

## Lesson 2

### *Authorial Intent & The Biblical Text*

#### **Discussion: “God’s Marvelous Mirror” by Zane Hodges**

- What did you gain from the reading?
- What questions did it raise for you?
- What did you find difficult or disagreeable?

#### **Authorial Intent**

- Defining Authorial Intent:
  - Authorial intent is the intended meaning by the author(s) of any communication, whether written, spoken, or communicated through any other means. (Such as body language, etc.)
- There is only \_\_\_\_\_ exact and absolute meaning to any communications and that is the one intended by the author. The recipient(s) of the communication must determine the intended meaning, using principles of interpretation that result in an accurate understanding of the message being communicated.

The following quotes are taken from noted experts on hermeneutics:

- E.D. Hirsch (Professor of Literature, University of Virginia)

*“For, once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text’s meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation. By an inner necessity the study of ‘what a text says’ became the study of what it says to an individual critic... Thus, when critics deliberately banished the original author, they themselves usurped his place, and this led unerringly to some of our present-day theoretical confusions. Where before there had been but one author, there now arose a multiplicity of them, each carrying as much authority as the next. To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation.”* (*Validity In Interpretation*, Dr. E.D. Hirsch, University of Virginia, p.3 & 5)

- Dr. Walt Kaiser. (Professor of Old Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School & Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary)

*“To interpret we must in every case reproduce the sense the Scriptural writer intended for his own words. The first step in the interpretive process is to link only those ideas with the author’s language that he connected with them. The second step is to express these ideas understandably... In human conversation, the speaker is always the author; the person spoken to is always the interpreter. Correct understanding must always begin with the meanings the speaker attaches to his own words.”* (“Legitimate Hermeneutics”. Dr. Walt Kaiser, p. 118, 120)

### **Instinctive Practices of Authorial Intent:**

- All of us practice instinctive principles (practices that we do automatically without being consciously cognizant of these principles) determining an author's intended meaning through what is being communicated.
- What are some examples of us practicing these instinctive principles?

### **Living In the 21st Century Relativistic World**

- *Relativism is the belief that there's no absolute truth, only the truths that a particular individual or culture happen to believe. If you believe in relativism, then you think different people can have different views about what's moral and immoral.* (Taken from [vocabulary.com/dictionary/relativism](http://vocabulary.com/dictionary/relativism))
- Relativism (the view that absolutes are determined only by the individual) is not new. It has been an issue for centuries. Read and discuss the following biblical passages.
  - Judges 21:25: *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what **was right in his own eyes**.*
  - 2 Timothy 4:3: *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but **according to their own desires**, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; (Emphasis, mine.)*

### **Discovering Authorial Intent**

- Three practices must be implemented to determine authorial intent if the author is unavailable to speak for himself or herself. These three are:
  - Examine to see if a statement made within the document or speech that states the authorial intent. For example, John 20:30-31 explicitly states the intention of the Gospel of John. "*I write these things so that...*". Therefore, the author's intent is clearly stated and determining the interpretation of the segments within the book should always be consider the authorial intent as stated.
  - Through thoroughly examining the contents and understanding who the original audience is/was, ask yourself what is the overriding question that is being answered. That will give strong indication of the author's intent.
  - Look for repetitious terms and or phrases. An author's intent may be evident by using certain terms for emphasis, giving indication of the intent of the communication.

### **Application Development & Authorial Intent**

- It is the opinion of the author of this course that it is better said something like this.
- There is only \_\_\_\_\_ correct interpretation of any passage of Scripture.
- But it is also true that there is only \_\_\_\_\_ correct and intended application of any passage of Scripture.
- But it is also truth that there are \_\_\_\_\_ ways and circumstances that this one application can be practiced.
  
- Example: 1 Peter 3:7
  
- Dr. Haddon Robinson, homiletics instructor at Dallas Seminary, Denver Seminary, and Gordon Comwell Seminary has stated the following:
  - *Sometimes we apply the text in ways that might make the biblical writer say, 'Wait a minute, that is the wrong use of what I said.' This is the heresy of a good truth applied in the wrong way. ("The Heresy of Application", Leadership Journal, Fall-1997, p. 21)*
  - *Inappropriate application can be as destructive as inept exegesis. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he tried to achieve victory through misapplication of Scripture...In refuting the devil, Jesus did not debate the grammar of the Hebrew text. Instead, He attacked the application of Psalm 91 to temple jumping." (Biblical Preaching, p. 29.)*