

Figures of Speech

... poetic way to convey a literal meaning

EXAMPLE: "this is my body ... this is my blood" = Figures of Speech

When we read the Scripture, we must interpret it literally with the plain common sense meaning of the words found in the passage without seeking some hidden mystical message buried deep under the surface.

REMEMBER: The Bible was written originally for the common everyday person without the need of an interpreter, translator, decoder, decipherer, teacher, tester, proctor, mystic, prophet, priest or king.

Therefore, when we find a figure of speech in the Bible we must interpret it as a

FIGURE OF SPEECH!

Example of a Figure of Speech called a metaphor:

Literal

The ground needs rain.

Figure of Speech

The ground is thirsty.

As a matter of fact, "the ground needs rain." It is a straight forward true literal statement.

It is not a true statement that "the ground is thirsty." Dirt cannot long for a drink; it cannot feel; it cannot be thirsty; therefore, using the word "thirsty" is a figure of speech.

**The plain common sense does not make sense
according to our understanding of the word "thirsty."**

Most Common Kinds of *Figures of Speech* in Scripture

Simile
Irony
Synecdoche
Euphemism

Metaphor
Anthropomorphism
Ellipsis

Allegory
Hyperbole
Polysyndeton
Personification

Paradox
Metonymy
Asyndeton

Each kind of Figure of Speech is used to express an idea more forcefully, causing you to remember the truth!

How do you recognize a *Figures of Speech* in Scripture?

Whenever and wherever it is possible, the words of Scripture are to be understood **literally**, but when a statement appears to be contrary to our experience, or to a known fact, or revealed truth, or seems to be at variance with the general teaching of the Scripture, then we may reasonably expect that some figure of speech is employed... to call attention to some specially designed emphasis.¹¹

One Example of each of the common *Figures of Speech* in the Bible

(Special Note: The Bible contains over 200 kinds of Figures of Speech; we are looking at only the most common.)

Simile	<p>Uses the words <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> to state the equivalence between two things.</p> <p>Psalm 1:3 And he will be <i>like</i> a tree <i>firmly</i> planted by streams of water, ...</p>
Metaphor	<p>Uses a word or phrase to compare two or more things that are not alike.</p> <p>Matthew 26:26 ... Take, eat; this is My <i>body</i>.</p>
Allegory	<p>Uses a comparison of everyday plausible events (possibly a known historical event) to <u>express</u> a spiritual truth.</p> <p>Galatians 4:22-26 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, <i>one by the bondwoman</i> and <i>one by the free woman</i>.²³ But the son by the bondwoman was born <i>according to the flesh</i>, and the son by the free woman <i>through the promise</i>. This is allegorically speaking: for these <i>women</i> are two covenants, one <i>proceeding</i> from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this <i>Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia</i>, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the <i>Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother</i>.</p>
Parable	<p>Uses a comparison of everyday plausible events (possibly a known historical event) as an <u>example</u> leading to a spiritual truth. Parables in the Bible might be thought of an extended metaphor.</p> <p>Luke 15:3-7 And He told them this <i>parable</i>, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' "I tell you that <i>in the same way</i>, there will be <i>more</i> joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.</p>
Paradox	<p>Uses what seems to be a contradiction.</p> <p>Matthew 16:25 For <i>whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it</i>; but <i>whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it</i>.</p>

¹¹ Bullinger, E. W., *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, page 9.

Irony	<p>Uses an idea in such a way that it naturally conveys the opposite meaning. Sarcasm is a form of irony.</p> <p>1 Kings 18:27 And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened."</p>
Anthropomorphism	<p>Uses physical words to give human traits to God or inanimate objects.</p> <p>James 5:4 ... and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.</p>
Hyperbole	<p>Uses words to exaggerate a simple statement.</p> <p>Judges 20:16 Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.</p>
Metonymy	<p>Uses words to express a cause, effect or subject.</p> <p>Cause – Sword = war Ezekiel 14:17 Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,</p> <p>Effect – Two nations = two infants who will become the patriarchs of two nations Genesis 25:23 ... Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body;</p> <p>Subject – House = family Luke 19:9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.</p>
Synecdoche	<p>Uses a few words to express a part of something for the whole.</p> <p>Genesis 42:38 ... then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."</p>
Polysyndeton	<p>Uses a word to intentional slow the message down. Each point separated by and in the following passage is important to the story.</p> <p>Luke 14:18-19 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.'¹⁹ "And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.'</p>
Asyndeton	<p>Uses commas in place of conjunctions to intentionally speed the reader through the information to get to the important message.</p> <p>Luke 14:12-14 ... But when you give a reception, invite <i>the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind</i>, and you will be blessed, since they do not have <i>the means</i> to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.</p>
Euphemism	<p>Uses pleasant words when harsh words are intended. Absalom had already died in the following passage.</p> <p>2 Samuel 18:32 Then the king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be as that young man!"</p>

Personification

Uses human characteristics with non-human things.

Psalm 85:10 Lovingkindness and truth have **met** together; Righteousness and peace have **kissed** each other.

We all use these same FIGURES OF SPEECH every day in our conversations with people. We may not know their formal names, but we naturally know how to use them all!

WHEN WE READ PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE IN THEIR FULL CONTEXT,
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE FIGURES OF
SPEECH MEAN SOMETHING ELSE THAT THE LORD WANTS US TO
KNOW.

IT IS NOT A MYSTERY OR HIDDEN SECRET!

**FIGURES OF SPEECH ARE USED TO EXPLAIN OR GIVE AN
EXAMPLE OF A SPIRITUAL TRUTH!**

*Why then do we not recognize when false teachers twist the
FIGURES OF SPEECH in the Bible to prove their own theological
or philosophical position instead of Gods*

... by grabbing God's thought to twist and prove their thought!

Example

When the head of the INTEGRAL YOGA INSTITUTE said, "Blessed are the pure in **heart**, Jesus said, for they shall see God," he twisted the FIGURE OF SPEECH to press his personal theology on the listener. After stating the Scripture, he then interprets it as follows:

"Yes, blessed are those who purify their consciousness, for they shall see themselves as God."¹²

**After all, everyone loves Jesus! Right! He quoted Jesus; therefore, the
Yoga interpretation must be right! Right!**

Wrong! The word "heart" is a metaphor for the *soul* or *conscience* and the Swami rewords that part of the Scripture accurately. However, he then MISQUOTES the last part of the Scripture to prove his theology.

¹² Swami Satchitananda

A big difference exists between what the Scripture says and what you want it to say!

Exegesis VS Eisegesis

Exegesis The interpreter draws from the passage the truths that the LORD intends to communicate <i>... reading what the text plainly says.</i>	Eisegesis The interpreter reads into the passage his own truths, bias, ideas that he intends to communicate <i>... reading what the text does not say.</i>
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Example

When the POSITIVE CONFESSION CHRISTIAN TEACHERS say, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue,”¹³ they twist the FIGURE OF SPEECH to press their personal theology on the listener. After stating the Scripture, they then interpret it as follows:

“If you speak evil, you will receive evil. If you speak good things into your life, you will receive good things. If you speak to your wallet and proclaim that it will be filled with money, it will be filled with money.

If you declare that a new Cadillac will become yours and appear in your driveway, speak it into existence. If you want healing from your cancer, speak it with your tongue and you will be healed. Whatever you say will come to pass; therefore, do not speak anything negative; speak only positive confessions.”

After all, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue!” *Right!*

Wrong! The words “death and life” are metaphors for the eternal destination of your *soul*. Romans 10:9 agrees when it says, “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” The word “power” is actually the Hebrew word *hand* and is a literal metaphor for *strength*.

The statement that “**death and life are in the power of the tongue!**” does determine the eternal destiny of your soul but has nothing to do with confessing your earthly desires for possessions.

THE ORIGIN OF THE POSITIVE CONFESSION THEOLOGY
came from the cults.

**CHRISTIAN SCIENCE, MIND SCIENCE and other
METAPHYSICAL RELIGIONS**

¹³ Proverbs 18:21

Figures of Speech were used in Scripture because they were useful in clearly explaining the meaning of each passage in the original culture and time of the recipient!

*The Old Testament was written for the nation of Israel.
Creation until the time of Jesus!*

*The New Testament was written for the Church.
The time of Jesus until the end of human existence!*

The Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament.

The New Testament is the completion of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament must be interpreted in light of its fulfillment found in the New Testament.

The New Testament must be interpreted in light of its foundation in the Old Testament.

ONE IS NOT COMPLETE WITHOUT THE OTHER!

BUT TRANSLATING THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT FIGURES OF SPEECH INTO THE VARIED CULTURES OF THE WORLD TODAY IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AND CONFUSING AT TIMES!

Dr. Walter Martin
*Founder of the
Christian Research
Center
(b.1928 – d.1989)*

Many times in Dr. Martin's lectures, he would tell how difficult it was for the Wycliffe Bible Translators to translate even the simplest Scriptures into some current languages and cultures. One example involves John 14:1, "**Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.**" As mentioned before, the word "heart" is a metaphor for the *soul* of a person in the culture of the Church of the first century and the heritage of the nation of Israel. It is the part of a person that needs a Savior; it is the part of a person that lives eternally after the death of the body. The word "heart" in this passage does not mean the organ that pumps the blood through the body; it means the actual person living in the temporary earthly clay body.

For one tribe, the "heart" was not the seat of the spiritual person; rather, the *liver* was the soul of people in that culture. After struggling to translate the passage so it made complete common sense to the tribe, the text was translated "**Let not your liver quiver; believe in God, believe also in Me.**"

Wycliffe Bible Translators have thousands of these examples!

The Bible translators for each language go to great lengths to put the intent of the Old and New Testament passages in the contemporary plain and simple common sense language of each culture.

As an example, there are even word differences in the New King James Versions distributed in America versus those in England today; the words may be the same but the definitions of those words may be different.

Interpretation Difficulty # 2:

Translating Figures of Speech

The interpretation of FIGURES OF SPEECH can become heretical when translated incorrectly across cultural boundaries.

Example | **John 1:1-3, 14** In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ... And the **Word** became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In the John 1:1-3, the “**Word**” is a figure of speech referring to Jesus before He was born into this world as a human. It is also an indication that He was the creator of the world.

However, Sun Myung Moon, a Korean, says about this passage,

John 1:3 states that man was created by the Word. Consequently God’s purpose of creation was that the first man should have accomplished the purpose of the Word by becoming the incarnation of the Word; but he fell without keeping the Word of God, thus leaving the purpose of the Word unaccomplished ... God attempted again to fulfill the purpose of the Word by recreating fallen men according to the Word ... Seen from this perspective, we can understand the Bible (John 1:10) only clarifies the fact that Jesus was a man who had perfected the purpose of creation, and does not signify that he was the Creator Himself.¹⁴

Moon goes on to say, “Jesus, as a man having fulfilled the purpose of creation, is one body with God. So, in light of his deity he may well be called God. Nevertheless, he can by no means be called God Himself.”

Moon teaches that many persons can be deity.

The original intent of the Scripture in context, culture and language means nothing to this group. How do we know?

In the introduction to his book, *Divine Principle*, Sun Myung Moon states:

Until our mission with the Christian church is over, we must quote the Bible and use it to explain the *Divine Principle*. After we receive the inheritance of the Christian church, we will be free to teach without the bible.¹⁵

Therefore, the Scripture is misused to prove another book has more authority than the Bible! (A topic for a future lesson in this series!)

¹⁴ Divine Principle, page 163

¹⁵ Divine Principle, page 163

Another cult reads into the English translation of John 1:1-4 the following interpretation:

Jesus, before his earthly life was a spirit creature named Michael, the first of God's creation, through whom God made the other created things. As a consequence of his birth on earth which was not an incarnation, Jesus became a perfect human, the equal with Adam prior to the fall. In his death, Jesus' human nature, being sacrificial, was annihilated. As a reward for his sacrificial obedience, God gave him a divine nature. Jesus was neither coeternal with God nor coequal with God.¹⁶

Still another cult reads into the English translation of John 1:1-4 the following meaning:

God the Father already had a physical body before mankind was placed on earth; his Son acquired a physical body by being born of Mary; the Holy Spirit remains a spirit. But all three "constitute the presiding council of the heavens. ... The passage is simple, precise, and unambiguous. ... That the Word of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father in that beginning and who was Himself invested with the power and rank of Godship, and that He came into the world and dwelt among men, are definitely affirmed. ..." ¹⁷

God used to be a man but was able to learn how to be a god, and all Mormon men are planning on becoming gods just as they say our heavenly Father did.¹⁸

Why do all false teachers and cults use mainly *Figures of Speech* passages to bolster the theology of their religion?

Because they can bend and twist the meanings of the words for their benefit!

On to Definition of Words Part 1

¹⁶ Jehovah's Witness

¹⁷ James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1977) p. 32

¹⁸ Harry Ropp, *Are Mormon Scriptures Reliable*, 1987) p. 15.