

## Theory

As we consider the topic of biblical hermeneutics, it is important for us to realize that there are a number of different approaches to how we interpret the text that we have been given in the Bible. In this course, we will first briefly address both the posture of hermeneutics, and the most significant methods of Bible interpretation. We will also conclude by presenting a basic description of our chosen hermeneutic, which we believe is practical, sensible, and Biblically consistent. As a follow up to this, we will also present instruction on some practical steps that best lead us into the practice of this hermeneutic as we engage the Bible in study.

Another important thing to understand is we look at these different ways of interpreting the Scriptures is to realize that each one of them is formed from a certain set of presuppositions, or pre-determined conclusions that people bring to the way that they interpret the Scriptures. We readily acknowledge that presuppositions are not only present but required when we study the Bible, so it is important for us to note what some of those presuppositions which helps us determine which hermeneutic approach is more biblically founded and supported.

### **Exegesis vs. Eisegesis**

From a philosophical standpoint, it is important to note that one's hermeneutic (means of interpretation) can be broadly categorized by one of two words: exegesis or eisegesis. We will define the terms briefly and explain how these two postures affect our hermeneutic.

Exegesis is the posture that the meaning of a passage is derived, or "mined out", from within the text. Exegesis views the passage as the container of the intended meaning of the original author (God through men), of which we as readers are meant to discover from within the text. With an exegetical posture, we assume our humility under the author's intended meaning and we seek to uncover it, understand it doctrinally, and apply it personally and contextually.

Eisegesis is the view that external presuppositions and knowledge are brought into the passage in order to come to an understanding of the meaning and application of a particular passage. To put it simply, eisegesis reads the meaning into the text. With an eisegetical posture, we assume authority and freedom as the reader to bring our own cultural and contextual assumptions to interpretation and we seek to validate those personally held presuppositions from the text.

## **Comparing Hermeneutic Approaches**

Biblical hermeneutics is a very old science, with a plethora of unique approaches, established over centuries. General speaking though, most of these approaches fit into one of two hermeneutic “families”, either the Allegorical or the Literal-Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic. We will briefly explain both in order to provide an adequate backdrop for presenting our chosen method of interpretation.

### **The Allegorical Hermeneutic**

The allegorical hermeneutic primarily sees the Bible as a grouping of writings that present general ideas, and not as historical events and interactions between human beings at actual points in time and space. This method although it sounds very negative much of it is indeed used by more liberal veins of what we would call the Christian religion and they use this very loose method of interpretation to support their various claims about what God can and indeed should do for us. This approach is certainly supported by those who would promote a much more man-centric view of the Christian faith and use it to support the various things that they desire for God to accomplish for them.

When we consider the presuppositional perspective of the allegorical method of Bible interpretation, we recognize that this view does not perceive the Bible as literal nor does it represent the actual facts of human history. This presupposition leads to a very loose conclusions as to the specific and particular meaning of a given passage. Because of this fact, much of the use of the allegorical method leads to very undefined and unverifiable conclusions and applications of what the Bible is speaking about. It is this approach then that is most easily associated with the hermeneutic posture of eisegesis.

### **The Literal-Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic**

The second broader category of Bible interpretation is known as the literal-historical-grammatical method. This method employs a more of a plain sense assumption that the Bible, believing that it means precisely what it claims, in that it represents actual recorded events and interactions of people in real space and time. It also assumed these stories literally represent the presence and interaction of God with humans history. Because of this fact, the literal hermeneutic not only permits but promotes a much more disciplined and structured method of Bible interpretation. It forces the student to come to consistent conclusions about what the meaning of a particular passage is and also provides boundaries for the potential application of the meaning of that passage.

With this in mind, we acknowledge that the student of the Bible brings this presupposition to their study of the Bible and it leads them to pursue that study with certain values and restraints. These values are:

- Uncovering the authors original intended meaning.
- Considering the application of the meaning to the original audience.
- Using a “principled” view of these conclusions as we consider the personal application of the meaning to our lives today.

## **Hermeneutical Blending**

We must acknowledge that in the broader Christian community, there is much blending of these two methods of interpretation that does occur. For example, we know that there are those in the Reformed community that would support a more literal method of interpretation, however when they come to the doctrine of the end times and the future revealing of the kingdom of God, they would tend to employ a more allegorical method of interpretation. Because of this, we must approach others with grace as we engage the scriptures together, but we must also strive to maintain as consistent a method as possible when it comes to the study of the Bible, no matter the context in the Bible that we find ourselves studying.

As we consider these two methods of Bible interpretation, it is our conviction to hold to the Literal-Historical-Grammatical method. We believe that this approach is most inline with the concept of revelation (God communicating to mankind), considers the grammar and language used, and provides the most consistent way to understand and apply the principles of the Bible as God intended us to. The next section of this course will outline some practical steps that be taken to employ Literal-Historical-Grammatical method to interpreting the Bible.