

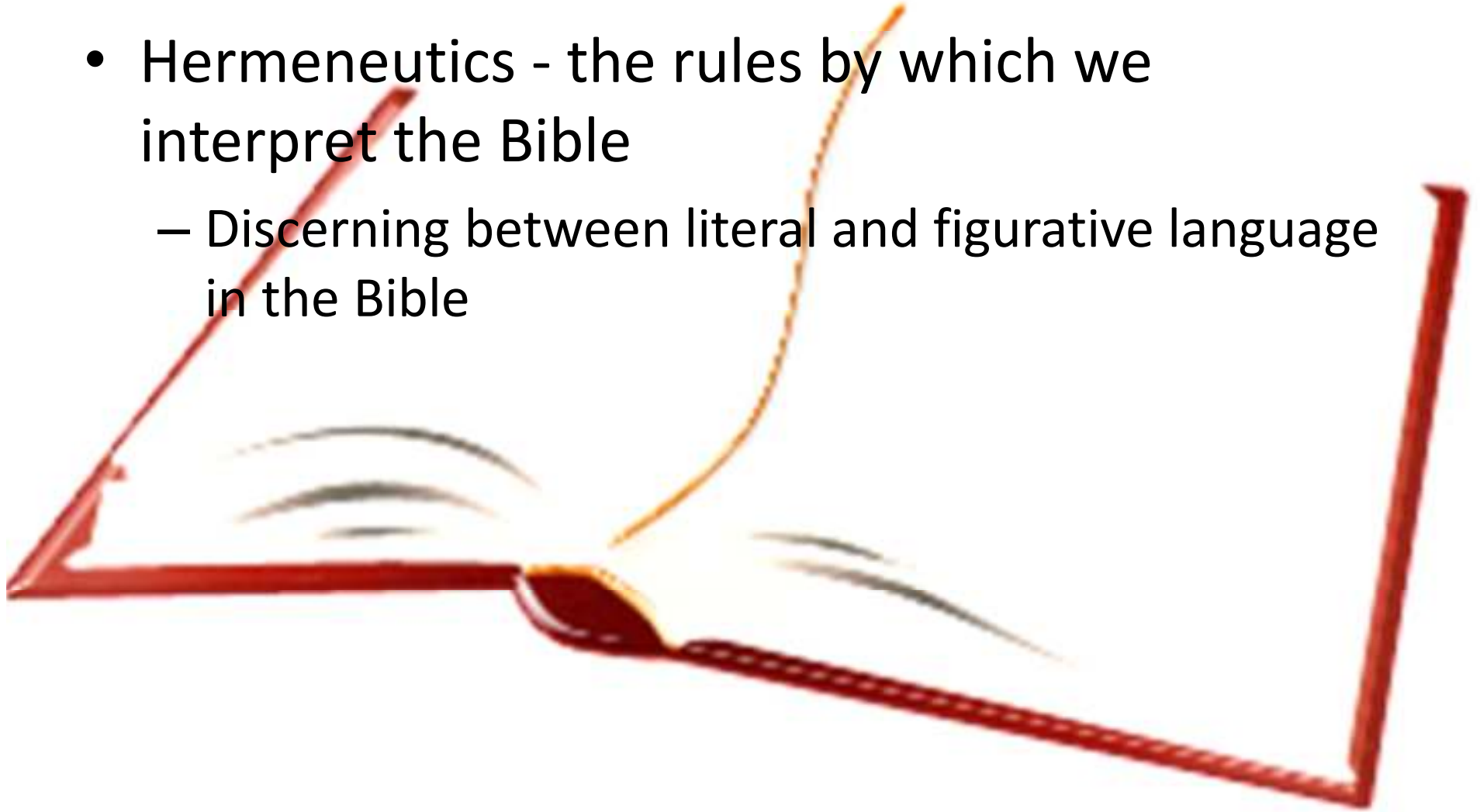


What Does the Bible Teach About Figurative Speech?

May 12, 2022 Thursday Indepth Bible
Class of the Trilacoochee church of Christ

What Does the Bible Teach About Figurative Speech?

- Hermeneutics - the rules by which we interpret the Bible
 - Discerning between literal and figurative language in the Bible



What Does the Bible Teach About Figurative Speech?

- 1Cor. 3:10-13 - “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.”

Defining The Matter

- Literal (Webster's): "According to the letter; primitive; real; not figurative or metaphorical; as the literal meaning of a phrase; Following the letter or exact words; not free; as a literal translation."
 - Literal is taking the reading at its face value.
 - John 11:35 - "Jesus wept."
 - We read this verse and accept the fact that Jesus, in the flesh, cried tears on behalf of Lazarus. We do not attempt to make it figurative

Defining The Matter

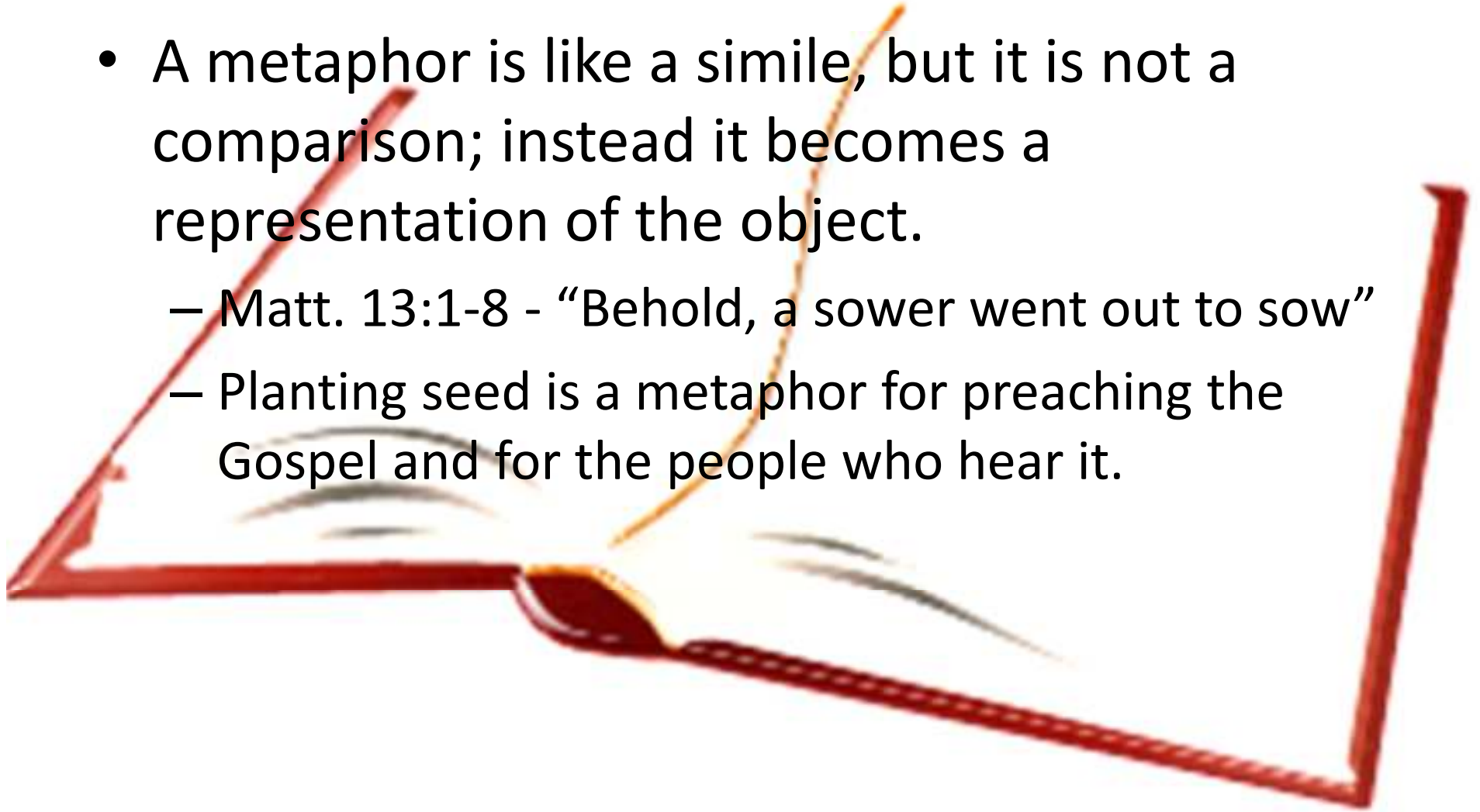
- Figurative (Webster's): "Representing something else; representing by resemblance; typical; Representing by resemblance; not literal or direct. Abounding with figures of speech"
 - Figurative is not literal; it represents something
 - 1Cor. 10:4 - "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."
 - Is Christ literally a rock? We recognize that the rock represents Jesus.

Kinds Of Figurative Language

- A simile is a comparison between two events or things.
 - Matt. 13:45-46 - “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”
 - Is the Kingdom of Heaven literally a high-quality pearl?
 - Jesus is comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to a pearl which a man will give up all he has to own.

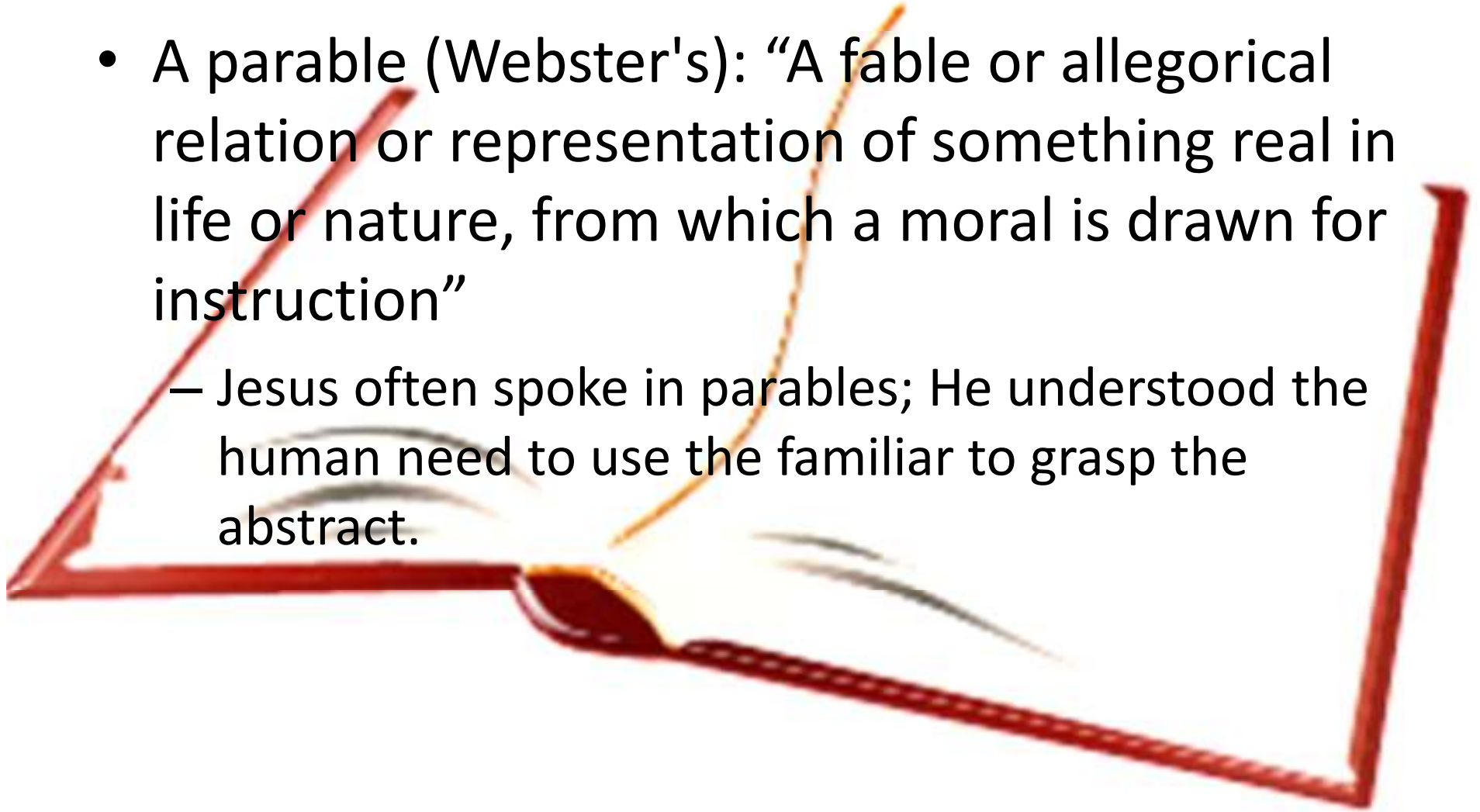
Kinds Of Figurative Language

- A metaphor is like a simile, but it is not a comparison; instead it becomes a representation of the object.
 - Matt. 13:1-8 - “Behold, a sower went out to sow”
 - Planting seed is a metaphor for preaching the Gospel and for the people who hear it.



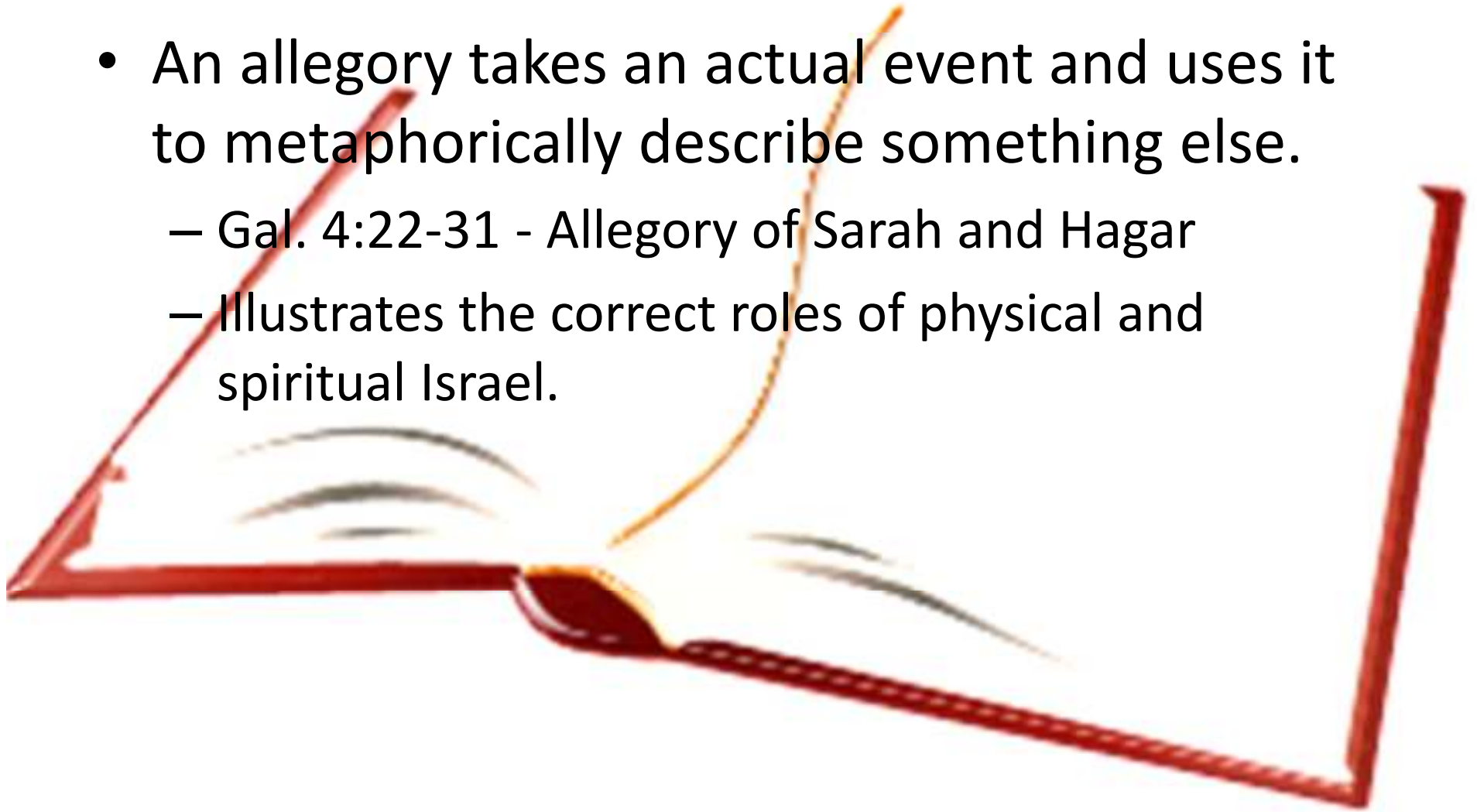
Kinds Of Figurative Language

- A parable (Webster's): “A fable or allegorical relation or representation of something real in life or nature, from which a moral is drawn for instruction”
 - Jesus often spoke in parables; He understood the human need to use the familiar to grasp the abstract.



Kinds Of Figurative Language

- An allegory takes an actual event and uses it to metaphorically describe something else.
 - Gal. 4:22-31 - Allegory of Sarah and Hagar
 - Illustrates the correct roles of physical and spiritual Israel.

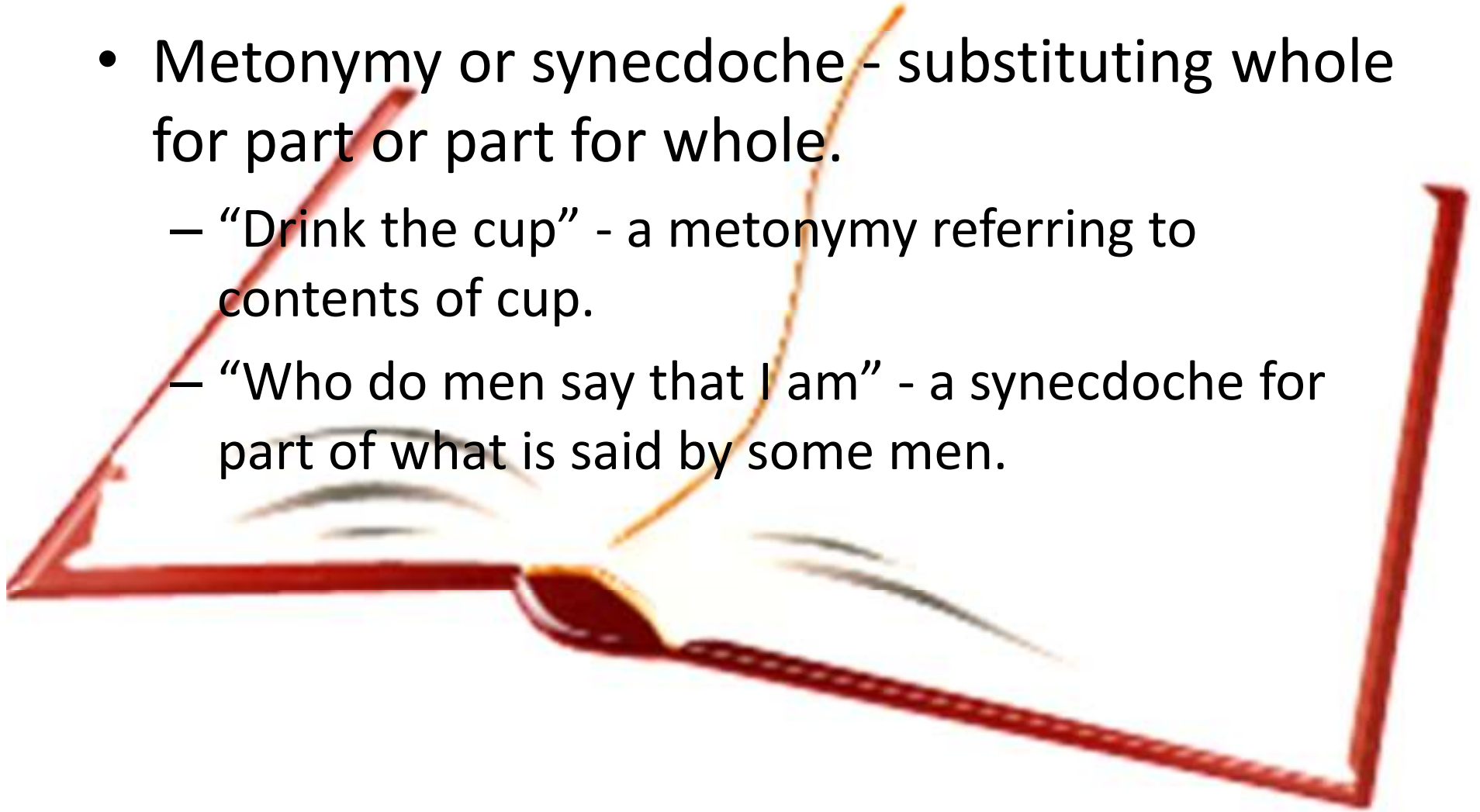


Kinds Of Figurative Language

- A symbol (Webster's): "The sign or representation of any moral thing by the images or properties of natural things; an emblem or representation of something else."
 - The Lord's Supper - the bread is the symbol of the Lord's body, and the fruit of the vine the symbol of the Lord's blood.
 - They are not literally the body and blood, they remind us of the body and blood of Jesus.

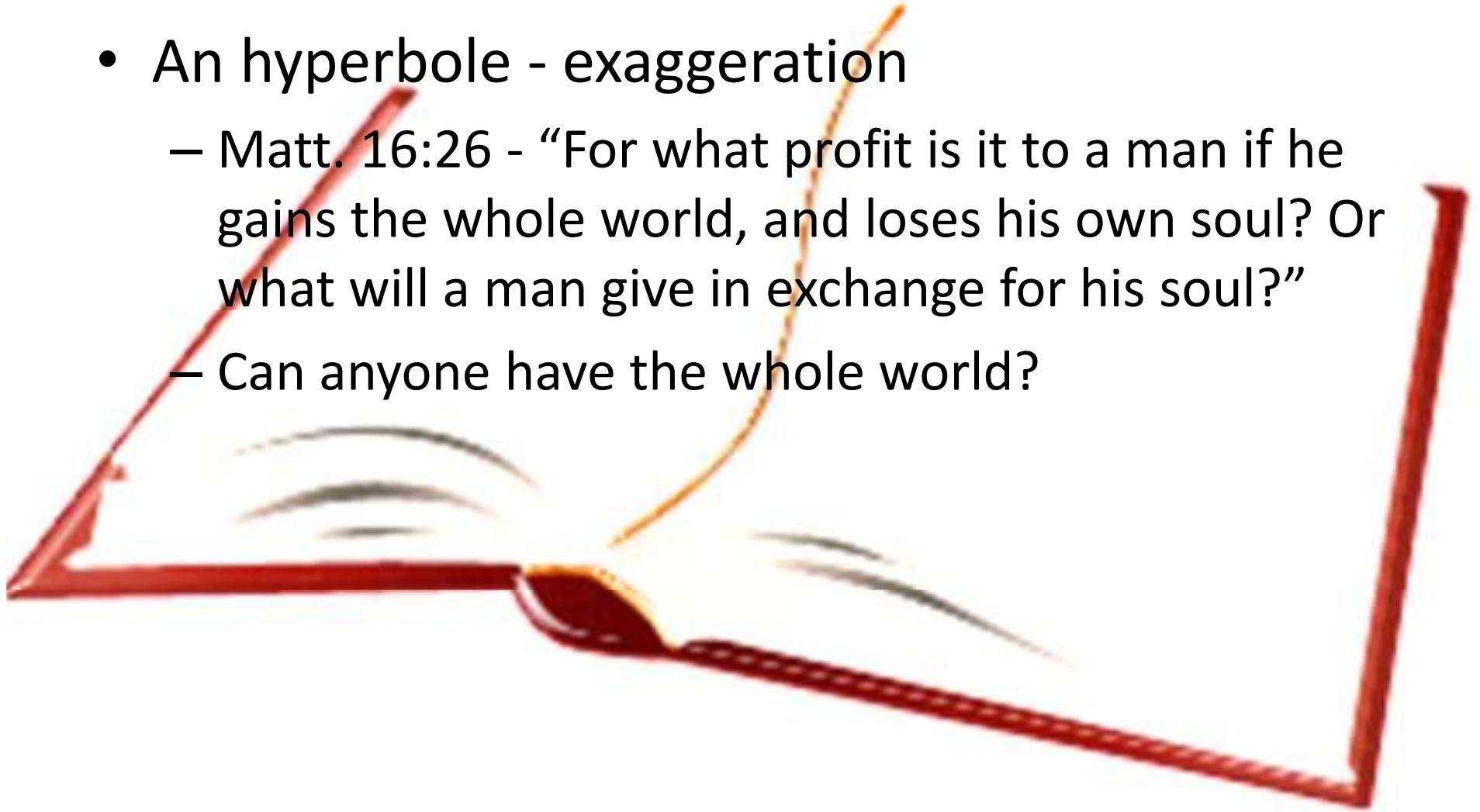
Kinds Of Figurative Language

- Metonymy or synecdoche - substituting whole for part or part for whole.
 - “Drink the cup” - a metonymy referring to contents of cup.
 - “Who do men say that I am” - a synecdoche for part of what is said by some men.



Kinds Of Figurative Language

- An hyperbole - exaggeration
 - Matt. 16:26 - “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”
 - Can anyone have the whole world?



Application In Interpretation

- Fundamental rule - interpret everything literally unless:
 - Such a reading is nonsensical,
 - A literal interpretation would cause a contradiction with another truth,
 - The context does not allow for a literal interpretation.
- If any of these conditions exist, we must interpret the material in a figurative manner.

Application In Interpretation

- Nonsensical readings

- John 4:10-11 - “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ 11 The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?’”
- Does the living water vs. dead water make any sense?
- Jesus compares the physical water that can only temporarily refresh the body with the eternally refreshing truth.

Application In Interpretation

- Contradictions

- Acts 2:16-21 is a partial quotation of Joel 2:28-32.
- Peter speaks of the sun turning to darkness and the moon to blood.
- Since there is no evidence that any of these signs literally occurred; what do we do with it?
- Peter is saying these things occurred on the day of Pentecost; it is up to try to understand what Joel meant by his signs, as opposed to saying that the signs have not yet occurred, creating contradictions that fuel Premillennialist heresies.

Application In Interpretation

- Context
 - Apparent contradictions seem to arise between Acts 17:30-31, 2Peter 3:9-10, and the book of Revelation.
 - According to the context, most of the book of Revelation is a vision; Paul's lesson to the Athenians and Peter's letters do not require a figurative interpretation.
 - Most of the contents of Acts and the Epistles are literal.

Application In Interpretation

- We must know why we believe a thing to be true.
 - 2Tim. 2:15 - “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
 - 1Peter 3:15 - “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”