

The Parabolic Principle

Lesson 7

Intro: A parable is a story that illustrates a truth. An allegory is an extended metaphor. Allegories do not tell stories like parables. Allegories are in words what hieroglyphics are in painting. The old saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” perfectly defines the power of parables and allegories. They give us insight into truths that would be hard to understand otherwise.

Goals:

1. To understand what parables and allegories are?
2. To learn how to correctly interpret parables and allegories.

Important Definitions:

1. Parable: A story told to illustrate a truth (Num. 23:7, Ez. 17:2). Parable means to lay something alongside another, “referring to a comparison or a similitude, in which one thing is compared with another, especially spiritual things with natural, by which means those spiritual things are better understood, and make a deeper impression on an attentive mind.”

Allegory: A figurative sentence or discourse, in which the principal subject is described by another subject resembling it in its properties and circumstances. The principal subject is thus kept out of view, and we are left to collect the intentions of the writer or speaker, by the resemblance of the secondary to the primary subject. *allegory* is in words that hieroglyphics are in painting. We have a fine example of an *allegory* in the eightieth Psalm, in which God's chosen people are represented by a vineyard. The distinction in scripture between a parable and an *allegory* is said to be that a parable is a supposed history, and an *allegory* a figurative description of real facts. An *allegory* is called a continued metaphor.

1. Definition:

A. Parable – a statement or brief story, taken from daily life, which portrays some spiritual truth like the story of the Prodigal Son.

1. A short, simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral lesson; a figure of speech in which truth is illustrated by a comparison or example drawn from everyday experiences.

2. According to Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, a parable is often no more than an extended metaphor or simile, using figurative language in the form of a story to illustrate a particular truth. The Greek word for parable literally means “a laying by the side of” or “a casting alongside,” thus “a comparison or likeness.” In a parable something is placed alongside something else, in order that one may throw light on the other. A familiar custom or incident is used to illustrate some truth less familiar.

B. Allegory – an extended metaphor, by which some spiritual truth is illustrated. Unlike a parable, an allegory does not tell a story – The Vine and the Branches.

1. Perhaps the most memorable of Paul’s allegories, is found in Gal. 4:21-31: Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac. One of the (Ishmael) was born to the bondwoman Hagar; the other (Isaac) was born to a free woman, Sarah. Hagar and Ishmael are symbolic of the Old Covenant: the law from Mount Sinai that brings all flesh into bondage. Sarah and Isaac are symbolic of the New Covenant: the gospel of grace from Mount Calvary that gives spiritual freedom. When Paul concluded by saying, “*So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free*” he was urging his readers to reject the bondage of legalism- salvation by keeping the law and to live by faith in Christ. (Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

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2. In the New Testament, Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43) is a good example of an allegory. The apostle Paul also used allegories when writing. In Ephesians 6:11-17 he urges his readers to "put on the whole armour of God" and then gives the symbolic spiritual designation for each article worn by the Christian soldier. (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

2. Interpretation:

A. Application of this principle – Robert Hackaman *How to Interpret the Bible*: when interpreting parables and allegories, seek answers to the following questions:

1. To whom and about what had the speaker been talking?
2. What prompted the giving of the parable or allegory?
3. To whom was the parable or allegory addressed?
4. What are the natural, true-to-life features of the parable or allegory?
5. What data do parallel passages, elsewhere in the Bible, add to your understanding of the parable or allegory?
6. Did the speaker give an explanation of any feature of the parable or allegory?
7. What central truth or duty does the parable or allegory teach?
8. How did the teaching of the parable or allegory apply to the one(s) to whom it was given?
9. What application of this teaching can be made to yourself or to others?
10. IN addition to what the parable or allegory teaches, does it illustrate any biblical truth other than what the speaker intended to convey?
11. If the parable or allegory was given by Jesus, what does it teach about Him?

B. Example of this Principle – The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Using the above 11 questions lets work through the passage together.

1. (25-28) This parable arose out of a conversation that Jesus had with a certain _____ in Jewish law about reception of eternal life.
2. Jesus told the parable in response to the lawyers question about the identity of his _____. (29)
3. The parable was addressed to the _____.
4. Going from Jerusalem to Jericho, a man fell among thieves, who beat him, stripped him, and left him for dead. A Jewish priest and a Levite, fearing ritual contamination, passed by the victim without assisting him. But a _____ merchant, who by Jewish values was a nobody, personally ministered to the man and paid others to care for him. (30-34)
5. This is the only record of this parable.
6. Jesus did not give an explanation of the parable. He does ask the lawyer who was _____ to the victim. (36)
7. By this parable the Lord Jesus teaches that one's neighbor is any person who has some need to which he can minister, even at _____.
8. This parable answered the man's question (29). That he understood this answer is shown in verses 36-37.
9. Within the range of our opportunities and resources, we who are saved have the duty of ministering to all who have need. This is an expression of Christian love. (1 John 3:16-18, Gal. 6:10, 1 Tim. 6:17-18)
10. This parable clearly illustrates salvation. The victim portrays the unsaved person, spiritually dead and in debt for his sins. The priest and Levite represent the Law of Moses or any system of human works, which is powerless to save. Rejected by the Jews, the Samaritan depicts the Lord Jesus, who came to us and paid the price of our redemption.

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11. The parable illustrates the Lord Jesus' infinite love and grace in His saving us from our sins when we were helpless to help ourselves.

Romans 5:6 *"For when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."*

Homework: Reach pg. 90-97 in your Rightly Divided books.

Closing: Today's lesson is another tool for your tool box. My prayer is that it will be a help to you as you dig deeper and deeper into the Word of God during your personal study. May God bless you as you seek to know Him more.