

Christianity Clarified Volume 32

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[0 : 00] What is Christianity really all about? Here, in an ongoing effort to try and dispel some of the confusion, is Marv Wiseman with another session of Christianity Clarified.

Why God Stoops to Man The observation was made in numerous past segments of Christianity Clarified that the Bible is both a divine and a human document.

It derives its authority, its infallibility and inerrancy from God Himself. At the same time, it derives its ability to relate to humans from the fact that it contains elements unmistakably human.

Its languages, expressions, creativity, individuality, and nuances of style are all intensely human. This makes the Bible, and only the Bible, representative of the best of both worlds.

The world that is from above being of God, and the world that is from below being of man. Likewise, it was noted, the same dual origin is true of Jesus Christ, and only Jesus Christ.

[1 : 14] He, too, represents God above and man below, and the best of both worlds. Very God, a very God in His deity, and the only one to live among humans untainted by human sin.

Now, consider this. How could God, if strictly limited to expressing Himself solely from His own person and character, ever hope to communicate Himself to man?

He could not do so unless the recipient of that communication is on the same level and wavelength as Himself. But the recipient, which is mankind, clearly is not.

In fact, the separation between God the Creator and man the creation is wider than we can imagine. So, if communication is going to occur at all, it must involve accommodation of some sort.

God must find a way to accommodate man's deficiency in order to establish a connection. God must somehow condescend, stoop, if you will, to a human level in order to make Himself knowable to mankind, His lesser creatures.

[2 : 37] This is precisely what He has done, both in His Son, who is the Word of God, the Logos in the flesh, as described in John 1, and in the Word of God, as inscripturated in the Bible.

Both are wonderful acts of gracious condescension on the part of God, all to accommodate man, enabling him to receive the revelation of God in an intelligible manner.

Currently, on Christianity Clarified, we are considering the latter, the Word of God written. And our present goal is to grasp the meaning of what is written through the use of hermeneutics, the art and science of interpreting the Bible.

And of late, we have focused on the use of figurative language as opposed to the literal language most often employed in the Scriptures. Figurative language is the purview of man only and not at all of God.

Now, what do we mean by that? Well, it's important and it's upcoming. The Language of Deity Have you ever wondered how communication is carried on in the Trinity?

[3 : 58] Probably not. Then, on the other hand, that there should be communication between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ought to be a given. And while we concede such a communication must of necessity be as perfect as the principles engaging it, what and how would it be?

Lest we think they communicate with Hebrew or Greek, as in the Bible, then let's be reminded that the Godhead's existence predates all human languages.

The need for language in order to communicate appears to be a creaturely need exclusively, not a need of deity. With the Trinity, there exists a complete knowledge and understanding between the three, so that language and intercommunication are unnecessary.

Each so fully knows everything that an exchange between them is not needed. This negates even the possibility of there being a misunderstanding among the three persons of the Trinity.

Such misunderstanding occurs frequently among us humans. We all know the confusion that can arise from a simple misunderstanding in our speaking to one another.

[5 : 14] But the Father, Son, and Spirit need never concern themselves about that. Such is certainly not the case with us humans. We may go to great lengths to speak plainly so as to avoid misunderstandings and they still occur.

This is especially true when figurative language, such as we have been studying, is concerned. Because if we mistakenly try to make literal language figurative or figurative language literal, great and many will be the misunderstandings thereof.

And this is exactly why we are taking deliberate steps now to distinguish between the two, particularly the figurative. And this is because, as we have said, the use of literal language in the Bible, which is the majority thereof, is singular.

By singular, we mean that literal language means precisely what it says, face value. It means what it seems to mean. And this makes it more easily understood.

And this usage is far and away the most frequently engaged in the Bible. The figurative, however, is not singular. It is multifaceted.

[6 : 35] There are hundreds of categorized usages of figurative language in the Bible. And when we say hundreds, we are not speaking figuratively as in hyperbole, but we are speaking literally.

Hyperbole. Ah, yes, hyperbole. Which means to throw out or to cast over. Hyperbole is a figurative tool of language and full of color and emphasis not communicated with the literal.

But it is also, then, open to confusion and misunderstanding. Knowing and understanding hyperbole beautifully opens new windows of perception and understanding for you.

I can't wait to get into this. Hyperbole. Yes. Upcoming. The figure of hyperbole part one.

The literary figure of speech we plan to consider now is called hyperbole, spelled H-Y-P-E-R-B-O-L-E. It means to cast or to throw the reality of a thing over or above what it really is.

[7 : 45] Hyperbole is a literary tool used all throughout scripture and it is not only an intended exaggeration but it is understood to be so.

Technically, the statement of hyperbole is not true literally but no one expects it to be and no one accuses the one who uses hyperbole of lying but accepts the hyperbolic statement as poetic license.

It is a colorful and emphatic way of stating something. But now a problem arises at least in the minds of some who do not think the Bible should contain any statements that are not literally true.

Their thinking is that the Bible being the Word of God should not contain any statements that are not literally true but it does. It contains many statements that are not literally true and it does so because the biblical writers inspired of God implement the full spectrum of literary expression.

We already treated simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecchi, and others merely to name a few of those more frequently found throughout Scripture as figures of speech.

[8 : 55] Hyperbole is simply one more of the same. It is the understood, intentional exaggeration of the literal truth of the matter and it is done for emphasis and effect as a literary tool.

When the Israelites were preparing to enter the promised land, Moses reminded them of the obstacles they would face and how God had promised to overcome them. Moses referred to the people that then dwelt in the land in Deuteronomy 9 saying, These nations are greater and mightier than thyself with cities great and fenced up to heaven.

What? Cities that have fences reaching up to heaven? Really? Well, no, not really, not literally.

Well, then, was Moses lying because he said they reached up to heaven and they didn't? Some would say, See, you can't believe what the Bible says.

Well, such a conclusion is completely unaware that the Bible is as human a book as it is a divine book. And while the Almighty has no need to speak figuratively, man does, and often.

[10 : 12] And using non-literal language like hyperbole is simply a tool for emphasizing, intentionally exaggerating, an item for effect. We use the figurative when we deem the literal to be inadequate.

Would the critic have preferred one to say, Yes, sir, we measured those walls and they were 18 feet 6 and 1 half inches tall, literally? or to simply say, The walls went up to heaven.

Which do you think better gets the point across? We will consider a few other instances of which there are many in the Bible. You will recognize and benefit from each usage of hyperbolic language.

The figure of hyperbole part 2. We have earlier stated that mankind the world over uses figures of speech in everyday conversation. But what we didn't tell you is that those of eastern or mid-eastern origins make even greater use of it, and the Bible is most emphatically a mid-eastern book.

This is the very cradle of civilization, and those who live there predate us all. Scholars have devoted years to the study of anthropology and are quick to acknowledge the peculiar mindsets, traditions, and ways of the Mediterranean or mid-eastern people.

[11 : 39] In their literary collections, there are profuse usages of figures of speech, and hyperbole is one of the most frequently employed. Intentional exaggeration is commonplace, and understood by the writer that literality was never the intent.

The intent was to garner attention, add color, emphasis, forcefulness, that led to a communicated understanding. In Joshua chapter 2, Rahab, who hid the spies, told them of the effect the Israelites had on her countrymen when they heard they were coming, and she said, As soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt.

Really? Melted hearts? Literally? Well, of course not. And only a fool for a critic would accuse Rahab of lying. The figurative expression, Our hearts did melt, meant in actuality, we were terrified.

She might also have said the same thing we might say, We were scared to death. One can readily see in our own use of hyperbole that we did not die as a result of being scared, which would be the literal truth, yet saying it figuratively conveys the level of our fear better than simply saying we were fearful.

We said we were scared to death. Yet, here we are, still among the living. Luke chapter 2 tells us that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

[13 : 11] Really? All the world? Literally? Of course not. It certainly didn't include India, nor Africa, nor North or South America, all of which represent substantial pieces of real estate on this globe.

Were they not part of the world? Yes. Well, were they taxed also? Of course not. The statement is a clear hyperbole that simply meant all the land under the rule and jurisdiction of Rome, that was that which was taxed.

Perhaps the ego of Caesar Augustus was pumped somewhat, caused him to say, I'm going to tax the whole world. But he did so only figuratively, certainly not literally.

And Dr. Luke, who penned this gospel, knew full well he was making an intentional exaggeration, not intended for consumption in a literal sense. And to charge the Bible with making untrue or erroneous statements because it departs from the literal, is simply to deny the humanness of the book we have always insisted upon.

And we repeat, the Bible writers, under divine inspiration, use the full spate of literary tools to convey meaning. And we're glad it does.

[14 : 27] Hyperbole is a figurative speech among them. The Figure of Hyperbole, Part 3 Apart from the fact the Bible is inspired by God himself, there is another aspect to it that makes it wonderfully engaging.

It is its frequent usage of virtually every literary tool known to humanity. Its variety is simply stunning, and we have considered but a handful of its literary devices it actually employs.

We informed you on an earlier segment of Christianity Clarified about the massive work of the figurative language in the Bible that was contributed by Dr. E.W. Bollinger.

It exceeds 1,100 pages, including its extensive index. You will find biblical figures of speech explained and illustrated that very few preachers have even heard of.

Yet, there they are, gloriously expressing their truths and shedding their light upon a text, the meaning of which would be lost to most of us were it not for the prodigious efforts of men like Dr.

[15 : 39] Bollinger. The title of that book again, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible. Drawing upon it, along with other insightful scholars and authors, we are laboring to bring you only a small number of the figures of speech most commonly employed in the Bible.

And if we can merely enable you to recognize figures of speech when and where they occur, your own study of the Bible will be greatly enhanced. So, how about another hyperbole?

In 1 Samuel chapter 18, after David the shepherd boy slew Goliath the giant, what song was it the women of the village sang when the Israeli troops returned home as victors?

They sang, Saul has slain thousands and David his tens of thousands. No doubt King Saul had earlier slain a number of Philistines in earlier battles, but thousands?

No, not really. At least not literally. But then David, David his tens of thousands? And that was even more of a stretch, a huge exaggeration, because how many did David kill?

[16 : 54] Not tens of thousands, not even hundreds, but one. One? Yes, just one. one. But what a one it was.

It was Goliath the giant. Perhaps under the circumstances, these adoring women were eager to sing David's praises, and they used hyperbole to do it.

The emphasis their song gave to the event rang loud and clear in the minds and hearts of all, including that of Saul, who had jealousy hounding him because of it all.

All along, throughout our multi-volumed efforts of Christianity Clarified, we have sought to emphasize that the Bible is both a divinely inspired document, while it is equally very humanly endowed as well.

This identifies its authority as being God's, while it describes its content as addressed to humans. Nothing like it in the world.

- [17 : 59] And we shall forever be grateful for it. Another hyperbole is coming your way. Next up. The Figure of Hyperbole, Part 4 A beautiful example of hyperbole is utilized by none other than God himself when talking with Abraham in Genesis 15.

Using the kind of figurative language Abraham knew and used himself in daily discourse, God told him, I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.

And again, in chapter 15, God invited Abraham to step outside his tent and cast his eyes heavenward. Count the stars, Abraham. Can you do it?

Of course, Abraham couldn't do it. They are innumerable, aren't they, Abraham? Well, your descendants will be just like that. So many, they can't be counted.

And what about grains of sand added to the stars for a double hyperbole, if there is such a thing? Consider Genesis 22, when God again speaks to Abraham, following his willingness to offer his son Isaac.

- [19 : 22] God reassures Abraham, saying, I will greatly multiply your seed or descendants as the stars of the heavens and as the sand on the seashore.

God is essentially telling him, Abraham, if you want to know how many descendants you will have coming after you, go outside, look heavenward to the stars and start counting, or go to the seashore, scoop up a bucket, just one bucket of sand and start counting.

And when you're done, remember how many more buckets of sand are on that shore. Well, this is hyperbole. We might better call it hyper hyperbole.

God is saying, there are going to be so many descendants that come from your loins and Sarah's womb that you won't be able to count them. So shall your seed be.

Now, was God speaking literally or figuratively? Today, we know there are millions of Jews, descendants of Abraham, scattered and living all over the world.

- [20 : 31] Hitler alone was responsible for the brutal murder of six million during the 1930s and 40s. But have you any idea how many grains of sand or stars of heaven there are?

Millions won't do. Neither will billions or trillions or quadrillions nor quintillions nor... Well, you do get the picture, don't you? It's hyperbole.

God is intentionally exaggerating in the manner used and understood in Abraham's ancient culture. The sand of the sea is employed again as a hyperbole in Genesis 41.

And the text, in intentional exaggeration, says, Joseph stored up grain in Egypt like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring it, for it was beyond measure.

Was this true literally? Of course not. And everyone knew it. The point being made was that the storage of grain against the famine that was coming was just too great to actually be inventoried in any practical sense.

- [21 : 31] It was enormous, like the sand of the sea. And everybody got the point, powerfully, with an emphasis possible only with hyperbole. The figure of hyperbole, part five.

The last verse in the last chapter of John's gospel contains a beautiful hyperbole figure of speech. Here's the way it reads. And there were also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

Really, John? Well, no, not really. I mean, not literally, John might say, by way of explanation. What is meant by using hyperbole is simply that Jesus did a great many things that are not written here in this book.

Now, let's be reminded that our Lord, productive in every way that his time on earth was. Still, he was among us for only a scant three and a half years.

And with hyperbole, which all Mid-Easterners would have understood, John is simply saying that the things Jesus did while among us go far beyond what I have written here.

[22 : 59] That's really all he's saying. John is not being untruthful, but is merely expressing as he does for emphasis, color, and an intended, understood exaggeration.

Likewise, when the Apostle Paul told the Romans in chapter 1 that their faith in Christ was spoken of throughout the whole world, well, this, too, is a hyperbole.

The world, as all knew it during the first century, did not extend much beyond the Mediterranean basin. But in reality, speaking literally, the world even then extended to North and South America, the Far East, Australia, plus other geographical areas never dreamed of by the Apostle Paul.

Had these heard of the faith of the Romans? Of course not. Not literally. Yet, the meaning, employing hyperbole, Paul simply meant the faith the Romans had in Christ had been heard about all over.

A similar occasion is referenced in Acts 19, where Paul also spent two years in Ephesus. And the text in verse 10 says that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

[24 : 26] Literally. Does he mean every man, woman, and child in all of Asia heard the word of the Lord? Of course not. And everyone who would have read Acts 19.10 would understand that Paul was not saying he delivered the gospel to every single person.

He is simply saying great numbers were exposed to the gospel, and this is all the figure of speech called hyperbole required. This implementation of figurative language was the manner of common everyday discourse in the first century, as well as the common way of discourse today.

We use this kind of expression ourselves all the time. By the way, did you hear about the big party that Bill and Mary Smith had last week? No. Who was there?

Everybody. Lytotes, the opposite of hyperbole. Probably most of us have never heard of Lytotes, but it is a figure of speech in the Bible, and it's actually the opposite of hyperbole.

As the word suggests, hyperbole is that which hypes something by way of exaggeration. Hollywood has made this an art form along with Madison Avenue advertisers, and they are always hyping something, and they do know how to exaggerate, except that as they use it, they really want you to believe it literally.

[25 : 54] There is an opposite to hyperbole, and it's called Lytotes. It's the downplaying of the literal, not the exaggeration of the literal. Lytotes, spelled L-I-T-O-T-E-S, de-emphasizes the literal, but believe it or not, it has the same goal as hyperbole, which is to emphasize or draw attention to something that would not gain as much attention as spoken forth rightly.

Dr. Zuck gives an illustration in his book, Basic Bible Interpretation. He says, Lytotes is a negative statement to express a positive affirmation. When we would say of someone, he's not a bad preacher, what does that mean?

It actually means the opposite. He's a pretty good preacher. Well, then, why not say that? Because he is not a bad preacher is more emphatic and memorable than the positive. The Apostle Paul said to fellow Jews in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 21, I am a Jew born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city.

In actuality, Paul was saying he hailed from an important place, not an insignificant one. Tarsus is a place to be reckoned with, and that's where I'm from. I'm a citizen of no mean ordinary citizen.

The use of Lytotes in describing the city of his origin was intended to emphasize his origin and impress the audience. In toning it down, he actually highlighted it, which was the whole point.

[27 : 29] And when Dr. Luke, who penned the Acts of the Apostles, referred to the attitude of the Roman soldiers in regard to Peter's escape, he said, there was no small stir among them.

And then, in 1924, Luke reported the prophets of the pagan silversmiths as realizing no small gain for them. And lastly, in 2720, when describing the storm that would sink their ship, he called it no small tempest.

Luke seems to favor the figure of speech Lytotes for emphasizing the situation, whatever it was. And in each case, he actually meant the opposite. And the hearers would understand the downplaying was actually an emphasizing.

And when Paul said no mean city, he meant an important city. No small stir among the soldiers really meant a big stir. And the no small tempest that Paul referred to in Acts 27 really meant it was a huge storm, all employing the figure of speech Lytotes, designed to highlight and emphasize one more important but rarely used figure of speech in the Bible.

Introducing the Idiom Part 1 No consideration of figurative language would be complete without devoting time to the idiom.

[29 : 07] It's spelled I-D-I-O-M and comes from the root word that literally means one's own. And as applied to language, it has reference to an expression or saying that is peculiar to a given group of people in a particular geographic location.

The idiomatic expression communicates well to the people in a given area, but it is utterly lost on people outside that location.

It is like a private expression understood only by those in a given area. Every language and every geographical location has its own idiomatic sayings.

When the saying is heard outside that special area, it does not communicate at all. Usually it makes no sense when employed outside its area.

And what Bible students need to know is that the Bible is filled with idioms of the Middle East variety. They are not understood elsewhere, but are appreciated only in their place of origin, and to those people the idiom makes perfect sense because it is one's own expression, hence the name idiom.

[30 : 30] Idioms, too, are not literal, but figurative language, and as usual it supplies color and emphasis to what is spoken. In the United States an idiom may be used as everyday language in the south for instance, but if used up north, they would have no idea what you are talking about.

I don't want to buy a pig and a poke might be heard all over the south. That's an idiom, a saying peculiar down south. Literally it means, I don't want to buy something when I can't see what I'm getting.

A poke is a common name down south for a sack, a container. True, not many today go around carrying a pig for sale in a sack they are holding, but when they did, no one wanted to spend good money for a pig they had not seen.

You don't know what you're getting. How big is the pig? Is the pig sick or healthy? The idiom is also applied to any transaction where the buyer is asked to purchase something unseen.

One might say, I have a really nice car to sell. Would you give me two thousand dollars for it? Well, I might, but I have to see it and drive it before I would pay anything for it.

[31 : 57] After all, I don't want to buy a pig and a poke. But, of course, we're not talking about buying a pig. We're speaking of buying a car.

True, but a pig and a poke is an idiom, an expression of figurative language. No matter what's being bought or sold, no one wants to do it blindly.

Don't want to buy a pig and a poke. That's the way they put it down south. introduction to the idiom.

Part 2. Few scholars have made the contribution to understanding the thinking and speaking of the biblical Mid-Easterner, as has the Aramaic scholar George M.

Lamza. Dr. Lamza, his name is spelled L-A-M-S-A, has since passed on, but not before leaving a legacy of literary insight behind.

[32 : 55] Recently republished is his work titled Idioms in the Bible Explained and a Key to the Original Gospels. This small paperback contains nearly 1,000 of the Bible's used idioms, with a brief explanation of each covering both testaments.

And while some of his findings may be challenged doctrinally or theologically, yet in the main we recommend the book for many of its valuable insights.

For the next few segments of Christianity Clarified, we will draw upon some of the idioms of the Bible explained by Dr. Lamza, and we will all be the wiser for it.

Never forget, the Bible is not a Western book. It is an Eastern or Mid-Eastern book. All of its contents were written from the backdrop of the ancient Mediterranean world.

The languages, including figures of speech, the idiomatic expressions, and the like, reflect that ancient Mediterranean culture and thinking. And because it is so very different from ours in this present Western world, we should think of it as one of the gaps that needs to be bridged.

[34 : 08] Dr. Lamza helps us in doing that. It's a critical part of the science of hermeneutics. It's bridging the cultural gap. Here now is an example of what is meant by gaining an understanding of an Eastern idiom.

In Genesis 14, Abraham speaks to the king of Sodom and says, I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the Most High God. What Abraham meant by the lifting up of his hand is not readily available or understood in our text or in previous translations of it.

It is only in examining the Oriental idiom, as Dr. Lamza has done, that we understand the phrase, lifting up one's hand to heaven, to actually mean he has taken an oath to the God of heaven, as in a vow or a promise to God.

Have you ever wondered where the practice of being sworn in as a witness in a law court, being asked to raise their right hand and repeat after me, I do solemnly promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Why is the hand required to be raised? Likely as not, it extends all the way back to the ancient practice in the Mideast. Sadly, the Bible in many courts is no longer present upon which the witness would place his left hand as he raised his right hand heavenward.

[35 : 34] And, sadly as well, the words, so help me God, are also excluded in many of today's courts. But the lifting of one's hand toward heaven and our swearing of an oath appear inseparably connected.

It's one of thousands of idioms. Abraham clearly meant I have taken an oath to the Lord, simply saying, I have lifted up my hand to God.

Idioms of Prosperity, Part 1 Whenever we think in terms of prosperity, it usually has to do with an abundance of something. The ancient Mideasterners had a colorful way of describing that.

Within the 49th chapter of Genesis, the patriarch Jacob is speaking from his deathbed to his many sons who were surrounding his bed. Jacob's prophecies were pronounced upon each of his sons, and they related as much to the offspring of his sons as to the sons themselves.

Remember that each son was the head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jacob begins addressing them in accord with the order in which they were born, from the first who was Reuben, to the last who was Benjamin.

[36 : 54] Prophetically, Joseph speaks of the prosperity that will be the portion of some of his sons. Judah is the fourth-born son, who will be the head of the royal tribe from which David the shepherd lad will become king, and from whom Yeshua the Messiah will come a thousand years after David, in that same genealogical line.

Bear in mind that when Jacob pronounced this prophecy, Israel was not even a nation, much less a kingdom with a king. They would yet have ahead of them their captivity in Egypt, their miraculous release under Moses, their arrival into the land of Canaan, several hundred years of rule by judges, and then the kingdom would be established, finally, under the first to wear the crown, Saul, a descendant of Benjamin.

But Jacob's prophecy was that the scepter would not depart from Judah. The scepter was the royal symbol of power and rulership.

Pictures of present-day monarchs show them positioned on their throne, wearing the crown, and holding in their hand the royal scepter. Usually it is twelve to twenty-four inches in length, overlaid with gold, and encrusted with precious stones.

Of Judah, the progenitor of the royal line of Israel, it was said, The scepter shall not depart from Judah. This means the royal line of succession will not end, but will endure in perpetuity.

[38 : 38] It means the right to rule and reign will never be taken from the descendants of Judah, but will become the only lasting dynasty for the nation of Israel.

When you consult the names of all the kings that ruled over Israel from David onward, you will see that every one of them was a direct descendant of Judah. The last son of David, as well as a son of Judah, many years removed to be entitled to that throne, crown, and scepter, was and is none other than Jesus the Messiah.

And the line stops with him. The crown and scepter stops with him as well, and these items of regal rule shall never depart from him. The monarchy of Israel is now in abeyance, awaiting the return of the only rightful ruler to the new establishment of Israel's long absent throne.

And that scepter shall not depart from Judah. Idioms of Prosperity, Part 2 In addition to the idiom regarding regal prosperity given by Jacob on his deathbed, the Genesis 49 passage prophesies another kind of prosperity for Judah's descendants.

Verse 11 states that Judah will bind his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine. Well, what in the world does that mean?

[40 : 09] It's an idiom. Binding or tying his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine would ordinarily be unthinkable, because these are young, frisky animals that move around a lot, and to tie them to a vine, even worse, to tie them to a choice vine, one of your best vines, would be foolhardy, because these young animals would pull away from them, breaking those delicate vines, and prevent them from producing.

No matter. Judah has plenty more and to spare. Judah can even restrain his animals in this manner and still have many more. Do you not see the color and the exaggeration here?

It's what an idiom is all about. And he goes on talking about Judah by saying that Judah and his descendants will wash his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes.

What? Doing your laundry and wine? Who in the world would do that? Well, no one. It's an idiom. Jacob is simply saying that the descendants of Judah would have such an abundance of fertile vineyards, why his grape harvest will be so enormous he could do the family laundry and wine.

It's an idiom. A figure of speech designed to intentionally exaggerate. For an American equivalent today, we may say someone is so wealthy, they have money to burn.

[41 : 33] Now, no one literally thinks of someone setting fire to a pile of cash, but we all know it means such a person is so well off financially.

He could burn money if he wanted to. The values of the ancient Mideast were not merely silver and gold, but livestock as well. And in addition, there were other valuable commodities.

The Genesis 49 passage also speaks of Judah's teeth being white with milk. Another expression of affluence. And a similar idiom is used by Moses in Deuteronomy 33, when he describes the fortunes of the future descendants of Asher and his tribe.

There's also one of the twelve from Joseph. And verse 33 promises Asher will be blessed with an abundance of children, which of course means lots of descendants, and he will be acceptable to his brethren, that is, he will be accommodating to them and they to him.

They will be the peacemakers. And in addition, more physical prosperity will come his way in an abundance of olive yards, olive groves, producing the much sought after staple of olive oil.

[42 : 45] Wine, olive oil, and milk are strategic items for every single household in the Mideast. In fact, Moses goes on to say, Asher's descendants will be so blessed with olive groves, he'll be able to dip his foot in oil.

In other words, the olive trees will produce so many olives for the olive presses, Asher could wade in the oil they will produce. It's an oriental idiom. Land flowing with milk and honey.

Idioms about bread. Bread is one of the most universal of all items common to humanity throughout the ages, often spoken of as the staff of life.

We're all familiar with the give us this day our daily bread. That's simply a prayer for sustenance for another day. Very often the word bread is used in the Bible for items of food in general that could well include fruits and vegetables as well as the flour that is kneaded and baked into loaves or cakes.

In the book of Numbers, Joshua and Caleb, the only two spies who brought back a favorable report from spying out the land of Canaan, were urging the reluctant Israelites to go forward and take the land God had promised them.

[44 : 06] They told the Israelites, Do not rebel against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us.

Bread? Bread for us? Yes. It's an idiom. They were saying that the Canaanites would be as easy to defeat as eating bread.

Now, if we Westerners today would transfer their idiom into an idiom of our own, we would probably say something like, Defeating them would be a piece of cake.

Another idiom involving bread is found in Deuteronomy 23.4. When the Ammonites and Moabites are criticized regarding their negative treatment of the Israelites, when having come out of Egypt, were en route to Canaan.

These were faulted because they did not meet the Israelites with bread and water. The idiom bread and water was not limited to physical food and water, but more than that, it meant they were not sympathetic nor cordial to Israel, but were in fact hostile.

[45 : 19] Travel in this desert part of the world was very demanding, and oases were few and far between. And simply because of the common humanity, these should have been accommodating to the Israelites, and they were not.

Bread is also the idiom referred to when Jesus called himself the bread of life in John 6. And he declared that those who partook of him would receive eternal life.

It was the very words of Christ, his teaching content, that constituted the bread of which he spoke. In verse 63, Jesus said, The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.

When one partakes of Jesus Christ, it is not an act of cannibalism, as some of his critics foolishly asserted.

It simply meant to hear and digest his words. That was to partake of the bread of life. Christ and his word is to the spiritual part of man what physical bread is to the physical part of man.

[46 : 36] Bread in the Bible is both physical and spiritual, as are life, light, and death. These all utilize the figurative language of the idiom and do so very frequently.

The Idiom of a Circumcised Heart Circumcision in the Bible was a very physical thing. It was prescribed in the law God gave to Moses and was to be performed upon every Hebrew baby boy on the eighth day of his birth.

The cutting away of the excess of flesh marked that male as dedicated to God and a member of the covenant God gave to Israel. This was a physical act performed upon the baby.

But there is an idiom among the Jews relating to circumcision that is clearly not physical but spiritual. In Deuteronomy 10, Moses reminds the Israelites, saying, The Lord had a delight in your fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you, above all people, as it is this day.

Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked. Circumcise the foreskin of your heart? Does the heart have a foreskin to be severed by a knife as it cuts away excess skin of the male in an ordinary way?

[48 : 02] No. Circumcising the heart is an idiom, an expression peculiar to a particular group, in this case Israelites. With normal physical circumcision, the child of eight days old had no say in the matter.

It was a physical ritual performed upon him. But the circumcision of the heart was an entirely different matter of spiritual implications, because one circumcised his own heart by having an obedient and submissive will to God.

This was an issue of one's own human volition. A Jew would have a normal physical circumcision that outwardly positioned him as an Israelite, but inwardly, in the matter of the will, he could be far from what his outward circumcision stood for.

Inwardly, he could be disobedient and rebellious to the core. He could go through the requirements and rituals required by outward compliance, but inwardly be totally rebellious.

This is why Moses said, Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked. Thus, Moses was calling the disobedient Israelites to an inner compliance of the heart, not merely going through the motions outwardly.

[49 : 23] It is this very attitude Jesus would condemn fifteen hundred years later, when he said of the generation of Jews to whom he came, that, This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

It is the same saying that they may follow the rituals of religion outwardly, but inwardly their heart is not in it.

The Apostle Paul, in the New Testament Romans letter, picks up on this in chapter 2, when he describes who is a true Jew.

For he is not, said Paul, a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh.

But he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter. It's a Jewish idiom.

[50 : 21] The Idiom of Forbidden Sex The Old Testament book of Proverbs contains, as one might expect, an abundance of idioms, sayings, that were common to the culture of that day.

Some of these have to do with marital infidelity, such as the idiomatic proverb in 515. It states, Drink waters out of your own cistern, and running waters out of thy own wells.

To us, far removed from the ancient Mideast culture, it simply sounds like we should confine ourselves to our own water supply, and not steal water from others. But be assured, this is not about H₂O.

It's about marital infidelity. The meaning is that a man or woman is to make love and be sexually satisfied with their own spouse, not that of another.

It corresponds to a similar expression that was a well-known proverb and idiom of the ancient Hebrews found in Proverbs 9 and 17, which states, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

[51 : 36] And this is not speaking of literal bread any more than it is not speaking of literal water. In both cases, these idioms referenced forbidden love outside of one's marriage.

While on the surface, the affair may be exciting and pleasing, and this is why it is enticing. But as the book of Proverbs conveys throughout, things are not always as they seem.

There is a painful downside. The moral of the idiom? Confine yourself and your lovemaking to the spouse to whom you are pledged and united.

The issue regulating sexual activity and its legitimacy, or as in the cases mentioned in Leviticus chapters 18 through 20, are described also by use of an idiom.

The idiomatic figure of speech used is the uncovering of one's nakedness. Contrary to the earlier time of humanity, when as in the case with Adam and Eve's children, cohabitation with relatives was necessary, simply because there were no other possible mates with whom to have relations, but those produced by your mother and father.

[52 : 49] Such was necessary for mankind in the beginning. The question as to where Cain got his wife is obvious. Cain married his sister, and other siblings did the same.

Genesis 5.4 reminds us that not only did Adam and Eve produce a number of sons and daughters, but they had 800 years after Seth was born in which to do it.

What we today call incest, that is, being married or having sexual relations with a close relative, was not forbidden, but actually necessary in the beginning.

Later, the law God gave through Moses forbade the uncovering of the nakedness with a close relative, such as a sister, an aunt, or a niece.

Biblically, the uncovering of nakedness was an idiom that limited that uncovering to the mate to whom one was married. Uncovering the nakedness or having sexual relations with any other constituted fornication or adultery, and thus was forbidden.

[53 : 56] An idiom of remembrance Isaiah 49.14 expresses the fear of Zion, the city of Jerusalem, as saying, The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.

But God's response to that fear was, Can a woman forget her nursing child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.

Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. Thy walls are continually before me. This is an idiom, and a beautiful one.

In it, God is assuring the city of Zion, that is, Jerusalem, that she is ever before him. His memory of Zion is as near as the palms of his hands upon which Jerusalem is engraved.

The idiom is designed to guarantee remembrance. How many times do we do things using our hands? Well, every act God performs with his hands, he sees those hands in the doing.

[55 : 10] And what is it that is engraved in the very palms of God, but Jerusalem, Jerusalem, and the walls that surround her, says the Lord, are ever before me.

With this idiom, we also see the presence of the figure of speech considered in an earlier segment of Christianity Clarified. Do you recall our figure of speech called anthropomorphisms, that is, the attributing of human body parts to the deity, who is in reality non-physical, but spirit in his essence?

Psalms 137 records another idiom of remembrance. The Israelites had been carried away to the land of Babylon. God had given his people over to divine discipline for their idolatry, just as the prophet Jeremiah had warned them.

Far from home, in a strange land, the Jews reminisce about their beloved homeland and the city of Jerusalem that they so sorely missed. It evoked this idiom from them.

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning, if I do not remember thee. The ancient Jews were, like everyone else, accustomed to manual labor of all sorts, and most then, as today, were right-handed, and that hand was their main source and skill for productivity of all kinds.

[56 : 36] Every act of labor and skill of an artisan resided in the right hand, the hand of their doing. It was as if the hand possessed an independent skill of its own.

Trained by repetition and daily usage, the skilled right hand developed a reputation for its owner. It was like the hand had a mind of its own as it shaped, molded, fashioned, honed, cut, and comforted, whatever it came in contact with, whether skillful dexterity on the job or the comfort and caressing of one's wife.

The right hand had a skill set that was embedded in it, and it automatically rose to the need when called upon. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its ability to do what it always does.

How likely is that? Not very. Another beautiful idiom of remembrance. An idiom of drinking the cup.

An oriental idiom that describes the taking and drinking of the cup is a common expression in the Old and New Testaments. Whether drinking of the cup was a good thing or a bad thing always depended upon the contents of that cup.

[57 : 54] The psalmist in the famous 23rd refers to his cup as running over, which obviously spoke of an abundance, and in that context it no doubt referred to a good thing.

Then again in Psalm 75 we are told the cup is in the hand of the Lord and the wine foams. It is well mixed and he pours out of this.

Surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs. This is not a good thing. It is punitive, bitter, negative.

And such is the usual meaning and it is connected with judgment. The most memorable use of this idiom was that employed by Jesus himself in Matthew 20 when the Lord asked his disciples, Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?

They said unto him, We are able. Well, they spoke out of innocent ignorance, having no idea of the contents of that cup. It would hold the very wrath and justice of God and it would be drunk to its fullness by their Lord.

[59 : 01] Only a few days later in Matthew 26 Jesus would agonize in Gethsemane crying out to God saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. The drinking of that cup was an idiom that portrayed Christ emptying the contents of the wrath and justice of God poured into the person of his Son while he would writhe in anguish and shame upon the cross of Calvary.

It also depicted the bitter dregs of forsakenness he would experience in separation from his Father for those dreaded hours when he would be made sin by taking upon himself the evils of humanity.

Drinking of the cup will show itself in a completely different venue when in Revelation 14 an angel declares of those in the tribulation period that will drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is mixed in full strength in the cup of his anger.

And again, in Revelation 16 where we are told Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of his fierce wrath.

[60 : 18] Idiomatically, the ancients used the common act of drinking from a cup to portray what was coming good or bad. We in the West do not use this precise idiom of drinking the bitter dregs of a cup to denote punishment that is coming but we do have our own idiom that is close to it and it too is more often associated with punishment of some kind.

For instance, a parent may tell his child you have been disobedient now you will have to take your medicine. Kind of like drinking from the cup.

Go to your room. You are grounded or some other form of discipline. Thus, to drink the cup in an eastern idiom meant to partake of whatever the cup contained and in most instances was dreadful.

An idiom relating to trees. An expression used by our Lord which apart from knowing it to be idiomatic would be completely lost as to its meaning and it is found in Luke 23.

It occurred while Jesus was under the excruciating pain from the earlier flogging at the hands of the Romans. And while he was bearing his own cross en route to Golgotha he exclaimed if they do these things in the green tree what will happen in the dry.

[61 : 46] The Mid-Easterners considered green wood to be a picture of youth newness innocence while the dry was thought of as old more mature far less innocent but guilty compared to the new.

Jesus himself was the green tree. He was comparing himself and his innocence to those he addressed as daughters of Jerusalem or residents of the city of Jerusalem.

Regarding these he likens them to be the dry tree. Both are recipients of the cruel Roman treatment he was experiencing at the time while being shamefully treated on his way to the cross.

Turning to those weeping for him Jesus stated their tears would be better shed for themselves and their children because they constituted the dry tree to whom the Romans would be even more brutal.

They will be the tender of the dry tree filled not with innocence but with guilt for the way they had abandoned the true God of Israel. If this Jesus said is the treatment toward me the innocent green tree what will be the lot of those comprising the dry guilty tree?

[63 : 06] A related reference to the green and dry trees is found in Ezekiel 20 where the prophet who lived hundreds of years before Christ was born delivered to Israel the message he got from God saying Behold I am about the kindle of fire in you and it shall consume every green tree in you as well as every dry tree the blazing flame will not be quenched and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it such was the God given message Ezekiel gave to Teman and the forest land of the Negev in the south again the green and the dry trees make reference to the young and the old the innocent and the guilty and has it not always been true in times of war or natural calamity the young and innocent suffer the same fate as the old and guilty the idiom here is picked up by Jesus century later when he likened himself to the innocent green tree while categorizing the inhabitants of

Jerusalem to that of the guilty dry tree hence don't weep for me Jesus said weep for yourselves and for your children who will suffer along with you then you will even say how fortunate will those be who never bear children or the women whose breasts never nurse children for if these things are done in the green tree what will happen in the dry it's a powerful idiom that connects laying down one's neck and dying daily in the closing verses of Romans the apostle Paul in chapter 16 acknowledged a significant number of people who were of great help and encouragement to him among them a married couple by the names of Priscilla and Aquila and Paul said they assisted him even to the point of laying down their necks for his sake friends of this caliber are friends indeed who are willing to place their own lives at risk for Paul and the gospel he preached that was the meaning of laying down one's neck it was a powerful idiom that expressed one's level of commitment and sacrifice to which they were prepared to go such was precisely true of

James the brother of John both of whom were sons of Zebedee it was James John and Peter who comprised the inner circle of the twelve apostles closest to the Lord in Acts chapter 12 we are informed that James laid down his neck for the Lord verses 1 and 2 say that Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church and he killed James the brother of John with the sword almost certainly this means the king had James put to death by beheading him which was a common method of execution we can say that James laid down his neck literally more more than an idiom as was the case for Priscilla and Aquila related to this concept of laying down one's neck as an idiom is the expression Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15 when he stated I die daily such is an idiom that expresses the circumstances which the apostle lived under on a daily basis today in our culture we may speak of law enforcement personnel placing themselves at risk merely by putting on the uniform and appearing in public the risk is part of the job description in like fashion

Paul is saying every day I move about fulfilling my calling to preach the gospel of the grace of God I never know whether I will see the end of the day alive Paul didn't have a uniform as an apostle but if he had it would have marked him for hostile treatment for centuries tradition has maintained that after Paul was released from his house arrest in Rome he was set free for a brief period only to be arrested again by the Roman authorities this time there would be no house arrest in his own rented villa as in Acts 28 this time he would be imprisoned in the Mamertine prison of Rome the day would soon come when Paul would be led to a small grove of trees outside the city of Rome there an executioner would be waiting for him with his sword and he would do his duty

Paul would lay down his neck for his lord but it it would not be an idiom it would be literal yielding and mortifying our members a key passage for godly living on the part of all Christians is set forth in Romans chapter 6 the apostle Paul reminds his Roman recipients in this critical letter to yield the members of their body as instruments of righteousness unto god they are commanded to do that because they can do that such was not possible before they became believers and members of the body of Christ but now they can our members that need to be yielded to god consists of our body parts with which we can sin they are our arms legs feet eyes and ears these are the things we employ for sin when we walk in the flesh rather than in the spirit we are here commanded to give these body parts over to god to be used in his service rather than surrendered as instruments to sin and we can do this which makes us all the more accountable if we do not do this a related but slightly different idiom is used by

[69 : 33] Paul in Colossians 3 5 here he tells his audience mortify your members now this is a curious idiom mortify your members remember the members are physical body parts and when Paul says we are to mortify them whatever does that mean well the word mortify comes from the same word as morgue and mortician things that speak of death you got the point of this vidium do you not he is saying you know those body parts we all can use to sin with our arms legs eyes ears and so on well make them dead mortify them then they won't be able to be used in the service of the flesh not if they are dead and who is to mortify them we are oh but I can't oh yes you can because God will never ask anything of you that he knows to be outside your ability this mortify your members is only in regard to our doing evil that

Paul says consists of immorality impurity passion evil desire and greed included as well are the items in verse 8 listed as anger wrath malice and abusive speech make dead all the members of your body that can do these things because if you make them dead they can't do them this is all the negative side of the idiom the positive aspect involves those same members or body parts we make dead to evil but they become very active and alive as they are yielded to God as we saw in Romans 6 and here in Colossians 3 in the putting on of the new self same members same body but dictated to by the new man old man in Adam you and I with our volition will determine to whom we will yield and to whom do we yield our members the choice and its attendant accountability are all ours yield to

God make dead to evil these are powerful idioms you've just heard another session of Christianity clarified with Marv Wiseman the preview of volume 33 upcoming early on in our introduction of hermeneutics we described this discipline as both a science and an art the science portion is best understood as that which operates within the confines of fixed laws and principles which come with logic and order the laws we are currently engaging have just gotten underway as we have considered only the for many and that first law we considered in some detail due to its importance is known as the law of literal language it simply requires that we approach the Bible from a literal standpoint accepting its statements to be true as spoken that is taken at face value so that the text means precisely what it says such the valid approach not only scripture but to literature in general whether one is reading an academic textbook an encyclopedia a novel a biography or even a daily newspaper the literal is so critical because words mean things and they are the essence of communication no matter the language in which they are spoken following our pursuit of the literal of language we engage the only other possible meaning of a text that is not to be understood literally but was fully intended by the writer to be non literal that is a figurative expression of words yet even then as we pointed out the understanding of the meaning of figurative language when used is dependent upon the reader having a grasp of the literal upon which the figurative is based numerous examples were given we have completed our sign material relating both to the law of the literal and the law of the figurative■■■■ we just concluded our content on the idioms used by those in the biblical setting and we scarcely made a dent in the vast amount of material expressing mid-eastern ancient idioms that likely number in the hundreds but now we must move on to the next fixed law of hermeneutics and that is the law of context

This law is not to be underestimated, and you will soon see why in the upcoming volume number 33. So much theological and doctrinal mischief and errors stem from ignoring this great rule of hermeneutics.

You will see the meaning of passages take on new significance and appreciation as we apply this law of context. And in closing, let's answer the question, If hermeneutics is both an art and a science, and if the science has to do with the implementation of the laws, where does the art concept come in?

[75 : 23] That's it. The art is realized through the skillful application and utilization of the laws. So, next up, the law of context.

Prepare yourself for some breakthrough in an appreciation of the Word of God. This is Pastor Marv Wiseman. Glad to have you along learning with us.

Thanks so much for being a part of Christianity Clarified.