A Study on the Skill of Generalization

Copyright, J. Michael Strawn

From everywhere in the Bible. THE NATURE OF GENERALIZATION FROM SCRIPTURE TO TEMPORAL MATERIAL EXISTENCE.

PART 1: LEGITIMACY.

#1. We shall define LEGITIMACY as developing a language manifold, perfectly organic to a text of Scripture and equally parallel to the inherent meaning of that particular text.

#2. 1 Samuel 17 is the particular text. One may generalize to this linguistic proposition: MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT DETERMINE OUTCOMES.

#3. David had every apparent material disadvantage as he offered combat to the Philistine champion, Goliath. The Philistine was more than adequately prepared to deal a mortal blow to the Israelite challenger.

#4. However, that text forces into our reasoning the fact that material disadvantage and as well, material advantages, had nothing to do with the outcome of the battle. THE OUTCOME OF THE CONTEST WAS PRE-DETERMINED BY THE WILL and POWER OF GOD.

#5. The generalization impinges upon the force of nature and human personal experience. By natural standards David should have perished; while Goliath dominated the battlefield. Human lived experience, almost always, agrees with nature.

#6. So the question: Of what importance is our generalization that material circumstances do not determine outcomes? More precisely, are we to put faith in generalizations from Scripture that defy nature and human experience?

#7. To elevate biblical generalization above human reason presents an immediate test of faith; especially when our lives are at stake and those of our loved ones.

#8. To generalize from Scripture and then to force that idea or set of ideas into our daily life requires an unbendable conviction.

THE CONVICTION: OUR ONLY INTEREST IS LEGITIMACY OF THE GENERALIZATION! Once the Almighty instructs us to go down to battle, we go. When the Lord leads us to the Red Sea, we await not death but deliverance, Exodus 14. As His Excellency the King makes promises to us that have no root in the natural nor in human experience, we generalize that MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT DETERMINE OUTCOMES!

From everywhere in the Bible. THE NATURE OF GENERALIZATION FROM SCRIPTURE TO TEMPORAL MATERIAL EXISTENCE.

PART 2: VALIDITY.

#1. The term VALIDITY we define as an issue. The issue is this: Since any generalization from Scripture defies the natural and our personal lived experience of it, should we believe that the generalization holds VALIDITY IN THE "REAL WORLD"? In other words does it, will it, can it "work" in the material realities?

#2. With noticeable regularity within the flow of Scripture, examples abound to show that THE ISSUE OF VALIDITY HAD GREATER BELIEVABILITY THAN LEGITIMACY!

#3. The Israelites turned back on the day of battle at Kadesh-Barnea, Numbers 13, 14. Faithless. Abraham and Sarai surrendered to THE ISSUE OF VALIDITY regarding the promise of God about having a son in their dotage, (Genesis 16). Hence, the faithless decision to seek VALIDITY or workability through Hagar.

#4. Peter, asking Jesus to allow him to walk on the water, began that experience in questionable faith. LEGITIMATE GENERALIZATION like MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT DETERMINE OUTCOMES, Peter referred to THE ISSUE OF VALIDITY, Matthew 14.

#5. Biblical teaching always affirms that while human reason believes that VALIDITY is the safer option, it is in fact the more dangerous! Consider the case of Rahab, Joshua 2. Rahab lived on the walls of Jericho; a "dangerous" place to be according to rational thought, yet she clung to LEGITIMACY.

#6. LEGITIMACY and VALIDITY are not just terms. They represent two different ways of reading Scripture! VALIDITY EDITS REVEALED TRUTH DOWN TO THE MORE COMFORTABLE LEVEL OF HUMAN RATIONALISM: Faithless.

#7. LEGITIMACY defies nature, the human mind, experience. It correspondingly elevates generalization from the Bible above the "safer" and "more realistic" findings of VALIDITY! And that is biblical faith!

From everywhere in the Bible. THE NATURE OF GENERALIZATION FROM SCRIPTURE TO TEMPORAL MATERIAL EXISTENCE.

PART 3: CERTAINTY.

#1. ALL LEGITIMATE GENERALIZATIONS CONVEY CERTAINTY IN TERMS OF THEIR MEANING.

#2. This case of certainty is inherent in the derivation of the generalization. MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT DETERMINE OUTCOMES; (1 Samuel 17), the specific language of our working generalization, is directly immediate to the biblical text.

#3. The precise wording of the generalization is detached from lived experience; while its linguistic construct is purely indebted to and parallel to the revelation. Therein lies the CERTAINTY.

#4. CERTAINTY becomes recognizable by the powers of SELF-EVIDENCE (that which needs no further explanation). We are mindful that clarity and certainty are not identical.

#5. Theories of Interpretation do not produce CERTAINTY. Much of that offers, sometimes at most, POSSIBILITIES. No CERTAINTY there, ambiguity abounds. Interpretation of Scripture inherently promotes ambiguity. Generalization from Scripture banishes uncertainty and ambiguity.

#6. CASE EXAMPLE: The Old Testament Prophets. The symbolism in the prophets can be used to reach conclusions not warranted by the grammatical structure of the revelation. For example, the proposition could be argued from Zechariah 6, that the "red horse" represents contemporary communism.

#7. Question is: How certain is that interpretation? One of the problems with such interpretive approaches is that they begin with TIME, NOT THE REVEALED TEXT: One looks at contemporary historical conditions and tries to fit the biblical symbol to our rational experience.

#8. MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT DETERMINE OUTCOMES is a generalization organic to the text of 1 Samuel 17. That unity is called CERTAINTY!

From everywhere in the Bible. THE NATURE OF GENERALIZATION FROM SCRIPTURE TO TEMPORAL MATERIAL EXISTENCE.

PART 4: ONE MAN ALONE WITH THE WORD OF GOD, Genesis 22; Hebrews 11; Galatians.

#1. Abraham was put by Providence into position to make a terrifying decision. "He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you'", Genesis 22.

#2. To obey was to counter Abraham's personal experience, his emotional stability and to test the man's trust in God and in revelation. IT WAS A TEST!

#3. From the point in time that Abraham received the mortal command, to the point in time he executed it, the patriarch was ALONE WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

#4. Beset by the expressed will of God, Abraham, under those conditions, still turned to a more detailed consideration of the grammatical construction of the language of the revealed promise.

#5. "it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called'", Hebrews 11:18. The patriarch did not consult with others regarding the decision to make. He was alone with the Almighty and the language.

#6. Without question, Abraham GENERALIZED FROM THE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OF GOD'S PROMISE TO A NON-LINEAR CONCLUSION. "He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type", Hebrews 11:19.

#7. Abraham did not consult with a pre-existing "community of faith" to support his reckoning. This man in that state of affairs made THE REVEALED TERMS THE AXIS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCE. To arrive at that axis is the purpose of generalization.

#8. So, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son", Hebrews 11:17.

#9. GENERALIZATION FROM SCRIPTURE TO TEMPORAL MATERIAL EXISTENCE is not subject to previously-held theological positions, not subject to nature nor to the experience of nature.

#10. LEGITIMATE GENERALIZATIONS are uniquely dependent upon the language manifold of revelation.

ONE MAN/ONE WOMAN/ONE BOY/ONE GIRL ALONE WITH THE BIBLE HAS NO DISADVANTAGE!

From everywhere in the Bible. THE NATURE OF GENERALIZATION FROM SCRIPTURE TO TEMPORAL MATERIAL EXISTENCE.

PART 5: FAITH.

#1. Generalization from the biblical language manifold constitutes a severe break between faith and human rationalism. There is no apparent reconciliation possible between them.

#2. Part of human free will is the ability to represent time, things and circumstances as one so chooses. This part of human nature was noticed by the "serpent" in Genesis 3. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'"?, v.1.

#3. Thus begins the satanic ploy to convince men in the temporal circumstance, that only HUMAN WISDOM and EXPERIENCE ARE TRUTH-DEFINING.

#4. By satanic representation, the word of God was mischief. "The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'", v.4, 5.

#5. The issue can be correctly assessed as that of HIGHER ORDER MAPPING. The place of man in time and the comprehension of immediate realities can each be represented by revealed language or, on the other hand, by human wisdom and experience.

#6. FAITH is a way of determining the differential between the two. Adam and Eve had to put FAITH in one or the other. FAITH IS A REPRESENTATION OF REPRESENTATIONS!

#7. As far as men are concerned, FAITH in the word of God is a statement that revelation is THE HIGHER REPRESENTATIONAL ORDER; or to the contrary that rationalism affords the HIGHER ORDER MAPPING OF TIME and ETERNITY.

#8. The threshold between the two is death. This generalization reduces down to one's immediate circumstances and historical conditions. The serpent's mission was to sow doubt about revealed truth. And then to present rationalism as the actual HIGHER ORDER MAPPING.

#9. Generalization from the Bible to temporal material experience brings HIGHER ORDER MAPPING TO BEAR UPON OUR MINDS and UPON OUR CIRCUMSTANCES! Rationalism is always fading away!