

History of Hermeneutics

A Broad Survey

Early Church

- ◆ Christ's and the Apostolic treatment of the Old Testament treated it as authoritative, historical and literal.
- ◆ When using the Old Testament they showed how it was looking toward the coming of the Messiah.
- ◆ They would also use it as an illustration. Example of this is Galatians 4 where Paul allegorizes.
- ◆ As Christ and the apostles taught they expanded the meaning and goals stated in the Old Testament.

Early Fathers

- ◆ By the 3rd century there was a marked shift in hermeneutics.
- ◆ Platonic thought was the norm and it affected the leaders of the Church.
- ◆ Philo of Alexandria was a Hellenized Jew who also influenced the early Fathers.
- ◆ Origen became the leader of what was known as the allegorical school.
- ◆ A school in Antioch came into being in the mid to late 3rd century to resist Origen.

Origen

- ◆ Was a neo-Platonist which saw the physical realm as a lesser reality.
- ◆ He taught three meanings of the Scripture:
 - ◆ The literal (basic meaning)
 - ◆ The soulish (focuses on religious living)
 - ◆ The spiritual (heavenly meaning)

Origen

- ◆ The spiritual meaning was the highest form of interpretation and was achieved by allegorizing.
- ◆ He taught that to take a literal meaning was crude, and made the Christian faith “grotesque.”
- ◆ Augustine followed in his footsteps and together their hermeneutic was the most common well into the medieval period.

Antioch School

- ◆ Stood in opposition to the allegorical school
- ◆ Taught that the plain and literal reading of the Scripture was the best approach and it guarded against making the Scripture say anything we want it to say.
- ◆ Many of the teachers were limited in their knowledge of Hebrew and it limited their ability with the Old Testament.
- ◆ They were in the minority and the Roman church was rising in power and was allegorical in its approach.

Roman Catholic Middle Ages 1200-1500

- ◆ The interpretation of the Scripture was defined by the Church and must conform.
- ◆ Allegorical method was the norm with two meanings:
 - ◆ Literal (but not the proper or true meaning)
 - ◆ Spiritual/Mystical with three levels:
 - ◆ Allegorical (Jerusalem is the Church)
 - ◆ Moral (Jerusalem is the human soul)
 - ◆ Anagogical (Jerusalem is heaven)

Reformation

- ◆ Radical changes came back into the Church-at-large.
- ◆ With the invention of the printing press the bible came into the hands of the common people.
- ◆ Intense debates by Luther with the Catholic Church were focused on what the biblical text actually said.

Luther

- ◆ Luther became a champion for Scripture over tradition. Scripture interprets Scripture.
- ◆ In some ways he emphasized the literal meaning of the text, especially on those passages related to salvation.
- ◆ But he never developed a solid hermeneutic and resorted many times to allegory and reading the New Testament backwards into the Old Testament.

Calvin

- ◆ Calvin rejected the allegorical method and moved much more toward a LGH approach.
- ◆ He would argue that the interpreter's job was to let the author's meaning be understood.
- ◆ When it came to prophetic passages he would often read a spiritualized meaning into the text.

Bottomline Goal

- ◆ For each of us to be able to show what a passage says. No reading into the passage. You can point to it and others can see it.
- ◆ For each of us to be able to show what is not said. Stretch your minds to consider ways you or others might read into the passage that are not present.

Competing Theologies

- ◆ There are many systems of theology that exist. They are frameworks through which theology is developed and put into an organized order.
- ◆ Each of these have a hermeneutic that drives it.
- ◆ Though many theologies exist, two specific ones affect Missio Dei:
 - ◆ Covenant Theology
 - ◆ Dispensational Theology

Covenant Theology

- ◆ This is what is known as Reformed theology.
- ◆ God deals with us through covenants.
- ◆ 2-3 key covenants that control the flow of the bible.
 - ◆ Covenant of Redemption
 - ◆ Covenant of Works
 - ◆ Covenant of Grace

Covenant of Redemption

- ◆ This was made within the Trinity primarily between the Father and Son.
- ◆ It was determined that the Father would give the Son a people for whom the Son was to save from sin.
- ◆ It was offered to the Son by the Father. The Son accepted it.
- ◆ The Son was to perfectly fulfill righteousness by obeying the law of God.

Covenant of Works

- ◆ This was a covenant made by God with Adam.
- ◆ Eternal life would be attained for him and his offspring with the condition that they perfectly obeyed His commands.
- ◆ Adam failed in this covenant by taking the fruit forbidden to him. The result was death.
- ◆ The Tree of Life was seen as a sign of the promise of this covenant.

Covenant of Grace

- ◆ Due to the failure of Adam God now made a new covenant with him and those God would save.
- ◆ Salvation was now offered in and through Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The requirement was to have faith in Jesus.
- ◆ The sign of the covenant was through circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament.

Hermeneutics of Covenant Theology

- ◆ High view of Scripture
- ◆ The New Testament interprets the Old Testament
- ◆ The Old Testament is the “shadow” and the New is the “reality”
- ◆ Israel of the Old Testament is now the Church of the New Testament

Dispensational Theology

- ◆ A more recent theological development in the 1800's
- ◆ It is known for seeing in the Scripture different ways God dealt with mankind. These are known as “dispensations.”
 - ◆ Usually seven in number
 - ◆ In each of them mankind was under some condition by God to be obeyed
 - ◆ Mankind failed to meet the conditions and a new dispensation would begin

Hermeneutics of Dispensational Theology

- ◆ The meaning of any Bible passage is in that passage, not somewhere else.
- ◆ Typology is not prophecy and the antitype does not eliminate the type.
- ◆ Israel and the Church are two distinct entities.
- ◆ The literal, historical and grammatical hermeneutics is the wisest method of interpretation.

Christocentric or Christotelic?

- ◆ Christocentric interpretation is very common today and is often a final, key part of Covenant Theology.
- ◆ A common statement made: *“There are two ways to read the Bible. The one way to read the Bible is that it’s basically about you: what you have to do in order to be right with God, in which case you’ll never have a sure and certain hope, because you’ll always know you’re not quite living up. You’ll never be sure about that future. Or you can read it as all about Jesus.”*
(Tim Keller)

Christocentric

- ◆ In Covenant Theology this is the key hermeneutical principle.
- ◆ This view sees that the most important question to ask of a passage is “What does the passage tell us about Christ?”
- ◆ You must use the person and work of Jesus Christ (the Gospel) as the lens throughout which you interpret the entire bible.
- ◆ Their desire is to show the redemptive plan and work of God through Jesus in all of the scripture.
- ◆ **This view has Christ IN every text and somehow the TOPIC of every passage.**

Christocentric

- ◆ Christ must be found in the text there is the need to go beyond the passage's actual words and meaning and read into it various analogies.
- ◆ Wisdom literature points out how we are sinful and how we need the One who embodies wisdom, Christ
- ◆ David and Goliath become a picture of how the ultimate David would vanquish sin, Satan, and death
- ◆ Samson's rejection by his tribe mirrors how Jesus would be rejected.

Christocentric

- ◆ Many aspects of this approach is helpful and good. Too long preaching has been moralistic and not overtly Christian.
- ◆ But by requiring that Christ be found in the text it ends up ignoring the actual meaning of the passage.
- ◆ We have a short video clip here that we want you to watch that illustrates this.

Christotelic

- ◆ This view says that all things in the bible find their end in Jesus Christ.
- ◆ This upholds the original meaning of a text but also considers how its trajectory is pointing to Jesus.
- ◆ All storylines in the bible will eventually intersect with Jesus. But this method will not try to find a way to make Christ the POINT of every passage.
- ◆ So the story of Samson is about a sinful man who nonetheless is used by God to punish the enemies of God. God is faithful in His care of His people, Israel. But there is a coming Judge who shall rule and judge in purity and truth.

Questions?

◆ matthentry@missiodeifellowship.org

◆ mattmiller@missiodeifellowship.org