

AN INTRODUCTION TO

figures
of
speech

IN THE SCRIPTURES

a teaching series by
HARBOR LIGHT FELLOWSHIP



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“Figures of speech are at the basis of all true translation, interpretation,
and understanding of the Scriptures.
For years I had asked myself the question, “What’s really important in the Scriptures?”
I finally discovered that whatever God wanted to emphasize beyond the literal sense,
usage, and understanding of the words, He put into a figure of speech.
Thus the figures of speech used in God’s Word are God’s own markings of the Scriptures
as to what He considers important.”

...

There is no branch or subject of Bible study more important than figures of speech.
Yet I know of no branch of study which has been so severely neglected.
Since all of God’s works are perfect, and His Word is one of His works
(perhaps the greatest of all His works), it must also be perfect. God magnified His Word
above all His name (Psalms 138:2).
So we ought to look for the accuracy of figures of speech in the Scriptures.

Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille

“Rediscovering Figures of Speech”

The Way Magazine

March/April 1984

page 35

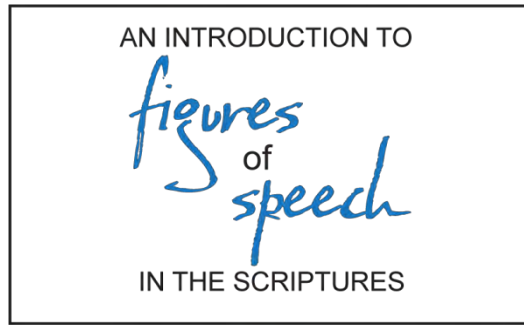


Table of Contents

| | | |
|--------------------|--|----------------------|
| Session 1 - | <i>An Introduction to Figures of Speech in the Scriptures</i> | Steve Zolezzi |
| Session 2 - | <i>Figures of Speech of Repetition</i> | Jesse Carr |
| Session 3 - | <i>Figures of Speech of Comparison</i> | Michael Young |
| Session 4 - | <i>Metonymy, Synecdoche, Metalepsis, Idiom</i> | Steve Zolezzi |
| Session 5 - | <i>Parables</i> | Steve Zolezzi |
| Session 6 - | <i>Metaphors Relating to Jesus Christ</i> | Jim Daggon |
| Appendix - | <i>For Further Study</i> | |



Handout for Session 1 –
An Introduction to Figures of Speech
Steve Zolezzi

The Importance of Figures of Speech

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

God is perfect. His Word is perfect. The use of the words in the Word is perfect.

Figures of Speech--a key as to how God's Word interprets itself in the verse.

Figures of Speech add emphasis, drawing attention to that which is being communicated.

"Figures of speech used in God's Word are God's own markings of the Scriptures as to what He considers important."--Dr Wierwille.

Definition

When the rules of a particular language are deliberately and purposely departed from such that the information is stated in an unusual or non literal sense, the resulting words form expressions that are called figures of speech

Non literal sense: Compare Luke 4:4/Matthew 4:4--*condescensio*

Unusual sense: Psalm 136, Psalm 118:8, 9 repetition; Acts 2:25—historical present

Categories of Figures of Speech--omission, addition, change

Literal and figurative

God's Word is to be accepted literally whenever and wherever possible with the exception of orientalisms and figures of speech.

Sometimes people take that which is literal and understand it as a figure.

Sometimes people can take that which is figurative and understand it as literal.

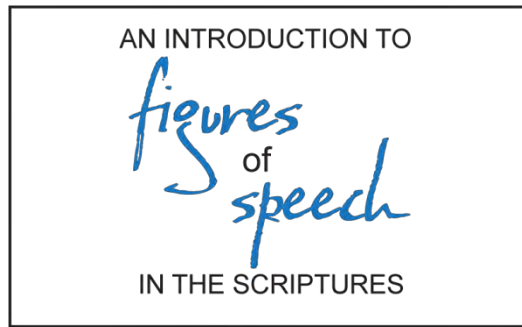
Matthew 5:28,29 hyperbole--change our thinking and actions, not eyes or hands

Further Study: Are the Dead Alive Now?, chapter #7

The disciples with the words of Jesus:

John 11:5-14--euphemism; Matthew 16: 5-12--*hypocatastasis*

Jeremiah 15:16



Handout for Session 2 –
Figures of Repetition
Jesse Carr

Anaphora is the repeating of a word or words at the beginning of several successive lines or verses, clauses, or sentences.

| | | |
|---------------|----------|------------------|
| Deuteronomy | 28:3,6 | blessed |
| Deuteronomy | 28:15,20 | cursed |
| 1 Corinthians | 13:4-8 | charity, whether |

modern-day example:

Every child must be taught these principles. Every citizen must uphold them. And every immigrant, by embracing these ideals, makes our country more, not less, American
President George W. Bush's inaugural speech

Polysyndeton is merely one special form of Anaphora in which the word “and” is repeated. Some definitions include other conjunctions, but we will be looking at “and”
When it is used, there is no conclusion is at the end. Each phrase is to be considered before moving on.

With “no ands” the hearer or reader is not asked to stop and consider each item individually, but to proceed to the end where there is something of greater emphasis.
THE EMPHASIS IS AT THE END

With “many ands” God wants us to consider each item individually. There is no climax at the end. The emphasis is on each item in the list, as in the shopping list.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Genesis 1:1-2:3 | in 34 verses, 102 acts of God are individually emphasized by this figure |
| Acts 1:8 | each is important |

Asyndeton

This figure is the enumeration of things without the use of conjunctions. It is the opposite of Polysyndeton. With “no ands” the hearer or reader is not asked to stop and consider each item individually, but to proceed to the end where there is something of greater emphasis. THE EMPHASIS IS AT THE END

Philippians 3:5-7

emphasis on what Paul has gained in Christ “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”

Exodus 15:9-10

emphasis not on what enemy has done but what God accomplished

We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardships, support any friend, oppose any foe **to assure the survival and the success of liberty**. President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural speech.

Polyptoton

The repetition in close proximity of words that have the same roots, even the repetition of the same word in different parts of speech or inflections. (“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” --FDR)

Ephesians 4:8

he captivated the concept of captivity (personified) captive, captured the that which captures

Luke 22:15

similar style to Ephesians

Genesis 2:17

“dying thou shalt die”

Modern Example:

"Love is an irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired."—Robert Frost



Handout for Session 3 –
Figures of Comparison
Michael Young

Simile: Basically means a resemblance and is modestly defined as an explicit comparison usually using “like” or “as.”

Everyday example: Stop running around like a chicken with your head cut off.

Examples from God’s Word:

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Matthew 9:36

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Metaphor: Means transference and is sometimes called a compressed simile because it has a subject and something it is related to, but there is no word to make the resemblance explicit. So it might also be simply defined as an implicit comparison.

Everyday example: My car is a tank.

Example from God’s Word:

Isaiah 40:6

All flesh is grass

Hypocatastasis: This is sometimes called an implied metaphor. The subject is implied rather than stated. “My car is like a tank” is a simile; “My car is a tank” is a metaphor; and “I drive a tank,” is hypocatastasis.

Everyday example: When my rich aunt died, the vultures swarmed.

Example from God’s Word:

Acts. 20:29

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Prosopopoeia or Personification: Human attributes are applied to inanimate objects or abstract ideas.

Everyday example: When justice is portrayed as a blindfolded woman with a sword in one hand and a scale in the other.

Example from God's Word:

Genesis 4:10

And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

Condescensio: Human and sometimes animal characteristics are attributed to God.

Everyday example: It's in God's hands.

Example from God's Word:

II Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.



Handout for Session 4 –

Metonymy, Metalepsis, Synecdoche, Idiom

Steve Zolezzi

Metonymy: This figure of speech uses one name or noun instead of another to which it stands in a certain relation, not resemblance. The figure is a change of noun.

Modern-day examples: "The White House called." "Heaven help us all."

Examples from the Word of God:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Acts 2:26 | "my tongue was glad" "Tongue" is put for the words or language expressed by the tongue |
| Genesis 25:23 | "Two nations are in thy womb" The effect (nations) is put for the cause (twins in the womb.) |
| 2 Kings 4:40 | "...there is death in the pot" The effect (death) is put for the cause (something poisonous) |
| Acts 21:21 | "...to forsake Moses" Moses is put for the law he gave to the children of Israel |
| Acts 17:31 | "...he hath given assurance (<i>pistis</i>)" Believing is put for what it is based on. |

Further Study: See Romans 1:17 in [A Journey Through Acts and the Epistles](#)

Metalepsis: This figure of speech is a double or compound metonymy.

Modern day example: "He drank his house."

Example from the Word of God:

Ephesians 2:13 "blood of Christ"
The blood represents his death. His death is put for what he accomplished in his death.

Further Study: 1 Corinthians 1:17 "the cross of Christ" See Jesus Christ our Passover, p. 235-237.

Synecdoche In this figure of speech, one word receives something from another word which is *internally associated* with it by connection of two ideas. The English name for this figure is transfer.

Look for the part being put for the whole or the whole being put for the part.

Modern day example: "I'm going to beat your butt."

Examples from the Word of God:

Genesis 1:5 "And the evening and the morning were the first day."
The evening (part) is associated with the night time (whole).
The morning (part) is associated with when it is daylight (whole).

Romans 12:1: "...present your bodies a living sacrifice"
The body (the part) refers to the whole person. They were to present themselves

Philippians 3:19 "...whose God is their belly"
Belly (the part) refers to the whole person.

Mark 16:15 "...preach the gospel to every creature. "
Here the (whole) creature stands for mankind (the part.)

Idiom This figure of speech is a peculiar usage of words or phrases unique to each language; expressions which have been coined to mean certain things.

Modern day examples: "...knee high to a grasshopper;" "What's up dog?"

Examples from the Word of God:

Acts 9:28 "coming in and going out"
This means the daily life and conduct.

- Acts 13:51 "...shook off the dust of their feet"
They left their animosity, bitterness, restraint, or other negative feelings.
- Exodus 4:21 "...I will harden his heart"
Hebrew idiom of permission. Active verbs were used by the Hebrews to express not the doing of the action, but the permission of the action.
- Further Study: Matthew 10 38: "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." See Jesus Christ our Passover, p. 228-236.
- 2 Corinthians 6:11 "our mouth is open"
Hebrew idiom. This means speaking at length with liberty or freedom.



Handout for Session 5 –

Parables

Steve Zolezzi

Definition:

A parable is a placing beside or side by side for the purpose of a comparison; an utterance which involves a comparison. It is an extended simile usually with one point of comparison.

Keys to understanding parables:

Be careful with comparisons. Christ is coming as a thief. What is the comparison?

Look for the point of comparison.

Who was Jesus Christ talking to? What is the context?

Interpretation and application in light of to whom addressed.

Are there orientalisms involved?

Matthew 13:10-17 Jesus taught some things to the disciples that he did not teach to the multitude.

Examples of parables

Luke 18:1-8

Purpose: "...to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint:"

Comparison: the widow's requests to the judge and the exhortation to the disciples to pray and not faint

The parable (v.1) is about a widow and an unjust judge. God is not an unjust judge.

Luke 18:9-14

The parable was to certain that trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

Two points of comparison: the Pharisee and those who exalted themselves; the publican and those that humbled themselves.

Luke 15: 1-7

Who is he talking to? The Pharisees and scribes who murmured.

v.7 Point of comparison: Note "likewise." The man who rejoiced who found his lost sheep and the joy in heaven over a sinner that repents.

Luke 15:8-10

Who is he talking with? the same people.

Orientalism concerning the piece of silver

v. 10 Point of comparison: Note: "likewise" The woman who rejoiced who found her lost piece of silver and the joy in heaven over a sinner that repents

Luke 15:11-32

Who is he talking to? the same people

Orientalism concerning swine and swine herders

v. 24, 32 Point of comparison: The joy of the father whose son had returned and the joy in heaven over a sinner that repents.

Matthew 22: 1-14

Who is he talking to in the context?

Matthew 21:42-46 chief priests and Pharisees who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ.

v. 11 Orientalism of the wedding of the king's son; You can't get in by your own provision.

See "many are called, but few are chosen" in its context.



Handout for Session 6 –
Metaphors Relating to Jesus Christ
Jim Daggon

Metaphor – Definition:

A metaphor declares that one thing IS (or represents) another. A metaphor is used to illustrate a single point of comparison. It is sometimes called a compressed simile, because it does NOT use the words, “like” or “as”. A metaphor is a stronger comparison than a simile and carries more emphasis.

Some Examples:

John 8:12 – Jesus is the light of the world. The comparison is that light allows one to see and not walk in darkness. Jesus Christ brought spiritual light so people could see spiritually.

John 6:32-36 and 6:51-56 – Jesus is called the bread of life. As bread provides nourishment for our physical life on earth, Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for the people to have nourishment unto eternal life.

1 Corinthians 11:23 - 25 – “This (bread) is my body... This cup is the new testament in my blood” – The bread represents his body. By his stripes we were healed (1Peter 2:24). The cup represents his death, and what we have in his death, the forgiveness of sins.

John 10:9, 11 – “I am the door... I am the good Shepherd.” The comparison is that Jesus is the way for people to have access to God, and that he (Jesus Christ) was willing to lay down his life for them.

John 15:5 – “I am the vine you are the branches...” – The connection between vine and branch is crucial for the branches to survive and have nourishment. According to the custom in the lands and times of the Bible, the grapevine represented the presence and blessing of God. The comparison here is that Jesus Christ is the source of God’s blessing and prosperity for the people.

1 Corinthians 10:4 – “...that Rock was Christ.” In Exodus 17 God provided a rock that gave physical water for people to drink. The people were to look forward to the coming of Christ. The comparison here is that Christ is the spiritual rock who provides spiritual water for people.



Materials for Further Study

The following are some books that the Biblical student can reference to study the field of figures of speech further. Many of these were mentioned by the teachers in the series “An Introduction to Figures of Speech in the Scriptures”.

For General Information on Figures of Speech

Bullinger, Ethelbert W. *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978.

For Reference to Figures of Speech in Particular Verses or Sections of Scripture

Cummins, Walter J. *A Journey Through the Acts and Epistles*. Franklin, OH: Scripture Consulting, 2006.

Can be used as a reference to help understand verses that contain figures of speech. It will sometimes list in its footnotes figures of speech that appear in a particular verse.

_____, *Demonstrating God's Power*. New Knoxville, OH: American Christian Press, 1985.

Chapter 9 – “The Parable of the Sower” is a detailed study of this parable, putting together the records in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

_____, *Scripture Consulting Select Studies*. Franklin, OH: Scripture Consulting, 2010.

Chapter 1.7 – “Consideration of Figures of Speech and Customs” delves into the role that understanding of these topics plays in “Considerations for Working the Scriptures”.

_____, *The Acceptable Year of the Lord*. Franklin, OH: Scripture Consulting, 2005.

Can be used as a reference to help understand sections of the Gospels which contain parables or employ other figures of speech.

Geer, Christopher C. *Walking in God's Power™ Foundational Class Student's Study Guide*. Stirling, Scotland: Word Promotions Ltd., 1995.

Chapter 3.2 – “In the Verse – Figures of Speech” handles this topic as part of the keys to how God's Word interprets itself.

Wierwille, Victor Paul. *Are the dead alive now?* New Knoxville, OH: American Christian Press, 1982.

Chapter 7 – “Lazarus in Abraham's Bosom” explains a figure of speech in Luke 16.

_____, *Jesus Christ Our Passover*. New Knoxville, OH: American Christian Press, 1980.

Contains references to and explanations of some of the parables and other figures of speech.

_____, *Living Victoriously*. New Knoxville, OH: American Christian Press, 1982.

Chapter 12 – “Living Victoriously in Service” gives an overall introduction to the role of figures of speech in the Scriptures and then goes into examples of similes, metaphors and *hypocatastases*.

_____, *Power for Abundant Living*. New Knoxville, OH: American Christian Press, 1971.

Chapter 5 – “The God-breathed Word” explains the significance of figures of speech as God's markings of what He wants emphasized and then details the figure *condescensio* in 2 Timothy 3:16.