

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

*Analogical Reasoning:
A Method for
Interpreting the Bible
When Confronted with
Contemporary Issues*

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Introduction

It is not uncommon for someone reading the Bible to pause and ask, “What does this mean?” Equally uncommon is the assumption that anyone reading the Bible has studied hermeneutics as a method for interpreting Scripture.

The assumption is not a modern observation. Luke tells us that while Jesus walked with two of his disciples on the Emmaus Road, “he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27 NIV). The Greek verb *hermeneuein* (hermeneutics) means to explain. This is what Jesus did, he explained the meaning of Scripture. This series of booklets will explore a wide range of hermeneutical methods for interpreting the Bible in order to discover meaning.

One of the most challenging aspects of interpreting Scripture is to determine if the text still means what it originally meant. Another challenge is meaning that comes by revelation as opposed to discovered meaning through hermeneutical methods.

For example, Jesus asked his disciples how people identified him. Peter replied, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16 NIV). The response of Jesus shows that Peter understood by revelation and not by hermeneutical methods. “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:17 NIV).

Caution is needed because meaning that comes by revelation appears to require no effort. It is my observation that interpretation of Scripture has become too reliant on personalized interpretation in the name of meaning by revelation. When meaning does occur this way, it generally produces a sense of humility and reverence, not popularity.

Our daily lives are filled with decisions that present choices. Do we say yes or no? Do we stop or move forward? If there is a fork in the road, do we take the path on the left or right? The Bible tells us, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105 NIV). Consequently, it is essential to let Scripture guide these daily choices.

As you read these booklets, it is my hope that Scripture will come alive in your daily life by using simple methods of interpretation. This first section in this booklet explains the method of analogical reasoning when confronted with contemporary issues that are not explicit in the Bible.



HOLY BIBLE

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

ANALOGICAL REASONING

Analogueical Reasoning

The method of analogueical reasoning dates back to the 4th century BC in the works of Aristotle (384-322 BC).¹ It is a method of interpretation that relies on analogy.

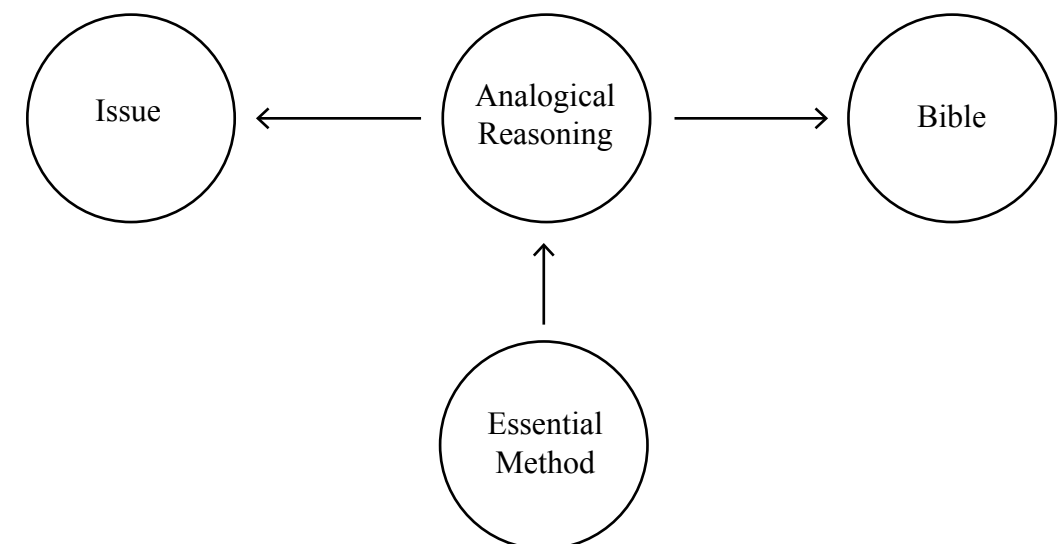
Analogy is a comparison between two things by identifying similarities to discover meaning. A typical example reads like this, “Just as a sword is the weapon of a warrior, a pen is the weapon of a writer.” A sword is compared to a pen and the commonality is a weapon.

A little more complex way of using analogy can be seen in a modern version of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 2: “What does a name mean? The thing we call a rose would smell just as sweet if we called it by any other name. Romeo would be just as perfect even if he wasn’t called Romeo.” Juliet compares a rose to Romeo and the commonality is that if both were called by another name their sweet fragrance would be the same.

Therefore, the method of analogueical reasoning is deductive. It looks for patterns.

The things being compared could be objects, systems, beliefs, or values. For the purpose of this booklet, the things being compared are contemporary issues and what the Bible has to say about them. Analogueical reasoning is needed in many cases because the Bible is not explicit about contemporary issues. Without a method of interpretation, moving from an issue to the Bible, or the Bible to an issue can be highly subjective.

Figure 1.1

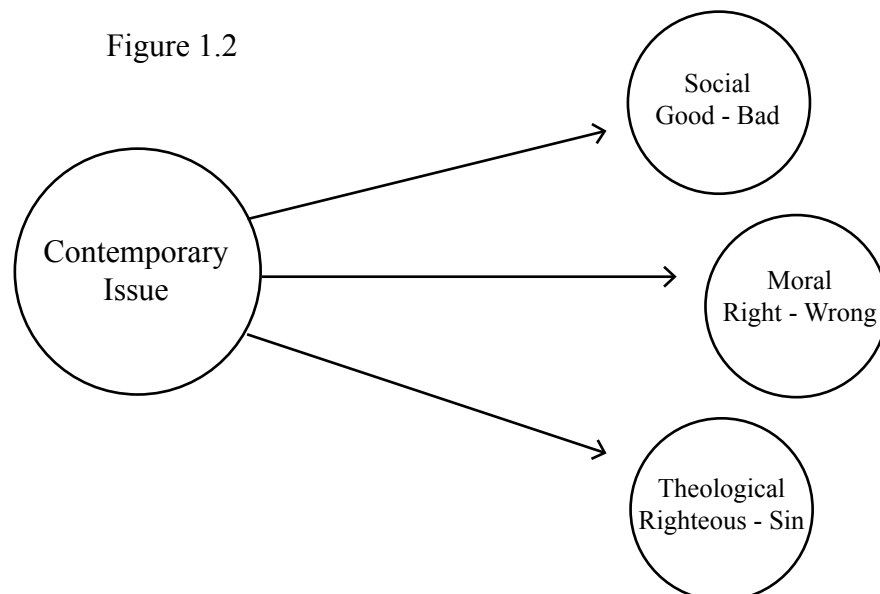


Take any issue in the three categories below and place them into the “issues” circle in Figure 1.1.

CATEGORY	ISSUE
Technology	Access to Information Social Networks Artificial Intelligence Big Data CCTV — Facial Recognition
Environment	Air Pollution Plastic Pollution Fossil Fuels Alternative Fuels Geoengineering
Medicine	Legalization of Marijuana Stem Cell Reserch Designer Babies Abortion Euthanasia

In order to arrive at a conclusion, analogical reasoning recognizes similarities between the contemporary issue and passages of Scripture. For the purpose of this booklet, those similarities are recognized as social, moral and theological dimensions. As a result, three questions can be asked about the contemporary issue: (1) Is it socially good or bad? (2) Is it morally right or wrong? (3) Is it theologically righteous or sinful?

Figure 1.2



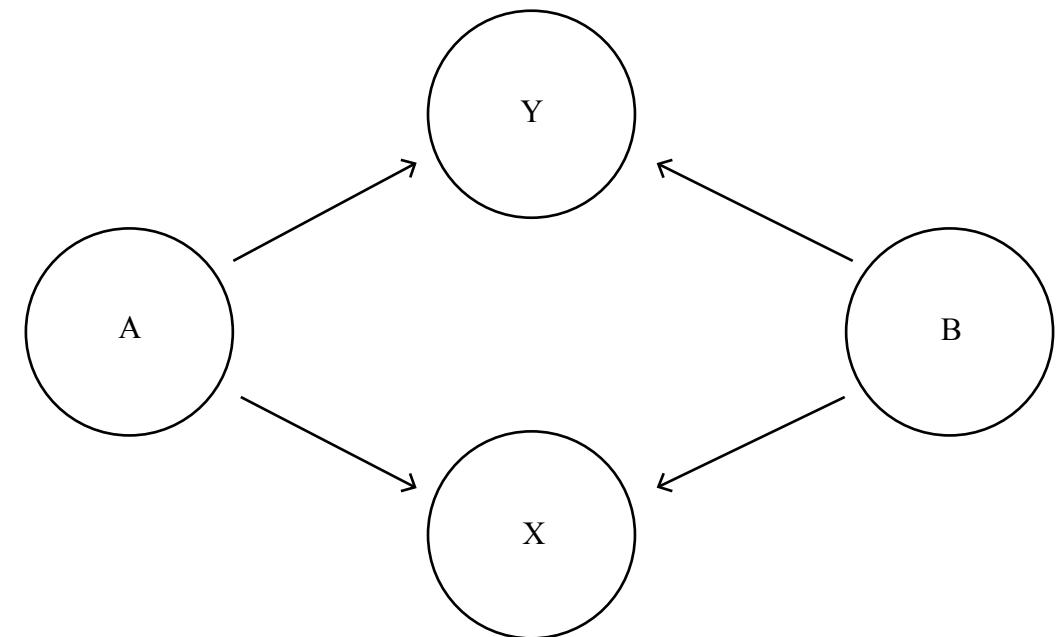
Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, translated by W. Rhys Roberts (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), and *A Prior Analytics*, translated by A. J. Jenkinson and G. R. G. Mure (Amazon Digital Services, 2011).

Three steps demonstrate how to use the method of analogical reasoning.

**STEP ONE:
THE EQUATION**

1. A has the characteristic of X
2. B shares the characteristic of X with A
3. X represents the dimensions of A and B
4. Y presents the conclusions of A based on X
5. Because A and B share the characteristics of X, it can be assumed that B shares the conclusion of A in Y

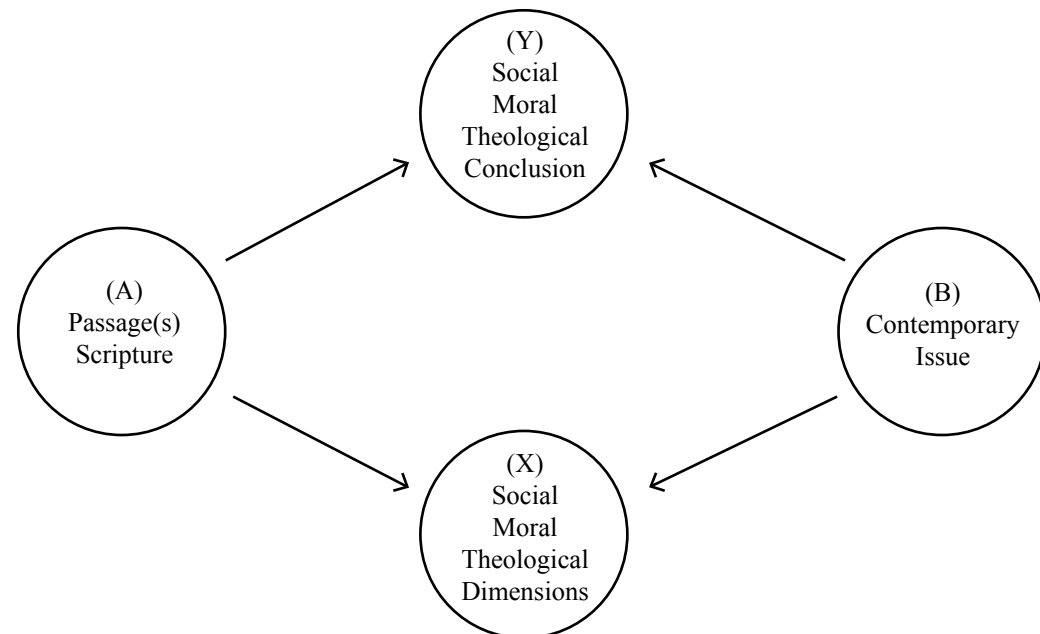
Figure 1.3



**STEP TWO:
THE PRINCIPLE OF A CONTEMPORARY ISSUE AND
SCRIPTURE IN THE EQUATION**

1. A is a passage(s) of Scripture interpreted in X
2. B is the contemporary issue that shares a similar interpretation of X with A
3. X represents the social, moral, and theological dimensions of A and B
4. Y presents the social, moral, and theological conclusions of A based on X
5. Because A and B share the characteristics X, it can be assumed that B shares the conclusion of A in Y to determine if the contemporary issue is socially good or bad, morally right or wrong, and theologically righteous or sinful.

Figure 1.4

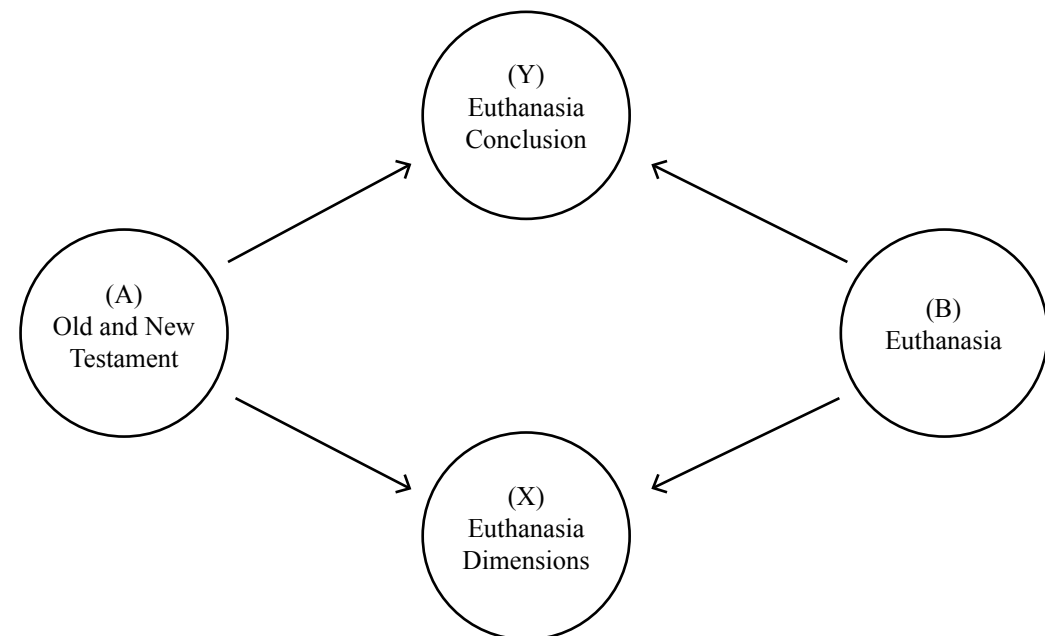


**STEP THREE:
THE CONTEMPORARY ISSUE OF EUTHANASIA AND
ACTUAL PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE IN THE EQUATION**

The method of analogical reasoning can take place in personal or group study. Whereas A and B need clear definition, X and Y require research.

The following paints a general picture of the method using an actual contemporary issue and biblical passages. The contemporary issue, biblical passages of Scripture, and the social, moral, and theological dimensions are not intended to limit personal or group study. The following points are conversation starters.

Figure 1.5



1. A is a passage(s) of Scripture
 - a. “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13 NIV).
 - b. “A person’s days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed” (Job 14:5 NIV).
 - c. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV).
 - d. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21 NIV)

2. B is the contemporary issue of Euthanasia
 - a. Define whether the issue is human or animal euthanasia
 - b. Define whether the issue is physician assisted euthanasia or something else
 - c. Distinguish between active and passive euthanasia
 - d. Discuss the legalization of euthanasia compared to Scripture
 - e. Public opinion in the West is rapidly changing towards the practice of Euthanasia
 - f. Public opinion in the East has largely been for the practice of Euthanasia

3. X represents the social, moral, and theological dimensions of biblical passages and the contemporary issue of Euthanasia
 - a. Social dimension
 - i. Quality of life
 - ii. Medical bills
 - iii. Burden on loved ones

- b. Moral dimension
 - i. Minimizing pain and suffering for the person dying and loved ones
 - ii. Difference between taking steps to hasten death and allowing the dying process to occur
 - iii. Personal dignity of the dying

- c. Theological dimension
 - i. The dying in the hands of God or in the hands of fate
 - ii. Made in the image and likeness of God
 - iii. The joy of new birth and the sorrow of death

4. Y presents the social, moral, and theological conclusions of A based on X
 - a. I have omitted a conclusion in the interest of using analogical reasoning to wrestle with the issue of euthanasia. For the purpose of this booklet, it is far better to discover meaning in Scripture than deliver a conclusion on behalf of the reader.

5. Because A and B share the characteristic X, it can be assumed that B shares the conclusion of A in Y to determine if Euthanasia is socially good or bad, morally right or wrong, and theologically righteous or sinful.
 - a. As above, I have omitted a conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Readers of the Bible frequently ask, “What does this mean?” Most readers have not studied methods for interpreting Scripture. This reality is not meant to patronize, even the disciples of Jesus wrestled with it.

Scriptures shows us that meaning can be obtained through revelation. However, Scripture also shows us most interpretation requires a measure of work. That work does not have to be overwhelming. It can be fun and engaging in a group setting, especially with people from different church traditions. It can be very insightful with people of no church tradition. Nevertheless, without effort meaning becomes purely subjective.

Subjective interpretation of Scripture can become socially, morally, and theologically misguided especially when confronted with contemporary issues. Though Scripture was written in cultural setting that differ from our contemporary world, meaning can be discovered.

Analogical reasoning is a simple deductive method with conclusions that answer the readers question, “What does this mean?”

ANALOGICAL REASONING TEST

1. Analogical reasoning a method for...
 - a. Translating ancient language into contemporary meaning
 - b. **Interpreting the Bible**
 - c. Comparing traditional text with contemporary translation
 - d. Highlighting a point of view
2. Analogical reasoning relies on...
 - a. Analysis
 - b. Assessment
 - c. **Analogy**
 - d. Allegory
3. Analogical reasoning is...
 - a. **Dedicative reasoning**
 - b. Inductive reasoning
 - c. Incursive reasoning
 - d. Invasive reasoning
4. Analogical reasoning dates back to...
 - a. Protestant Reformation
 - b. Early Church Fathers
 - c. The 20th Century
 - d. **St. Augustine**
5. Analogical reasoning looks for...
 - a. **Patterns**
 - b. Differences
 - c. Opposites
 - d. Images
6. Analogical reasoning also compares beliefs, values, objects, and systems
 - a. **True**
 - b. False
7. Analogical reasoning is necessary for biblical interpretation when...
 - a. Arguing a convincing point of view
 - b. Attempting to understand ancient culture

- c. Comparing identical ancient and contemporary issues
 - d. Encountering contemporary issues not explicit in the Bible
8. Analogical reasoning can prevent...
- a. Subjective interpretation
 - b. Denominational interpretation
 - c. Traditional interpretation
 - d. Collective interpretation
9. In the category of technology, which contemporary issue does not belong?
- a. Access to Information
 - b. Social Networks
 - c. Artificial Intelligence
 - d. The rising cost of electricity
 - e. Big Data
 - f. CCTV – Facial Recognition
10. In the category of environment, which contemporary issue does not belong?
- a. Air Pollution
 - b. Plastic Pollution
 - c. Fossil Fuels
 - d. Alternative Fuels
 - e. Space Exploration
 - f. Geoengineering
11. In the category of medicine, which contemporary issue does not belong?
- a. Legalization of Marijuana
 - b. Radiation exposure during an X-ray
 - c. Stem Cell Research
 - d. Designer Babies
 - e. Abortion
 - f. Euthanasia
12. The three dimensions typically used to compare biblical passages with contemporary issues are...
- a. Political, Cultural, and Theological
 - b. Social, Religious, and Theological
 - c. Social, Moral, and Theological
 - d. Moral, Economic, and Theological

13. Fill in the blanks (A, B, X, Y) of the analogical reasoning equation

- a. ___ has the characteristic of ___
- b. ___ shares the characteristic of ___ with ___
- c. ___ represents the dimensions of ___ and ___
- d. ___ presents the conclusions of ___ based on ___
- e. Because ___ and ___ share the characteristics of ___, it can be assumed that ___ shares the conclusion of ___ in ___

14. Fill in the blanks

- a. A and B need clear _____
(definition)
- b. X and Y need _____
(research)

15. Analogical reasoning can be done...

- a. In a group
- b. On your own
- c. Both



Dr. Andrew Fox is a professor of Intercultural Studies - a historical, theological, and sociological approach to interpreting and communicating Scripture. His passion is to spark people's imagination toward Faith, positive change through life's challenges.

Dr. Fox is the Chair of Ikon Inc., a non-profit organization engaging in religious publications, lectures, preaching, and education. He holds a Masters in Missional Leadership from The Northwest University, Masters in Theological Studies from Southeastern University, PhD in Intercultural Studies from Assembly of God Theological Seminary.

Dr. Fox lectures in a number of colleges, universities, and organizations in the United States and overseas. Typical responses from his lectures include approachable, professional, colorful, masculine, elegant, extreme, and extravagant.

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