

## **BIBLICAL CRITICISM:** **Its Uses and Abuses**

### **Introduction**

**Biblical criticism** is the application of human sciences to access the biblical text at deeper levels. **When used properly**, biblical criticism helps us to *utilize* the text so as to concentrate on God's message. **When used improperly**, biblical criticism leads us to *scrutinize* the text and to be distracted by human dimensions.

### **I. Textual Criticism**

Textual criticism examines the transmission of the scriptures through analysis of manuscripts.

**Use:** Textual criticism gives us exegetical confidence by providing an accurate text.

**Abuse:** Textual criticism lets us hide behind our skepticism while we look for the "perfect" text.

### **II. Form Criticism**

Form criticism identifies literary forms and their respective functions.

**Use:** Form criticism clarifies how particular literary forms serve as vehicles of the gospel.

**Abuse:** Form criticism casts the forms as cultural accretions which hinder a humanistic message.

### **III. Source Criticism**

Source criticism determines which sources were drawn upon in the composition of a text.

**Use:** Source criticism helps us appreciate the unity and plurality of the gospel.

**Abuse:** Source criticism obsesses over a solution to the puzzle of writers' textual dependence.

### **IV. Redaction Criticism**

Redaction criticism attends to the editorial decisions made by authors.

**Use:** Redaction criticism helps us identify an author's thematic and theological emphases.

**Abuse:** Redaction criticism makes us hypersensitive to the "agenda" of the author or the needs of his community.

### **V. Social-scientific Criticism**

Social-scientific criticism investigates the social dynamics of a textual community in its particular culture.

**Use:** Social-scientific criticism helps us understand the Word of God as a word to real people in real communities.

**Abuse:** Social-scientific criticism reduces biblical spirituality to communal dynamics.

### **VI. Conclusion**

Grammatical-historical or Historical Critical?