H. Technicalizing terminology   Virgil Warren, PhD

Assuming technical usage in the scripture is a way of trying to get something more specific out of a text than the author meant. Technicalizing is a kind of restrictive reading.

Technical contrasts with positive, general, or descriptive usage. Technicalizing shows up in taking words as appellative names rather than as descriptive ones: church of Christ, church of God, disciples become Church of Christ, Church of God, Disciples. Technicalizing leads to expectancy for uniform usage. It specifies a smaller group within those who could be described by the word picture. In church offices, *elder* means more than "older"; it means a(n older) man who oversees a group of believers as when qualifications are listed and a process of selection takes place.

In biblical study, interpreters should not expect as much technical usage because (a) the books are not tightly worded philosophical treatises; (b) they were sent to the general membership comprised of the general populace; (c) they were written by people whose background was Semitic, and Hebrew tends to exhibit a more loosely worded language convention. (d) The writings were delivered by bilingual authors communicating cross-culturally. (e) The New Testament writings are from the infancy of the church, when formal terminology is less likely to have developed. Cross-cultural communication needs to be more fluid, more generalized, dealing more with central issues, relying less on terminology and more on intuitive perception via the nature of the case. A particular turn to a word may exist in a context, not because it is a specialized usage, but because it is in that specialized context.

Saying that biblical books were written in the "language of the people" means (1) they have lass technical terminology, (2) are not highly abstract, (3) are not tightly structured, (4) have practical application in view, (5) are not burdened down with rare expressions, (6) are written with a lower degree of efficiency of expression.

The technicalizing tendency in biblical interpretation comes from people poring over the biblical text for centuries. They also bring to it questions that the ancient authors were not discussing; consequently, to have the text discuss such issues, readers resort to supposing technical expression. The best we can do with unaddressed matters is to extract principles that clearly lie behind the directives biblical writers <u>do</u> give and apply <u>those</u> to today's issues. In the end, some of our questions may need to remain matters of opinion.

1. Technicalizing terms in biblical interpretation and English usage

**church of God, church of Christ
προστάτις (*prostatis*), "helper," in Romans **16:2
**διάκονος (*diakonos*), "deacon," can mean a helper, server, minister, or a special office in contrast to other offices
**ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*), "apostle," can (1) mean anyone sent. At a more specialized level it (2) refers to an itinerant or general functionary who serves as an extension of (3) the apostolic office in a technical sense. (See elsewhere "Paul as Primary Apostle.")
**μαθητής (*mathētēs*), "disciple"; a disciple can be a learner, or follower, of another person. In the New Testament it describes all of Jesus' followers, but in many references, it indicates the twelve in contrast to the rest.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit has become for some a technical expression for the outpouring of the Spirit on the church collect *vs.* upon the individual person within it. The expression is probably as broad, however, as the flexible phrase *gift of the Holy Spirit* since it originated with John the Baptist as he addressed his general audiences.

**Note liquid *vs.* fluid. The former technically applies to what forms its own boundaries (water, oil, juice) while the other describes what does not form its own boundaries (gases). Everyday people discard the difference.

***neighbor*; *faith* and *works* in Paul, *break bread*, *ordain*

***Basketball* is usually a positive term that means the game as normally played. It can be made technical by saying basketball in contrast to *"make-it-take-it,"* where the team that scores gets to keep position.

**James D. J. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, pp. 98ff.

A "cup" refers loosely to however much a vessel shaped like a cup will typically hold—a cup rather than a gallon, a cup of cold water (Matthew **10:42; Mark **9**:41). Nevertheless, "cup" as a measurement in recipes is a definite amount equal to a half pint, that is, 8 ounces.

***The twelve* refers to the primary set of apostles even at a time when Judas was not part of the group: 1 Corinthians **15**:5 (*"[Jesus] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."*)

In Luke **6:15, for example, is *Zealot* a technical term meaning (1) a member of the sect of the Zealots—Simon the Zealot—or does it mean (2) an energetic, a high-energy person?

2. Technicalizing terms in historical theology

***justification *vs.* sanctification. *Sanctification* has come to mean growth in Christian life quality, whereas in the Bible itself it means the more general idea of being set aside to God.

***Saint* in scripture designates Christians because they have been made "holy" in Christ. In Christian tradition, however, it refers to Christians who have been formally recognized as especially holy for outstanding things they have done—like miracles—or experiences they have had.

***Discipling* has come to mean a one-on-one pattern of accountability in carrying through on Bible study and memorization, prayer, and other spiritual exercises designed to promote spiritual maturation. In the Bible, it is used more broadly for the whole process of gathering disciples of Jesus, converting them, and helping them grow in their relationship to him.

***Shepherding* today sometimes refers to the practice of dividing up the congregation and assigning them to the different elders of the church, who are supposed to keep close to their groups to know their needs and assist whenever possible. Shepherding in the New Testament refers to the whole range of the elder's responsibilities in a congregation.

**"Persecution for the name" is an expression *we* use for a particular kind of persecution of Christians that developed in the latter first century and early second century. That does not become a reason for dating 1 Peter later than Peter's lifetime, because he says, *"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed."*

**Pro-life, Pro-choice, ordain

The dictums *"use biblical terms in biblical ways"* and *"calling Bible things by Bible names"* originated in contrast to technicalizing biblical terms to carry more precise meanings than the Bible uses.

3. *Pesher* method of interpretation

Pesher refers to a specific application of a general principle. The idea differs somewhat from technical expressions or specific applications. Technical expression means the <u>author</u> intended the term in a technical (*vs.* general) sense. Specific application is the work of the <u>interpreter</u>, not what the author meant directly. Accuracy lies with the skill of the applier, not the author; the applier may correctly apply a general point to a specific case <u>he</u> believes is appropriate. Pesher, however, may assume that the <u>author</u> intended that meaning at two levels. One intended meaning is the general principle or prediction itself, and the other meaning is the specific case to which the interpreter applies it—presumably with authorial approval.

Cases like Acts **6**:20 (< Psalm **69**:25 + **109**:8) are <u>applications</u> of Old Testament principles, not instances that imply <u>interpretation</u> of authorial intent as if meant in reference to this particular New Testament event.

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