

The Figurative Expression Principle

Lesson 5

Intro: Figurative Expressions are all through the Bible. The Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 10:16 *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”* Were the disciples to interpret that literally or figuratively? Of course the answer is _____. Look at how vivid and powerful the figurative expressions in this passage are. Correct interpretation of the Bible will depend on the Bible student’s ability to distinguish between literal and figurative expressions.

Goals:

1. To identify figurative expressions in any given text of Scripture.
2. To correctly interpret figurative expressions.

Important Definitions:

Figurative- Representing something else; representing by resemblance; not literal or direct.

Figurative expression- One in which the words are used in a sense different from that in which they are ordinarily used, abounding with figures of speech; as a description highly figurative. Figurative expressions refer to words or phrases that are used with a meaning other than their common, literal use.

1. Identifying Figurative Expressions:

A. Definition

1. A figurative expression is a word, phrase, or clause that is used to convey meaning other than that which is literal, or natural, to it. (Robert Hackman’s *How to Interpret the Bible*) They are used to express an idea more forcefully. Figurative expressions usually grab our attention quicker than normal speech would. They create vivid images in the minds of those addressed.

2. A literal interpretation, taking words at face value, is always best according to the normal usage of words. Yet, literal interpretation accepts that figurative language may be used.

3. How does one recognize a figurative expression? A word, phrase, or clause should be regarded as a figurative expression when it’s literal; meaning is unsuitable or absurd in its context or is in conflict with the general teaching of the Bible. (Robert Hackman)

4. For example: Look up Matthew 7:15. Jesus describes false prophets to be “_____”. It would be absurd to assume that false prophets are real wolves.

B. Design- Why does the Bible use figurative expressions/ would it not be easier if the language was more straightforward and literal?

1. For Emphasis- Jesus said in Luke 13:32 “_____”. That is more forceful than saying “Go ye, and tell the king.”

2. For Concealment- Presenting the truth in figurative language hid it from the unsaved. Matthew 13:10,11 *“And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the _____, but to them it is not given.”*

3. For Motivation- It can be used to move one to action. *“Behold I stand _____”* gives an emotional impact far beyond the impact of simply saying “I am waiting for you to respond.” In the east where dining together is the seal of friendship, great is the emotional impact of being shut out awaiting the invitation to come in.

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4. For Memory- Phrases like

Matthew 5:13 “ _____ ”

Matthew 5:14 “ _____ ” are easy to remember.

5. For Illustration- John 6:35- When Christ said “ _____ ”, He was illustrating a basic truth concerning His relationship with those who belong to Him: He satisfies and nourishes.

6. For Clarification- The familiar can be used to explain the unfamiliar. It can be helpful when the eternal truths of God’s Word can be made simple enough for finite man to understand.

2. Interpreting Figurative Expressions:

A. Understanding Figurative Speech

1. Simile- This is an expressed comparison. Rev. 1:14 “*His head and his hairs were white like wool.*”

2. Metaphor- This is an implied comparison. Matt. 5:13- “*Ye are the salt of the earth.*”

3. Symbol- Symbols are always things, not people, which are representative of the subject. Luke 22:20- “*This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*” Our Lord was referring to an actual cup and its contents as well as to what the cup represented, namely, His blood that ratified the New Covenant and that was shed for His people.

Closing: My prayer is that this class has helped us understand a little more about figurative expressions. The Bible uses them and it is important for us in our study to determine when something is figurative and when something is not. I hope that today’s lesson will help you with that determination moving forward.

Homework: During your own personal Bible reading this week. Write down any figurative expressions that you come across.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Read in your Rightly Divided Book: Pgs. 65-78