith and work together engenders an integrity of life that is missing when work is punctuated by faith but not transformed by it, or when one attempts to divide his or her life into segregated domains of work and worship. Sometimes faith not only promotes work practices, it fuels them. And at other times, Scripture appears to call disciples to distinctly different business practices, interpersonal relations, and social activism. Both of these directions entail a shift from society's management and economic norms, and both suggest that the biblical text speaks to the Christian in business today. There is no evidence suggested in Scripture that a dualistic, Greek model of life exists where the mores and practices of secular life are secluded from an antiseptic sacred life (cf. Sherman & Hendricks, 1987). Such is a modern and artificial invention.[3]

Perhaps the clearest example of faith-business integration comes from biblical narrative itself. Many of the individuals recorded in Scripture served as artisans, agriculturalists, judges, and national leaders—Abraham, Jacob, the wife of noble character, Joseph, David, Deborah, Moses, Noah, and others. Their decisions, actions, and leadership are in small part recorded in the biblical record, sometimes with divine commentary, sometimes not. They themselves are *de facto* examples of the people of God at work.

But why the Hebrew Bible? Many Christians view it as divinely inspired, but as the "Old" Testament—one superceded by a "New" Testament. Furthermore, Israel's ancient economy was pre-capitalist—what would it have to say that is relevant in modern economies and governments? Since the only Bible the first century church had was the Hebrew Scriptures, they were then and indeed remain today a guide to individual and collective discipleship, "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16-17) in all aspects of life. The Hebrew Scriptures show God's nature and express his will for humankind. They contain rich veins of narrative demonstrating life in covenant relationship with God and with one another.

Cautions

When integration is poorly executed, contemporary culture and personal biases tend to mold biblical understandings. Four thousand years of the Judeo-Christian story is replete with the dangers of departing from or contaminating God's Word. In modern times, Christianity is littered with examples of the Bible being used to christen imperfect economic systems, oppressive wage scales, workaholism, slavery, and extreme corporate loyalty. We need not look further back than to the Chicago business community of early 20th century America (Heidebrecht, 1989, p. 4), where:[4]

> *the religious views [that leading businessmen] espoused were fundamentally shaped by their business experience and their social outlook as the wealthy elite of the city. They created what might be called a businessman's religion. Such a faith was pragmatic, activist, and geared to measurable results. It was a Protestantism that above all else was efficient.*

Honest intentions and noble causes are insufficient inoculations against the distortion of Scripture. Indeed, applying a labor and business lens to hermeneutics lends itself to

distortion. A business lens is generally applied not to understand an ancient text, but to seek commentary on contemporary economic practice or theory. For instance, modern scholars and practitioners might inquire what Scripture says about capitalism and socialism, yet ignore the major biblical theme of covenant (cf. Olyan, 1996). Thus, it is a hermeneutic much closer to liberation theology or feminist theology—that is, one with an agenda—rather than a purely historical or literary study. If approached from that vantage point, Scripture is likely to be distorted—if not the meaning of a sole passage, then the voices of other Scriptures are muted.

The alternative to poor exegesis and distorted application is not the avoidance of integration. A two-story house with separate secular and sacred floors, although a fairly common worldview, is not biblical but is the product of poor integration itself (Walsh & Middleton, 1984). An additional rub comes when one realizes that—central for both Jews and Christians—genuine faith is expressed *actively* and in community with others, not merely in thought (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989; Pava, 1997). As Elton Trueblood has said, "Abstract and unembodied Christianity is a fiction." Thus, action, not just carefully crafted systematic theology, is required for true biblical integration to occur in business.

In sum, integration is not only inevitable for phenomenological reasons—we cannot stand outside ourselves—it is also desirable because God's work is expressed in all of life, on human hearts and not on tablets of stone. Biblical integration is an inescapable, sobering, and exhilarating undertaking, requiring a careful handling of the biblical text, a critical eye toward culture, and a humility of spirit.

Models of Hebrew Bible Integration

Before proceeding to the details of hermeneutics, we pause briefly to address some important boundaries surrounding the task. Hermeneutics deals largely with the *methods* of interpretation. In part, however, the hermeneutic approach is chosen based on the reader's *assumptions* about the text. For example, if one questions the biblical authority of a text, he or she is likely to treat it differently in the interpretative process and reach a differing *outcome* compared to someone who has a high regard for a text's

Figure 1

Biblical Integration Influences

biblical authority (see Figure 1). Scripture-business integration itself already presumes that one sees value in both biblical literature and business. So some assumptions are already eliminated (e.g., that business and Bible are mutually irrelevant—one has absolutely nothing to say to the other). But the remaining assumptions one can hold about Scripture and commerce can range widely on several dimensions. While it is not our primary focus, these differential assumptions and outcomes are important to address since they confound the hermeneutic puzzle.

After informally surveying scholarly and popular business integrationist literature that incorporates Hebrew Scripture, we find that most integration efforts can be collapsed into one of four general categories. We present these in Figure 2 (next page) using the image of a Jewish toy—a four-sided dreidel with each side representing one model of biblical integration outcomes and assumptions.

The first camp of scholars and practitioners tend to approach Scripture as command or law, prescribing *practices* in antiquity, some of which may continue today. Those holding this view (e.g., Levine, 1987; Pava, 1997) typically have a high view of biblical authority and a primary concern for orthodoxy or right belief. For a second group of practitioners and scholars, Scripture offers timeless justice, ethics, and wisdom *principles*, especially in the minor prophets and the book of Proverbs (e.g., Gorringe, 1994; Zigarelli, 1999). The primary concern in this school of thought is orthocardia, or having the right heart. A third set of integrationists commonly use narrative or stories of *persons* as a springboard for discussing contemporary issues, much like one might use characters from any literary source (e.g., Baron, 1999; Hambley, 1987; Visotzky, 1998). For these, the focus rests on behaving effectively in contemporary settings. The fourth model differs from the other three

Figure 2

Assumptions and Outcomes of Hebrew Bible and Business Integration

Outcomes		Assumptions and Emphases			
Label	**Description**	**Scripture Favored**	**Primary Concern**	**Biblical Authority**	**Era in Focus**
Practices	Transplant ancient individual and collective forms, laws, and practices today	Law	Orthodoxy	Important	Ancient
Principles	Identify ancient principles of ethics, justice, and wisdom applicable today	Proverbs and minor prophets	Orthocardia	Somewhat important	Timeless
Persons	Use biblical characters as a springboard for discussing modern managerial and organizational behavior	Narrative	Orthopraxy	Mildly important or not important	Modern
Phenomena	Apply business and economic theory to explain the biblical record	History	Scholarship	Irrelevant	Ancient

in that it reverses the integration—rather than examining ways Scripture may be integrated in business today, it focuses on ways business and economic theory might explain Israel's ancient development and organization economically (e.g., Boer, 1998; Glass, 2000; Muth, 1997). In other words, it focuses on biblical *phenomena*.

These schools of thought are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they could respond to the same issue, simply from different angles. For example, take the instruction that Moses communicated forbidding Israelites from keeping a needy person's coat overnight as collateral for a pledge (Deut. 24:10-13). From the *practice* view, one might research the technical aspects of the teaching and consider how the law should be applied today. From the *principles* view, one might look for an ethical rather than legal precept and apply it to a variety of social justice applications. The *persons* view might focus on the lessons learned from the leadership style of Moses, a human leader. Finally, from the *phenomena* view, one might use economic or financial theory to address whether the lack of collateral would yield an economically sustainable system of loans.

These are not the only integration models in use, and there is considerable diversity within each. Perhaps that's what the four models portray best—that there is a divergence of approaches for applying Hebrew Scripture within contemporary economic and management thought and practice. A considerable portion of disagreement among scholars, however, may exist because of differences in assumptions about the nature of Scripture and one's approach to it. Once these assumptions are recognized, one may proceed to considering principles that will help illuminate the text—that is the hermeneutic process.

Hermeneutic Principles

Because a reader might examine a text from a variety of religious traditions, business disciplines, and individual perspectives, hermeneutics is clearly not an optic that always refracts one meaning from the same textual beam. The reader of Scripture will always come to the task of interpretation with unavoidable presuppositions and personal interests. The challenge for the interpreter of Scripture,

however, will involve submitting these interests to the light of Scripture, rather than demand that Scripture be shaped to personal preconceptions.

One may ask, "Why can't the text simply be taken at face value, without complicating the interpretative process with hermeneutics?" If one has not experienced it, it is hard to convey the amount of illumination shed by scholarly work or the amount of modern bias without it. Approaching the text without examining it, other passages, or oneself, is almost sure to result in a distortion of Scripture. For those not reading in the original Hebrew, the Bible they read is already the product of intense reading and interpretation. Even if our reading does not distort the original message of a passage, we are likely to emphasize certain passages that speak to our own cultural experiences and ignore other passages that do not. Without a systematic approach, the process of identifying, interpreting, and applying texts is uninformed subjectivity. On the other hand, in-depth study of a text does not violate a presumption of scriptural authority or divine guidance; indeed, it more fully respects it.

We suggest that ten hermeneutic principles can guide one to interpret and apply Hebrew Scripture with greater accuracy (see Figure 3). These principles provide a basic framework for understanding and applying the Hebrew Bible to a business concept or milieu. The process involves three basic steps of attempting to discover what the text meant in its ancient context, reflecting theologically on the principles that might transcend the ancient context, and applying the theological insights to a contemporary setting. These principles emphasize the historical and literary nature of textual analysis and the need for careful theologizing, but they also give assent to the insufficiency of integration without the involvement of the Holy Spirit and active application of integration. Finally, it should be noted that the principles and sources used intentionally draw upon and respect a diversity of religious traditions and perspectives. We begin with exegesis.

Stage 1: Beginnings—The Exegetical Process

The work of exegesis is intended to reach an informed understanding of the text in

Figure 3

Hermeneutic Principles for Hebrew Scripture

Beginnings—The Exegetical Process

Principle #1: Admit personal interests and cultural biases.
Principle #2: Begin with a good translation of the text.
Principle #3: Examine the historical and cultural context.
Principle #4: Give notice to the genre.
Principle #5: Realize that exegesis is an ongoing process informed by the Spirit.

Broadening the Focus—Theological Reflection

Principle #6: What does one learn of God from this text?
Principle #7: How does my exegesis relate to other Scripture?
Principle #8: How do my theological conclusions differ or accord with the traditional understanding of other believers?
Principle #9: Does my theological conclusion represent integrity and humility?

Applying the Text—Hermeneutic Implications

Principle #10: What implications does this passage have for people today, including myself?

question. It is a systematic way of drawing out meaning from the text. While the process may vary as methods are compared in the discipline of biblical exegesis, most exegetes would concur on some of the basic principles involved. We offer five in this category.

Principle # 1: Admit personal interests and cultural biases.

Any student of the Hebrew Bible will come to the text with subjective interests and personal experience. One cannot "objectively" stand outside his or her own world—whether it be their faith experience, their vocation, or academic interests. In fact, these interests should be

celebrated because they likely are what prompt the reader to the text in the first place. However, once admitted, these interests must not control or steer the exegetical process. Approach the text from what *it* has to say rather than what you are seeking. Keep an open mind and beware of personal and cultural biases. "We must resist letting our own traditional interpretations become the authority so that we elevate them as idols, convincing ourselves that they are divine and unchangeable just because we can cite chapter and verse" (Childers, Foster, & Reese, 2000, p. 163).

The question "Does Scripture teach about managing?" presumes an artificial separation between an individual's self and the role of manager. Because Scripture does not promote a dualistic view of sacred and secular human nature, the Bible necessarily speaks to the behavior of managers. Moreover, if certain occupations are excluded from biblical instruction, how can a person in that role know how to be faithful to God at work? But actually, because the starting place is wrong, the answer will be wrong. We need to read the text asking first "What is the message this text speaks?" rather than stretching the textual canvas by first asking "What does this passage say about business?"

The goal is not to baptize business and economic concepts or create a legal identification of God-approved economic systems. Jewish and Christian ethics cannot fully endorse any particular economic system, management practice, or leadership style. Minimum wage, for instance, may be argued as promoting communal charity. But minimum wage may also elevate unemployment among the poor. As Pava (1997, pp. 79-80) states, "Judaism's ideals are aspirational but certainly not quixotic." Hebrew Scripture generally offers values for the Christian, not endorsements.

Principle # 2: Begin with a good translation of the text.

While some might have knowledge of the original language, most interpreters will rely on the comparison of several good translations. Preferable are the standard translations that rely on insights from a committee of translators, rather than one person's translation or paraphrase. The New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version are examples of two generally accepted translations. Still, subtleties of meaning are often lost when translating from one language to another. To more richly mine the nuances of a Hebrew or Aramaic text, biblical commentaries and lexicons may be useful (see Appendix B on page 38).

Principle #3: Examine the historical and cultural context.

Although the books of the Hebrew Bible are anonymous and may have undergone layers of transmission and editing to reach their final canonical form, they did not arise in a vacuum. Scripture has emerged out of diverse cultural, social, religious, and historical contexts. These contexts may vary within individual books and certainly vary across several centuries in ancient Israel as one reads the Torah narratives, or the wisdom literature of monarchical Israel, or the sermons of the prophets in post-exilic Israel. While the precise original setting is not always discernable, the conscientious interpreter will seek to understand the historical setting being described in the text or the situation out of which the text arose.

The expanse of time and culture stretching between ancient and modern includes enormous differences in political economy and commerce. When casual readers underestimate the incongruence, they both draw inappropriate parallels to contemporary life and miss a text's richer meaning. In Hebrew Scripture, one reads of accountants, inns, loans, wealth, crafts, and trade. And Israel indeed was situated by busy trade routes, Mediterranean shipping, and fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Yet these often are mistakenly taken as contemporary equivalents.

Over the Hebrew Bible's dozen centuries, slavery, nomadic life, subsistence agriculture, centralized estate holdings (*latifundia*), and indentured labor (by the eighth century) were the norm. Goods were generally bartered (sixth century), and most merchants were foreigners (I Kings 10:15). Money is absent from the biblical record until the fifth century (Ezra 2:69). A Jewish trading class is unknown until the second temple period in the time of Nehemiah (fifth century), when diaspora Jews had learned trade methods from Phoenician and Greek businessmen, primarily operating open bazaars (Ezekiel 7:12-13). Inns (Gen. 42:27, KJV) were locales where tents could be spread in Eastern hospitality (no furniture, food, or concierge), and

accountants (Isaiah 33:18) just counted. It is not until the time of the writing of the oral law—the Mishna (second century AD)—that an ordered, patterned, political economy based on trade among extended households had been surpassed by a larger market transaction system (cf. Gottwald, 1993; Glass, 2000; Lockyer, 1969; Neusner, 1999).

Much debated passages on usury ... provide a classic example of how a passage can be distorted easily ...

Much debated passages on usury (e.g., Exodus 22:25-27; Deut. 23:19-20) provide a classic example of how a passage can be distorted easily by uprooting it from its original setting in Scripture and planting it in today. No-interest loans between Israelites were prescribed in Exodus 22:25, perhaps because default on a loan might result in a farmer or herdsman losing his ability to make a living, or perhaps it was to support covenant relationship among each other. Lending with interest was allowed if the borrower was a foreigner (Deut. 23:20), perhaps because borrowers were foreign merchants who did not have their livelihood to lose by offering collateral, or perhaps to minimize association with Canaanites, or perhaps because of a different ethic for foreigners, or interest was common practice among foreigners (for an extended discussion of usury, see Elder, 1999). Burbank (1999, p. 18) offers yet another contextual explanation:

Where in [Old Testament] time, no one would borrow except in time of need, people and organizations now borrowed to make more money through investing in productive resources, through expansion, and for convenience in ways that were never anticipated in the ancient economies. As modern capital markets developed, lending for productive business purposes far outstripped lending for charitable purposes to help the poor or needy. ...

The point is that these contextual explanations significantly alter the interpretation of usury. Childers, Foster, and Reese (2000, pp. 162-163) summarize the point well:

... we cannot properly honor the text's authority unless we're honest about the distance separating us from the text. We are not the original audience of the biblical text, nor is it essentially a book of ordinances immediately portable into our setting. From this standpoint, the problem of "silence" touches all of Scripture, since no verse of it was originally composed directly to address the needs of a 21st century church. ... The distance of language, history, culture, and the fact that we are indirect recipients of literary texts originally aimed at someone else all create a gap between us and the text. We shouldn't resent the gap, since this is how God has chosen to speak to us through Scripture. Nevertheless it is often into that gap that we pour our biases and preconceptions, using the text in ways that depart from its spirit.

While these contextual insights do not always present a single explanation of a text, they do shed considerable light on passages addressing usury and interest. Without insights such as these, we are much more prone to distort the text's meaning. This is an especially critical point for Christians who view the Hebrew Scriptures much like the New Testament—as a single collective witness pointing to the Christ, rather than multifaceted in culture, time, setting, and purpose (Gillingham, 1998, pp. 27-33).

Principle #4: Give notice to the genre.

The Hebrew canon's three divisions (Torah, Prophets, and the Writings) and the English canon's equivalent (Law, History, Wisdom and Poetical, and Prophecy) alert the interpreter to a diversity of genres.[5] The interpreter must avoid "flattening out" Scripture, as if Scripture were of one literary type, since each genre is written for a different purpose and is interpreted by different rules (cf. Sandy & Giese, 1995). Among the many genres that have been identified within the Hebrew Bible, a few of the more prominent ones dealing with economic issues are narrative, law, prophecy, and wisdom.

Much of the Hebrew Bible is narrative in its form. The purpose of narrative is not simply to relate that something happened. Rather, these compelling stories are selected to show God at work in His creation and among His people. The narratives describe the great community stories of ancient Israel and their pilgrimage as the people of God. Often, we

learn of the lives of individuals, some admirable and others not, who play a part in the wider narrative of God's redemptive history and his covenant people. As stories, the biblical narratives are always selective, limited in focus, and incomplete. While the interpreter may incline to "read between the lines," to allegorize, or to extrapolate heady doctrine from a simple story, the genre of narrative in the Hebrew Bible is for the selective theological purpose of revealing God and his purposes. Care should be taken to avoid reducing the narrative to simple moralization or expanding a passage considerably beyond its meaning (Moberly, 1998).

Often Hebrew Bible narrative includes biographical material. Because biographies speak powerfully in business, many have been written about biblical characters (e.g., Baron, 1999; Hambley, 1987; McKenzie, 2000; Pava, 1997; Visotzky, 1998). Most biographers acknowledge their subject's humanity. Indeed, self-recognition of faults can be a key asset in leading. Certainly we can learn from men after God's own heart, but we need to avoid creating heroes out of biblical characters by canonizing their lives. Beadles (1998, p. 114) says it well:

Unfortunately, many times what we represent as biblical principle is really biblical illustration. Biblical illustration apart from biblical principle has no warrant or authority. If we find a narrative passage which illustrates that an Old Testament character planned, and then argue from that passage that the Bible teaches the management principle of planning, we have failed in our task. Apart from commentary in the narrative itself (or elsewhere in the Bible), we cannot be sure that the action itself is one that is to be recommended.

Thus, just because scarcity existed after the fall or David called for national vision or Moses delegated doesn't mean we can magnify the notion and do justice to Scripture. In many of these cases, all the author accomplishes is to correlate Scripture with trendy management techniques rather than let Scripture guide, direct, and speak.

As one reads the Hebrew Bible, one also encounters a substantial amount of legal material. In fact, many business-related texts are found in the Torah among the laws of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (see Appendix A on page 35). These laws are in the context of ancient Israel's covenant with God and their response to His deliverance. They are not intended as a list of rules and regulations by which the nation earns redemption, but a means of responding to the God who had delivered. The laws serve as a means of deepening a relationship with Him and facilitating a relationship with the covenant community.

Form critics have been especially insightful in helping the reader understand this genre by identifying "apodictic laws" (such as found in the Decalogue), which state paradigmatic and general absolutes, and "casuistic laws," which demonstrate how an apodictic law may be applied in conditional cases. The interpreter of legal material in the Hebrew Bible will be challenged especially by the latter category as one attempts to identify the "case" under consideration in the specific law and the basic principle which the case illustrates. Ancient "case law" may or may not find a parallel for the Christian today. Other scholars (e.g., Hays, 2001) argue that distinctions between moral, civil, and ceremonial laws are arbitrary and that for the Christian, Mosaic law—including the Decalogue—should be read with an eye for principles, much like narrative text:

The Old Testament legal material does not appear in isolation. Instead, the Mosaic Law is firmly embedded in Israel's theological history. It is an integral part of the story that runs from Genesis 12 through II Kings 25. The Law is not presented by itself, as some sort of disconnected but timeless universal code of behavior. Rather it is presented as part of the theological narrative that describes how God delivered Israel from Egypt and then established them in the Promised Land as His people (p. 24).

Both of these approaches honor the moral teaching of the law, their difference lying in how literally the text is applied. More will be said on the place of law for the Christian in the final hermeneutic step.

Another prominent genre within the Hebrew Bible is the prophetic literature which contains collections of oracles or sermons. While the contemporary reader may tend to think of a "prophet" as one who foretells the future, the prophets were most

often spokespersons for God in matters of a present context rather than a future one. The challenges for the modern interpreter when reading the prophets are several. The material is often poetical in its literary form with certain distinctive oracles in the form of a lawsuit, a lament, or a woe oracle. At times, the historical context is not easily discernable. The books are not always in chronological order, so the reader may feel as if he or she is reading some preacher's sermon files in no particular order. However, the challenge is well worth the effort as the prophets urge their hearers and modern readers to integrate their faith and their covenant identity with their lifestyle. These spokespersons for God warn against syncretism and the compartmentalization of worship and ethics. The business ethicist will find much on which to ruminate in the great preaching of the prophets (cf. Burch, 1991).

Another category or genre to mention in the study of the Hebrew Bible is the wisdom genre. Although this genre appears in other books, three books are considered primarily in the wisdom category: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, with the latter two in dialogue with Proverbs on the limits of wisdom. Although the Wisdom Literature may be generally defined as teaching which advocates seeing life from God's perspective, the genre is particularly subject to misunderstanding. A proverb, for example, is a pragmatic generalization on the structures of life representing tendencies, not a rule to which there is no exceptions. In dialogue with Proverbs, the wisdom of Job and Ecclesiastes insists that one can never understand or unravel all the mysteries of life by applying limited practical wisdom.

Within the wisdom genre itself, the reader is warned to understand the text within limits. Zigarelli (1999) notes that superficial interpretation and application of Proverbs to business is especially tempting due to the seemingly short nature of the genre: Complex human interactions "cannot be reduced to a sound bite, much less half a proverb! When one attempts to do so, though, the potential for misunderstanding and subsequent damage is enormous" (p. 22). Proverbs 26:7 states, "Like a lame man's legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool." When misused, proverbs can be powerless.

In sum, the interpreter wants to avoid the leveling out of genre.

Scripture is not "like a box of materials to rummage through" (Childers, et al., 2000, pp. 158-159):

... when we treat Scripture like a jumbled box of materials, each piece useful but none more important than any of the others, we blind ourselves to the fact that Scripture has a center of gravity and that individual passages have a literary context. Not much of Scripture fits the category of "rules."

Yet, that is how we treat the text when genres are disregarded.

Principle #5: Realize that exegesis is an ongoing process informed by the Spirit.

The interpreter must avoid presuming that a single, precise meaning from every text is possible. In some business disciplines, research is approached as if there are single, correct responses. But to approach a passage of Scripture as if it has a single meaning and that that meaning can be deciphered by the reader is a proud boast and one that denies the value of the community of faith, the movement of the Holy Spirit, and the potential for growth oneself. Approach the text humbly and with recognition of multiple voices, perspectives, and tools. "Reading the Bible should lead us to tremble and to wonder, not to set our jaws with audacious certainty" (Childers, et al., 2000, p. 164):

A proverb ... is ... not a rule to which there are no exceptions.

The person who truly seeks the Lord will find him, as Jesus promised (John 7:17). Only those willing to take a step of faith and invest themselves in his message would be able to understand him (Matthew 13:10-17). ... By contrast, consider the Pharisees whom Jesus criticized. They were experienced and mentally sharp. They had the Word and knew it well. They were masters of the exegetical methods of their day, the same methods used by Jesus and Paul and Matthew. But typically their attitudes were poor and the spirit of their community was sour, so their Bible reading went wrong (p. 167).

Scriptural discernment is not merely a scholarly pursuit or academic endeavor. Paul

reminded the Corinthian Christians (I Cor. 2:14) that the Holy Spirit helps them understand spiritual matters: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." It was the Spirit who guided the apostles into all truth (John 16:13) and the Spirit's gift of love that would "abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" so the Philippians could "discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10). As Jesus was taught by God (John 8:28b; 12:49; 14:10), so we should "follow his example ... never relying only upon our own wisdom or knowledge or ability, but always, to the best of our ability, also letting the Father teach us ..." (Cook, 2000, pp. 32-33). For most readers of the Word, this has more to do with maintaining a humble, joyful, and childlike attitude than a mystical experience.

Stage 2: Broadening the Focus—Theological Reflection

As one moves from the work of exegesis to doing theology, a broadening of focus occurs. The interpreter can now engage in the practice of theological reflection utilizing four basic principles, each stated as a question.

Principle #6: What does one learn of God from this text?

What theological insights emerge from the text that transcend the original context? What does one come to know about God or human reality that remains true for all times? Scripture is essentially theological in nature, a revelation of God. Again we return to the model of Scripture: Do we approach the text as a management textbook or do we let it approach and speak to us? Management practice and economic policy can be biblically informed only by respecting biblical perspectives that originate in the biblical text. Johnson (1988, p. 19) summarizes it thus:

While the Bible represents the primary source for building a Christian philosophy of management, it is not the exclusive source. ... The Bible makes no claim for itself as an encyclopedia. It does not contain all the knowledge a Christian manager will need. What it does contain is the dear expression of God's will in the most important areas of our lives: our relationship to God and our relationship to other people. Its truths and values act as the core of the Christian management philosophy.

Principle #7: How does my exegesis relate to other Scripture?

Theologians of the Hebrew Bible have long debated what the "center" of Old Testament theology might be (cf. Gillingham, 1998; Hasel, 1991). While some have championed a single theme, others have recognized several. Pava's (1997) extraction of themes, for example, is threefold: (1) God as the ultimate source of values; (2) the centrality of community; and (3) men and women (in community) can transform themselves. Nevertheless, one's exegesis is further tested when it is compared to the teachings of other passages. "The continuing lack of consensus as to the center of Old Testament theology offers ironic evidence for the diversity of theologies in that book and the error of attempting to construct a systematic theology directly from it" (Levenson, 1993, p. 56).

But agreement on overarching biblical themes need not impede interpretation. There is a significant difference between building a theology on a single verse and interpreting a verse as the theological summit for a book which is undergirded by a network of thematically unified passages. Too often business-Bible integration has done the former shoddy construction rather than carefully and accurately building the latter. Zigarelli (1999, pp. 24-25) offers an example from Proverbs, a book which would seemingly have self-contained pearls of wisdom:

"A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds," declares Proverbs 17:8. Without further investigation of the biblical teaching on bribery, one might conclude based on this verse that bribery is not only sanctioned by Scripture, but it is advanced as a means to success! But that conclusion opposes the plain teaching of many other Scriptures, both in Proverbs and in other books of the Bible. ... Since so many other passages speak of bribery as a transgression, Proverbs 17:8 should be interpreted consistently. ... Just as one piece of evidence does not indicate a trend, one

proverb does not constitute a scriptural principle.

Being in tension with core theology does not always indicate a misguided exegesis. Remember, much diversity resides in the Hebrew Bible.

Principle #8: How do my theological conclusions differ or accord with the traditional understanding of other believers?

"The message that the Hebrew Bible conveys to any community is necessarily in large measure a function of the tradition in which it is contextualized" (Levenson, 1993, p. 56). A simple threefold emphasis on orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthocardia (Clapper, 1997) emphasizes holistic integration. But one tradition may not fully illumine all three applications. The history and thought of various traditions may illumine portions of a text or a biblical concept which remain in the shadows of a single tradition's light, just like uninformed subjectivism leaves many corners of a room dark. Often other perspectives can be identified through commentary series, publishing houses, and periodical series that grow from the roots of a given Christian or Jewish tradition.

Principle #9: Does my theological conclusion represent integrity and humility?

Again, we return to the ever-present question of personal and cultural bias. Does my theological understanding of the text result from exegesis or eisegesis? Are my conclusions formed primarily from Scripture speaking or from my own cultural template and personal biases being imposed on theological reflection? Research suggests that the stronger the attitude regarding an object, the stronger the possibility that belief-bias will occur (Lynn, 1987). As Porter (2000, p. 71) states:

Biblical integration is incomplete without putting biblical concepts into action.

Because we see through a glass darkly (I Corinthians 13:12), and because the Bible is often an enigma, we must tread softly, acknowledging that differing interpretations of God's Word are possible and equally plausible, even when utilizing ***the whole counsel of God.***

Stage 3: Applying the Text—Hermeneutic Implications

Biblical integration is incomplete without putting biblical concepts into action (Lynn & Keyes, 1999). Thus, the final stage entails acting on the exegesis and theological reflection.

Principle #10: What implications does this passage have for people today, including myself?

While the work of "hermeneutics" begins with solid exegesis and includes competent theological reflection, the process is not complete until the interpreter applies the text to the contemporary reader. The hermeneutical process culminates as one seeks to discover what practical implications a text might have for one's own culture, community of faith, or individual life.

Guided by exegetical and theological considerations, the integrationist will ask how Scripture impacts his or her own life and business thought and practice in a practical way. What is different about my life, the Christian community, and society were we to be transformed by this passage?

Hauerwas and Willimon (1989, p. 21) sound a reminder that Christianity is active, requiring personal and communal action:

The theology of translation assumes that there is some kernel of real Christianity, some abstract essence that can be preserved even while changing some of the old Near Eastern labels. Yet such a view distorts the nature of Christianity. In Jesus we meet not a presentation of basic ideas about God, world, and humanity, but an invitation to join up, to become part of a movement, a people. By the very act of our modern theological attempts at translation, we have unconsciously distorted the gospel and transformed it into something it never claimed to be—ideas abstracted from Jesus, rather than Jesus with his people.

This final hermeneutic step raises a knotty issue for Christians and the Hebrew Bible—to what degree does "Old Testament" have authority with the follower of Christ (Kaiser, 1983; Wright, 1995; Holladay, 1995)? Perhaps even more acutely, how does Old Testament law apply to a disciple of Christ? Since debates have raged over the centuries on this issue (Avis, 1975) and much

ink has been spilled by integrationists on usury, the year of Jubilee, and the Sabbath, easy answers which address all of Christendom are not to be had. But for those who argue that the Mosaic covenant should be interpreted in light of Jesus' life and teachings ("principlism"), the second hermeneutic orientation (Figure 2, page 14) and the hermeneutic principles already discussed may provide a useful approach. Basically, law is interpreted much like narrative. Since this is such an important point, we conclude with a lengthy quote by Hays (2001, p. 26) whose treatment offers an excellent explanation of applying the law to Christians:

To give the Mosaic Law a greater authority over the Christian's moral behavior than that of the other parts of the Old Testament narratives is to create a canon within a canon. Likewise to say that the legal material should be interpreted in the same manner as the narrative material certainly does not diminish the divine imperative of Scripture. When the disciples picked grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees accused them of violating the Sabbath Law (Mark 2:23-28), for reaping on the Sabbath was prohibited in Exodus 34:21. However, Jesus justified this apparent Sabbath violation by citing a narrative passage in I Samuel 21:1-9. In essence, the Pharisees criticized Him with the details of the Law, but Jesus answered them with principles drawn from narrative.

Conclusions

Several of the principles above coax the integrationist to balance between dissecting Scripture into smaller and smaller bits and looking for an axis or theme around which Scripture rotates (Gillingham, 1998, p. 27). Interpreting Scripture can be enhanced by a humble combination of literary, historic, and theological approaches. Gillingham states (1998, p. 45):

... no one approach can presume it is superior to the others and that the integration of all the different ways of reading is the only reasonable way forward. The historical approach prevents us from universalizing biblical theology from the particular local situations; the literary approach prevents us from particularizing the theologies too much without our own settings, without due concern for the wider issues; and the theological approach allows us to give due weight to the way in which texts have had meaning in the life of different communities. ...

Discerning theology is much like searching for the holy grail of leadership or investments advice —one may search for a single answer or technique but instead discovers multiple approaches, perspectives, and perplexities. The process confirms the core of Hebrew Scripture teachings—that God is the source of truth and direction, not ourselves. Nevertheless, careful exegesis and application can help us more accurately understand biblical perspectives today within business contexts.

We conclude with the words of two authors—one modern scholar and one ancient. Moberly (1998, p. 24) reminds us:

The purpose of good commentary on, and exposition of, the text of Scripture should be to leave ourselves not with something other than that text, but rather with the text itself better understood and better able to be appropriated. For it is in and through the words of Scripture that we especially expect the Holy Spirit to speak to us and to direct and shape our lives.

Perhaps inspiring Moberly's thoughts, God issues a call to his children to hear and understand (Isaiah 55:1-3a):

Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and
without price.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live.

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ENDNOTES

[1]The "Hebrew Bible" or "Hebrew Scriptures" are the first 39 books of the Christian Bible, generally referred to by Christians as the "Old Testament." Because of their historical peculiarities, we will restrict our discussion to the Hebrew Scriptures even though some hermeneutic principles are germane to the New Testament and other texts as well.
[2]We are assuming the reader's comfort with faith-business integration generally. For all scholars trained in theory-driven empirical research, integration raises questions of epistemological legitimacy. Some additionally question whether the rushing waters of a "pervasive capitalist ethos" dim the notice of certain themes in Scripture (e.g., Gottwald, 1993).
[3]Although it was a pre-capitalist society, work and faith were integrated for Jewish priests who had to judge the value of livestock and houses (Leviticus 27:9-15; Ohrenstein & Gordon, 1992) and for rabbis who came on the scene in the post-exilic period, not as professional clergy but as blacksmiths, brewers, herders, and other tradesmen who also studied Torah and were respected for their teachings. Combining faith with work has a patristic and rabbinic history.
[4]Interestingly, trade unions had their own Protestant-rooted view against the corporate worldview (Fones-Wolf, 1989).
[5]Literary analysis envelops but is not limited to genre. It also includes consideration of elements such as the forming and editing of the text and motivations of ancient translators and editors (cf. Ryken, 1993).

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APPENDIX A
Selected Hebrew Scripture Passages Dealing with Business and Economic Related Topics

Assets, Preservation of:
Exodus 21:18-36
Leviticus 19:19, 23-25
Deuteronomy 20:19-20; 22:9-10; 25:4

Bribery:
Proverbs 15:27; 17:23; 21:14; 28:6

Cheating:
Leviticus 19:13, 35-36
Deuteronomy 25:13-16
Proverbs 11:1; 13:23; 20:10

Creation, nature, and natural resources:
Psalms 65:5-13; 145:15-16

Debt and credit (also see **Usury**)**:**
Proverbs 22:7, 26-27

Distribution of resources:
Numbers 26:52-56

Harvesting laws:
Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22
Deuteronomy 24:19-22
Ruth 2:1-9

Jubilee, Year of (also see **Sabbatical year**)**:**
Leviticus 25:8-34; 25:35-55

Justice (see also **Oppression**):
Leviticus 19:11-18
II Samuel 11:1-4, 6, 14-15; 12:1-7
I Chronicles 18:14
Psalms 9:7-12, 18; 89:8, 14; 94:1-15; 96:10-13
Proverbs 16:11-12; 28:3; 29:4, 14, 26
Isaiah 1:21-26; 5:8-13, 15-16, 22-24; 9:6-7; 32:1-3, 15-17; 42:1-7
Jeremiah 7:1-15; 22:13-19; 33:14-15
Lamentations 3:34-36
Ezekiel 18:5-9
Amos 5:21-24
Micah 3:1-4, 9-12; 4:1-4; 6:6-8
Zechariah 8:14-17
- *God:* Exodus 23:1-3
Deuteronomy 10:17-19; 32:4
Job 34:18-19
- *Law:* Exodus 23:6-8
Deuteronomy 1:16-17; 16:18-20
Psalms 94:20-23
Proverbs 28:21
Isaiah 10:1-4
Amos 5:10-15
- *Worship:* Isaiah 1:10-17; 58:1-10

Money:
Exodus 21:33-34; 22:16-17
Leviticus 27
Deuteronomy 14:24-26
- *Excessive:* Deuteronomy 17:16-17
- *First fruits:* Exodus 22:19; 24:26
Leviticus 22:30; 23:9-28; 34:19
Deuteronomy 12:17-18; 15:19-22

Obedience and abundance (see also **Justice**)**:**

Exodus 26:12-13
Leviticus 26:3-5, 14-16
I Chronicles 1:11-12
Job 31:16-25
Psalms 12:1-4; 37:22-26; 112: 1-5, 9
Proverbs 8:17-21; 10:22; 11:25-26; 15:6; 22:4; 28:27; 31:10, 13-25
Ecclesiastes 5:19

Oppression (see also **Justice**):
Deuteronomy 23:16-17
Job 22:5-9; 24:1-12, 19-22
Psalms 72:1-4, 12-14; 103:6-7; 144:11-15
Isaiah 32:6-8
Jeremiah 21:11-12; 22:1-5; 33:14-16
Amos 4:1-3
Micah 2:1-10
Zephaniah 3:1
Zechariah 7:8-14
- *Exile in Egypt:* Exodus 3:7-10; 6:2-9
- *God sees suffering:* Exodus 3:7
Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Ecclesiastes 4:1
- *Punishment of oppressors:* Genesis 15:12-14

Ownership, possessions, and wealth:
- *Complacency:* Deuteronomy 6:4-12; 8:1-20; 32:15
Proverbs 30:8-9
Ezekiel 7:20
Hosea 10:1-2; 13:4-8
Haggai 1:1-11
- *Complaint:* Numbers 11:4-20; 21:4-9
- *Dangers:* Proverbs 11:28; 13:8; 18:10-11; 28:11
Ecclesiastes 5:10-12
- *Death:* Psalms 49:5-14, 16-20
- *Dishonesty:* Proverbs 20:17; 21:6; 22:16
Isaiah 3:1, 13-25; 10:13-19
Jeremiah 5:7-9, 26-29
Ezekiel 16:35-50; 22:23-31
Hosea 12:7-9
Amos 8:4-8
Micah 6:9-15
Habakkuk 2:5-12
- *God's:* Exodus 19:5
Deuteronomy 10:14
I Chronicles 29:10-14
Psalms 24:1; 50:10-12; 82:8
Ecclesiastes 3:13
- *Unjust acquisition:* I Kings 21:1-19
- *Value:* Psalms 37:16; 119:36-37
Proverbs 11:7; 15:16-17; 16:16, 19; 19:1; 22:1; 23:4-8; 28:6

Poverty and the poor:
I Samuel 2:2-8
Job 5:11-16
Psalms 10:2-18; 12:5; 35:10; 68:5-6; 69:30-33; 109:30-31; 113:5-9; 140:12; 146: 1-10
Proverbs 15:25; 17:5; 28:8
Isaiah 11:1-4; 26:5-6; 29:17-21; 61:1
Amos 2:6-8
- *Mistreatment:* Exodus 22:21-24; 23:9, 12
Leviticus 19:32-34
Deuteronomy 27:19
Psalms 41:1-2; 72:1-4, 12-14; 82:1-5

Proverbs 14:31; 21:13; 22:9, 21-23; 23:10-11; 29:7; 31:8-9

Provisions by God:
Isaiah 55:1-3
- *Possessions* (see **Ownership, possessions, and wealth**)

Rest/Leisure:
Exodus 20:8-11
Numbers 28:18, 25, 26
Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; 3:11-13; 5:18-19

Sabbatical year (see also **Jubilee**):
Exodus 23:10-11
II Chronicles 36:17-21
Nehemiah 10:28-31
Jeremiah 34:8-17
- *Debts:* Leviticus 15:1-11
- *Land:* Leviticus 25:1-7
- *Slaves:* Leviticus 15:12-15

Safety and injury:
Leviticus 24:19

Salvation:
- *The coming kingdom:* Micah 4:1-4

Serving others out of joy and gratitude:
Deuteronomy 24:17-18

Slander:
Leviticus 19:16a

Tithing:
Genesis 28:20-22
Leviticus 27:32
Deuteronomy 14:22-29; 26:12-13

Usury:
Exodus 22:25-27
Deuteronomy 23:19-20
Nehemiah 5:1-12
Psalms 15:1-5
Ezekiel 18:5-18

Wages:
Leviticus 19:13
Deuteronomy 24:14-15

Wealth (see **Ownership, possessions, and wealth**):
- *Ill-gotten:* Proverbs 10:2; 13:8; 21:6; 22:1; 28:8
- *Investment:* Proverbs 11:24-25; 13:11; 21:5; 23:6-7;
- *Wisdom:* I Kings 3:9-13
Proverbs 10:4; 14:24; 24:30-34

Work:
- *as a Calling:* Exodus 3-4; 31:1-6; 35:30-35
Psalms 78:70-71
Amos 7:14
- *as Creation ordinance:* Genesis 1:26
- *as Curse:* Genesis 3:17-19
Ecclesiastes 2:11, 18, 22-23
- *Divine and human cooperation:* Nehemiah 6:9, 16
Psalms 90:16-17
- *of God:* Genesis 2:2
Psalms 19:1; 121
- *Laziness:* Proverbs 6:6-11; 11:16; 13:4; 14:23; 20:13; 23:21; 24:30-34; 28:19
- *No hierarchy of occupations:* I Samuel 11:5
Psalms 78:70-72
- *Useless work:* Eccl. 4:4-8, 13-14
- *Work ethic:* Exodus 20:9
Deuteronomy 5:13
Proverbs 31:10, 13-25

Note: Some headings and passages are adapted from Sider (1997), Zigarelli (1999), and Ryken (1987). See them for additional passages and commentary.

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