

Hermeneutics

Class #4

Practice: Stage 2, Making Observations from the Text

*“Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy Law”
(Psalm 119:18)*

I. The Nature of Observation

A. Definition of Observation

- Observation has been called “the art of awareness,” the “act of taking notice.” So, the key question answered in this stage is the question, “What does the text say?” This stage essentially uncovers the “raw data.”

B. Purpose of Observation

- The purpose of observation is to get the interpreter saturated with the particulars of any specific passage. The more you make observations from the text, the better you will understand what the author is saying.
- The observations you make will provide the basic building blocks for you to use as you construct the meaning of a passage. It is important for us to understand that at this stage you are not trying to answer questions or resolve possibilities. You are simply trying to uncover the data which exists.¹

“The reason why the Christians in this day are at such a loss as to some things is that they are contented with what comes from man's mouth, without searching and kneeling before God to know of Him the truth of things.”

- *John Bunyan*



¹ Brad Klassen, *BI 505 Hermeneutics Class Notes* (Sun Valley CA: The Masters Seminary, 2017), 76.

C. Prerequisites of Observation

1. A Will to Observe

- This stage cannot really be successful unless you have a hunger to learn. Search the scripture anticipating rich rewards.

2. A Commitment to Precision

- We must not make the mistake of thinking we already know all that the text has to offer.
- Observation has been conducted well when the interpreter is able to close their eyes and still see the text and all of its details. The next prerequisite is to be persistent.

3. A Pledge to Persistence

- This is essential to the observation stage. You must have an attitude of discipline and patience.

NOTE: *Do not be too quick to begin utilizing commentaries. These are wonderful resources (from the proper authors). However, too many interpreters of the Word will go directly to a commentary, this can diminish the benefit to the interpreter. There is no substitute for direct personal discovery from the Word of God. The use of commentaries will come later in the interpretation stage.*

II. The Making of Observations

- There are several different steps which help the interpreter gather observations on the text.

“The more time you spend in observation, the less time you’ll have to spend in interpretation.”

A. Step #1 – Read the Text Prayerfully

- Avoid the temptation to jump right into a text without prayer. To minimize the importance being in prayer is dangerous.

B. Step #2 – Read the Text Repeatedly

- The reading now moves from general to specific. From paragraphs and chapters to the words and grammar of the text. To be a good observer requires the student to be a good reader.

C. Step #3 – Read Understanding the Parts of Speech

- If you are going to rightly divide the Word of God, you need to have at least a working knowledge of the basics of grammar.

Defining the Parts of Speech:

A. **Nouns** = A noun is the name of a person place or thing.
There are two kinds.

- ❖ Proper, naming a particular object (Joe, Shoe).
- ❖ Common, naming something in general or abstract (gift, love).

B. **Pronouns** = A pronoun is used as a substitute for the noun. They improve the aesthetics of sentences by allowing the speaker/writer to avoid repetition of the same nouns. Here are the categories of pronouns.

- ❖ Demonstrative
- ❖ Indefinite
- ❖ Intensive
- ❖ Interrogative
- ❖ Personal
- ❖ Possessive
- ❖ Reciprocal
- ❖ Reflexive
- ❖ Relative

NOTE: *It is an important step to correctly identify what noun a pronoun is referring. Most of the time this will be clear enough from the process of observation. When it is not, and there are several valid options, you just need to make a note to yourself to study this during the next stage of interpretation.*

C. **Adjectives** = A word which is used to describe, limit, or qualify a noun or pronoun.

D. **Verbs** = A word used to tell or declare something about some person, place, or thing. English verbs contain voice to indicate how the subject of the sentence is related to the action of the verb. Voice can be either,

- ❖ Active – The subject of the verb acted.
- ❖ Passive – The subject of the verb was acted upon.

E. **Adverbs** = A word used to modify, describe limit, or qualify the action of a verb or sometimes even adjectives or other adverbs themselves.²

F. **Conjunctions** = A word used to join together two or more words, phrases or clauses.

D. Step #4 – Read thoughtfully, asking questions.

➤ At this stage, we are still gathering the raw data.

➤ Six vital questions we need to ask of the text.

1. **WHO?** = Identify individuals or groups in the text.
2. **WHAT?** = What is happening? What is being described?
3. **WHERE?** = The geographical setting of the passage.
4. **WHEN?** = This is to identify the timing of the events or statements made in the passage.
5. **WHY?** = This question seeks to identify cause-and-effect relationships.
6. **HOW?** = This question seeks to identify the means by which something is accomplished.

No detail in the biblical text is trivial. God doesn't waste jots or tittles.

E. Step #5 – Read purposefully, summarize the results.

➤ Write things down. This will force you to think clearly and concisely. Summarize your findings in two lists:

1. **Key Observations:**

- ❖ Observations that can be clearly seen in the text.
- ❖ A good observation is not just a restatement of the obvious.
- ❖ Included in this list of key observations should be a list of important routine as well as non-routine terms.

² Brad Klassen, *BI 505 Hermeneutics Class Notes* (Sun Valley CA: The Masters Seminary, 2017), 91.

Routine Terms = Terms with no special emphasis attached. They simply complete the meaning of the sentence.

Non-Routine Terms = Terms that have unusual significance or outstanding importance. These non-routine terms fall into a few different categories.

- Terms that are difficult to understand.
- Terms that convey profound concepts.
- Terms which reoccur throughout the context of the book.
- Terms which are the main verbs of the sentence.

Take a moment and pick out some non-routine terms in these passages:

Matthew 8:12

¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

1 John 2:2

² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

Romans 3:25

²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.

Romans 8:29-30

⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Study these non-routine terms in your lexical study. Learn what they mean and how they are used. The second list you should make is a list of key questions.

2. Key Questions:

- ❖ Observation raises important questions which cannot be easily explained.
Don't see these as dilemmas, but invitations for the interpreter.

F. Final Suggestions:

- Writing down your thoughts helps greatly in clarifying your observations.
- Do not add something to the text that is not there.
- Physically mark up the text, underline, circle, boxes etc.
- Keep observation, interpretation and application distinct.
 - Observation = Observes the facts.
 - Interpretation = Interprets the facts.
 - Application = Applies the facts.

Stage #1 – Overview Understanding the Context of the Text	
Step #1	Study the book's historical context (outside of Bible)
Step #2	Study the book's canonical context (whole Bible)
Step #3	Study the book's central purpose (context of the book)
Step #4	Study the book's major sections
Step #5	Study the text's immediate context

Stage #2 – Overview Making Observations From the Text	
Step #1	Read the text prayerfully
Step #2	Read the text repeatedly
Step #3	Read understanding the parts of speech
Step #4	Read thoughtfully, asking questions
Step #5	Read purposefully, summarizing results