

1. **Introduction:** We have mentioned several figures of speech including **hyperbole, personification, oxymoron, metaphors, and similes**. Today we will look more closely at metaphors and similes and their use in Scripture.
2. **Metaphors and Similes:** When direct description is difficult, metaphors are often used to describe important aspects of a thing by comparing it with something else.
 - ◆ Metaphors directly compare things that, though fundamentally different, share some properties. Value might be one such shared property. Example: Comparing literary value to monetary value. *“This manuscript is worth as much as a perfect diamond!”*
 - ◆ Metaphors use verbs like is, are, was, were, has, have.
 - ◆ Metaphors are based on properties shared by things that may be quite different. They use aspects known to be true of one thing to reveal something about another thing. Examples: (1.) “Time is money!” (2.) “He has a heart of stone!” (3.) “The world is a stage!” (4.) “God is light.”
 - ◆ These metaphors convey truth about the value of a manuscript, the value of time, remind that some hearts are hard and difficult to penetrate, that people’s actions in the world are somewhat like actors on a stage, that in some ways God is like light.
 - ◆ However, metaphors must not be interpreted literally. The truth of a metaphor is limited. It compares similarities and ignores differences.
 - ◆ Similes are closely related to metaphors. Similes work grammatically by using “like” or “as” to compare the dissimilar things. My chair is cold as ice. She smells like a rose. She sings like a lark. He swims like a porpoise.
 - ◆ The concept is that some attributes of the things being compared apply to both things. For example, “I’m as happy as a pig in a mud puddle.” I am not a pig and don’t like mud puddles, but happiness can rightfully apply both to a pig and a person.
 - ◆ “The world is a stage” is a metaphor, but “the world is like a stage” is a simile.
 - ◆ Imagination (and a sense of humor) help in understanding metaphors/similes.
 - ◆ Metaphorical thought and language are essential. It is the only way to **bring before a person’s mind things not directly available to the senses**. Things not available to our senses covers a lot of territory.
 - ◆ Most of what everyone knows and understands is, by necessity, metaphorical.
 - ◆ Many things we need to know things about never come before our physical senses. We did not or cannot see, hear, taste, smell, or feel the object.
 - ◆ Knowledge about a thing not available for evaluation by our senses, can be transferred to us by relating the new thing to something we have experienced by using a metaphor or simile.

- ◆ The thing not available to our sense might be described as red as an apple, blue as the sky, valuable like time, hard as a rock, soft as a feather bed, sweet as honey, hot as fire, cold as ice, or any other familiar bit of knowledge.
- ◆ Imagination that enables creating metaphors is a wonderful gift from God. As far as we know, of all creatures, only people possess imagination.
- ◆ Our imagination enables us to think about God even though, as Paul says, God is One *“whom no one has ever seen or can see”* (1 Timothy 6:16b).
- ◆ God is an invisible Spirit and cannot be evaluated through our senses. God’s self-revelation is the basis for all thought about Him.
- ◆ That revelation is primarily through metaphors and particularly metaphors of humanity (e.g., the right arm of God, the face of God).
- ◆ We experience God spiritually through our God-given capability to bring before our minds that which we cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or touch.
- ◆ To fully experience Christian life, imagination is essential. Realities (like angels) cannot be seen, but Scripture insists they are nonetheless real.
- ◆ The Holy Spirit enables our understanding through imagination. Imagination is a remarkable gift which must be carefully used to avoid undue speculation.

3. A Couple of Examples from Scripture:

- ◆ A metaphor: **Psalm 100:3**, *“Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”* (metaphor – equates His people to sheep)
- ◆ A simile: **Isaiah 53:6**, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way.”* (Simile – compares His people to sheep – that is, they have characteristics in common)
- ◆ 1Peter 1:24, *“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls.”* (Simile: flesh is like grass in some of its characteristics)
- ◆ Isaiah 40:6b, *“All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.”* (Metaphor: equates flesh with grass.)

4. A Key Metaphor from Scripture: Light is used in Scripture in various ways to describe aspects about God. There is a variety of metaphors.

- ◆ Light is a familiar physical reality. God is not physical but pure spirit, invisible to human senses, known to us only through His revelation. “Light metaphors” provide valuable insight for what is otherwise indescribable in human language.

5. OT Examples of Light as a Metaphor: In Scripture God’s self-revelation is described as light that enables seeing truth. (Psalm 36:9b) *“in your light do we see light.”*

- ◆ (Psalm 27:1) ***“The Lord is my light and my salvation.”*** (metaphor equating the Lord to my light and salvation)
 - ◆ Light is used in Scripture to metaphorically indicate purity, wisdom, moral guidance. Light is itself visible, but light also makes other things visible.
 - ◆ Light is associated with the historical Jesus in the same way as with God the Father.
 - ◆ Example: In Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah wrote concerning God’s plan for Messiah, ***“I will make you as a light for the nations ...”*** (simile – Messiah shares some characteristics with light)
6. **NT Examples of Light as a Metaphor:** The light of Jesus reveals the world’s darkness and is victorious over it. John 1:4-5, ***“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”***
- ◆ Those who follow Christ are said to *be “sons of light”* (John 12:36), or ***“the light of the world”*** (Matthew 5:14).
 - ◆ Jesus refers to John the Baptist as a ***“burning and shining light”*** (John 5:35).
 - ◆ Of God John says, ***“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”*** (1John 1:5). Metaphorically that means God is completely holy, totally opposed to all that is sinful and false.
 - ◆ Scripture associates an ethical meaning of purity and truth with the presence of light.
 - ◆ A fascinating attribute of light is that it is both visible and makes other things visible. By Christ’s “light” we see sin’s tragedy, and by His light we see the way to salvation.
7. **Metaphors/Similes for Union with Christ:** John Newton (author of *“Amazing Grace”*): ***“The Union of a believer with Christ is so intimate, so unalterable, so rich in privilege, so powerful in influence, that it cannot be fully represented by any description or similitude taken from earthly things.”*** (www.monergism.com/topics./union-christ).
- ◆ Newton tells us that Union of a believer with Christ is important, intimate, unalterable (endures forever), rich in privilege, and powerful in influence.
 - ◆ The mystery of Union with Christ is so complex that no set of similes or metaphors based on earthly things can be adequate for full understanding.
 - ◆ Like the Holy Trinity, Union with Christ is inherently difficult to comprehend. Scripture’s multiple metaphors help.
8. **Metaphors from Jesus, Paul, John, and Peter:** Each metaphor gives a different perspective. The variety of metaphors about Union indicates it is not likely not subject to being fully explained. All the metaphors are useful and needed but, as John Newton so rightly says, even with them all, they are insufficient to provide full understanding.
- ◆ **Two Metaphors from Jesus:** (1.) In John 15:1-17 Jesus describes union with Himself as being like the union of a vine with its branches. This powerful extended metaphor

conveys the sense of a vital and necessary union between Christ and believers. By prospering in the vine with the spiritual “sap” of Christ flowing through, believers produce the good fruit God intends. Branches cut from the vine die. This extended metaphor will be covered in detail later.

(2.) Jesus says union with Him is in some sense like the union between Himself and His Father (John 17:20-26), The differences are profound but will be less so when we are glorified. How might this metaphor mislead us?

◆ **Metaphors from Paul:** Paul gave several metaphors for Union with Christ.

(1.) In a manner similar to Jesus’ metaphor of the vine and branches, Paul compares Union with Christ with the roots and stock of an olive tree diffusing life and fructifying sap through all the branches, both native and grafted (Romans 11:16-24). The added thought of grafted branches is important.

(2.) In Ephesians 4:15 Paul compares Union with Christ to the union between the head and members of the body. Christ, as the head, is the source of vitality and volition, as well as of sense and intelligence; the members are united to the head as if by a common set of nerves and community of feeling, life, and motion. This metaphor is powerful and introduces factors missing in that of the vine and branches.

(3.) In Ephesians 5:31-32 Paul likens Union with Christ to the union between husband and wife. The union between spouses is established as a sacred covenant constituting them one legal person. The husband is the accountable authority. They are to be united by tender affection, community of interest and legal obligations.

(4.) As wonderful as is the bond between husband and wife, it falls short of the bond of union created by the Holy Spirit between believer and Christ. In Ephesians 2:18-22 Paul likens union of all believers in Christ as forming a holy temple to God.

◆ **Metaphors from Peter:** Peter used a metaphor of a union of stones in a structure connected to their foundation and cornerstone. The cornerstone and foundation sustain all the rest. Stones are cemented to the corner stone and to each other, forming one whole. Stones are inanimate. Peter broadens the metaphor by referring to “living stones.” Together, the living stones compose a spiritual temple with the cornerstone being Christ (1 Peter 2:4–6; 1 Corinthians 3:11–16).

◆ **Metaphors from John:** In John’s Gospel his metaphor of Christ as “the light of men” and Christ’s followers as “the sons of light,” are both related to Union With Christ. Two more specific metaphors of union are “I am the bread of life” and “I am the vine.” The entire bread of life discourse provides necessary truth about Union, but union is specific in John 6:56: *“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”*

9. **What is Next:** A detailed discussion of Jesus’ extended metaphor of the vine and its branches.