



Introduction to Hermeneutics

Lesson 1

Prepare

Please read the following passages:

- II Timothy 3:16
- II Peter 1:20-21
- Psalm 119:160
- Matthew 5:17
- Deuteronomy 4:2
- Revelation 22:19

Study Guide

The lack of evangelism all relates back to how we handle the Scriptures (what we believe about the Word of God). Is the Word of God true? If we accept it as true and we handle it responsibly and correctly (and as the Word of God) then we're going to come to certain conclusions which include that Jesus is the only way. Hermeneutics forms the basis for the whole thing.

Hermeneutics: The art and science of biblical interpretation

Exegesis: The process of determining what the biblical text says

- Looking at the grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and literary context and determining what the text is saying

Interpretation: The process of determining what the biblical text means

- Determining what the author meant when he wrote the particular words

Hermeneutic: The set of principles used to determine what the biblical text means

Exposition: The process of communicating the meaning of the text

- Expository Preaching: The communication of what the text means based upon our interpretation and exegesis of the text which is derived from our hermeneutic (whether it be a biblical hermeneutic or an unbiblical hermeneutic)

Three Steps in Bible Study:

1. Observation

2. Interpretation

3. Application

We aren't observing the text just for the sake of seeing what's there. We aren't interpreting the text just for the sake of finding out what it means. The question is always, "So what? What do we do with the text?" The application is the purpose.

The immediate purpose and goal of hermeneutics interpretation is to correctly understand what the text says; the ultimate purpose and goal is to correctly apply the text.

I. FIVE THINGS WE HAVE TO BE CONVINCED ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD

A. Inspiration of the Scriptures (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21)

Inspiration is the process of the Spirit of God moving men to write the very words of God.

Inspiration extends to the precise meaning of every word and phrase.

It's not that the Bible contains the Word of God, it's that the Bible is the very Word of God. It is God-breathed.

The biblical authors wrote in this process of inspiration...

1. According to the accepted rules of language and communication

In order to communicate, we have to agree on certain rules (vocabulary and grammar).

Example: Catholics have a significantly different meaning of the word "grace" than what we would understand the Bible to teach "grace" means (two different definitions of the same word)

2. Through their own personal manner of thinking and expression

3. Within a historical context

- Not only the time in history when they wrote, but also the culture in which they wrote, economical situation, government, and all the things that contribute to worldview
 - Worldview: The lens through which we interpret life
- Example: David, while writing in Psalms, and Paul, while writing in Romans, wrote in different historical contexts about the "Spirit"

4. With the intent to be truthful and to be understood

B. Infallibility (Psalm 119:160)

Because the Scriptures are the very words of God, they are entirely true and absolutely trustworthy.

C. Inerrancy (Matthew 5:17)

Because the Scriptures are the very words of God, being true and trustworthy, they are completely free from error.

D. Authority (II Timothy 3:16)

Because the Scriptures are the very words of God, being true, trustworthy, and error-free, they have absolute authority.

We don't stand in judgment of the Scriptures, they stand in judgment of us.

E. Sufficiency (II Timothy 3:16)

Because the Scriptures are the very words of God, being true, trustworthy, error-free and authoritative, they are completely sufficient.

Sufficient for what? For us to live according to the will of God.

If these things are true of the Word of God, these demand a literal, grammatical, historical, and normal method of interpretation.

The Bible is both a human product and a product from God (similar to the incarnation – Jesus was fully man and fully God).

The text has...

1. Literal Interpretation – the text has objective meaning
2. Grammatical Interpretation – determined by the literary context
3. Historical Interpretation – illumined by the historical context

II. THE RATIONALE FOR A LITERAL, GRAMMATICAL, AND HISTORICAL HERMENEUTIC

A. The Purpose of Language

B. The Biblical Warnings (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:19)

- A principle that extends to everything that constitutes the Word of God

C. Fulfilled Prophecy

If the prophecies in the Old Testament were all fulfilled literally, when they were fulfilled, then we would expect that other prophecies would be fulfilled in the same way.

D. Authorial Intent

What did the author intend to communicate?

When we write somebody a letter, we don't want somebody else coming in and saying, "Well, I know what he said, I know what the words say, but this is what I think he means." If he doesn't know what we really meant, he has no right to come in and say, "Well, this is what I think he meant to say." Scripture is inherent and infallible and a person has no right to change it into what he thinks it means.

- Including the first twelve chapters in Genesis and the literal creation account!

There is only one correct interpretation for any given passage in Scripture. There are multiple applications for all generations. Our task is to figure out what it actually says so that we might know how to apply it.

III. AUTHORIAL INTENT: THE POSSIBILITIES

A. Truthful

B. Deceptive

C. Ambiguous

Jesus often was ambiguous when he taught so that the seeing would see, the hearing would hear, and the truth would be hidden from those who had hardened hearts.

D. Encoded

IV. THE NEED FOR A LITERAL, GRAMMATICAL, AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

A. Trying to bridge the gap between the author's mind and our mind

Our task is to try to figure out what the author meant when he was writing so that we're thinking and approaching it in the same way as the author.

V. SELECTED GUIDLINES FOR A LITERAL, GRAMMATICAL, AND HISTORICAL HERMENEUTIC

How do we get the right understanding of the Scriptures?

A. Read It Normally

B. Historical Context

C. Literary Context

D. Figurative Usage

VI. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF NORMAL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

A. Normal reading gives the most accurate results

B. Grammatical rules determine a word's function in a sentence

- Includes the tense of the verb, what the verb is referring to, adjectives, etc.

C. Lexical (dictionary) definitions provide all possible meanings

The word doesn't mean every possible meaning in a given context. It means only what it means in context.

D. Broad literary and historical contexts establish a range of possible meanings

E. The immediate literary context establishes a word's *single* specific meaning

Our task is to try to figure out what the one meaning of a word was in the author's mind when he was writing.

F. The context determines if words are used in a literal or figurative sense

G. If it's not in the text, somebody made it up!

VII. FIGURATIVE VERSUS ALLEGORICAL MEANING

FIGURATIVE	VERSUS	ALLEGORICAL
Tied to the Text	vs	Independent of the Text
Objective	vs	Subjective
Singular Meaning	vs	Possibly Multiple Meanings
Meaning Determined by the Author	vs	Meaning Determined by the Reader

God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, etc. were literal promises to the nation of Israel and were written to be understood literally.

The allegorical approach says, "This is what He says on the surface, but there's an underlying meaning under the text that you can't really get from the text itself; this is what we think He was getting at." This is the way many Christians handle, especially, the prophetic literature.

VIII. INTERPRETING APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

How do we handle the prophetic literature correctly? The meaning is...

- A. Tied to the Text
- B. Objective
- C. Singular
- D. Determined by the Author
- E. Sometimes Conveyed by Symbolism

It means exactly what it says, even if it uses figurative language.

We approach it the same way we approach every other part of the Scriptures.

IX. QUESTIONS FOR A LITERAL, GRAMMATICAL, AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

- A. What did the author say?
 - Process of observation
- B. What did the author mean by what he said?
 - Process of interpretation
- C. What would the recipients have understood?
- D. What did the author say elsewhere?
- E. What did other authors say?
- F. The Ultimate Questions in Bible Interpretation...

1. "What does this mean *to* God?"
2. The question then becomes, "What does this mean *for* me?" or "What are the implications?"

Applying Scripture interprets Scripture.

X. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN LITERAL, GRAMMATICAL, AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

- A. To enlighten hearts and minds so that we might see, understand, and accept God's revealed truth

The unbeliever might see what it says, but to understand it in a way that can be applied and to accept it is something that is outside the bounds of the capacity of an unbeliever. This is why it usually doesn't help to get into theological debates with unbelievers. Often times we're trying to debate something with someone who's not indwelt by the Spirit of God and has no capacity to understand and accept what we're talking about.

- B. To persuade us to act upon God's revealed truth
- C. To convict us when we depart from God's revealed truth