

Hermeneutics Workshop 01:
Why Study Hermeneutics?
 For the Bible Institute at GCBC Fall 2026
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Introduction:

Studying God's Word is an essential aspect of spiritual growth. Deeply studying a passage of Scripture involves more than just a quick read through the passage. The goal of this course is to help you study God's Word in a more thorough way. The reality is that lazy interpretation of Scripture can sometimes actually cause a believer to come to wrong conclusions about what God's Word says. People do interpret Scripture differently, and not every interpretation is correct. Faithful biblical interpretation seeks to understand what God communicated through the biblical writers before determining how that truth should be applied to us.

Course Overview:

- Week 1: Introduction: Why does Hermeneutics Matter?
 - **Homework: Choose a Passage**
- Week 2: Challenges of Interpretation
 - **Homework: Identify interpretive challenges**
- Week 3: Principles of Interpretation
 - **Homework: Establish interpretive principles**
- Week 4: Systems of Interpretation
 - **Homework: Consider theological/systematic assumptions**
- Week 5: Historical Interpretation: Bible Context
 - **Homework: Research surrounding context**
- Week 6: Historical Interpretation: Cultural Context
 - **Homework: Research cultural context**
- Week 7: Grammatical Interpretation: Genre
 - **Homework: Analyze literary genre**
- Week 8: Grammatical Interpretation: Grammar & Syntax
 - **Homework: Analyze grammar and syntax**
- Week 9: Grammatical Interpretation: Word Study
 - **Homework: Pick a word and conduct a word study**
- Week 10: Application: What Did it Mean to Them?
 - **Homework: Determine original meaning/application**
- Week 11: Application: What Does it Mean for the Church?
 - **Homework: Present a brief interpretation and application**
- **Free Online Resources:**
 - Blue Letter Bible
 - Bible Hub

Defining Key Terms:

- **Hermeneutics:** The science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined
- **Exegesis:** “Drawing out” the meaning of the text
- **Eisegesis:** Reading a meaning into a text
- **Exposition:** The communication of the meaning of the text along with its relevance to present-day hearers

Hermeneutics can sound intimidating, but it is something that every believer should understand and be comfortable with. Proper hermeneutics does not make the meaning of Scripture more abstract or distant, but rather it makes the meaning of Scripture more impactful and accurate for the present-day learner.

Why Proper Interpretation is Important:

II Timothy 3:14-17 says, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” God’s Word is essential for salvation, doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, maturity, and good works. The inspired Word of God has many powerful benefits for the Christian life. However, the promised benefits of inspiration assume the message has been properly interpreted. If we do not interpret God’s Word properly, then we miss out on the full power of His Word in our lives.

Paul is warning Timothy about spiritual and doctrinal danger in II Timothy 3:1-13. Verse 13 says, “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” There is a lot of deception going on even within the church. The church has had to deal false teaching all throughout the history of the church. The solution for this deception is the inspired Word of God. We must continue in the God’s Word in order for us to avoid deception.

Divine inspiration is what makes the need for careful interpretation so important. Inspiration means “God-breathed.” The words of the Bible are God’s words. The writers were not inspired, the “graphe” or writings are what were inspired. God is the source of all Scripture. Divine inspiration is what makes the Bible authoritative. The doctrine of divine inspiration should impact how we approach Scripture. Our job as interpreters is receptive rather than creative. We are not coming up with original thoughts, but rather we are clearly identifying what God already communicated. Divine inspiration means that Scripture is worthy of careful and precise interpretation because we do not want to misrepresent what God said.

Inspiration does not eliminate the need for interpretation. Someone might reason that if God inspired the Bible, then the Holy Spirit should simply reveal what every passages means to me. However, that is not how Scripture itself describes the task of interpretation. II Timothy 2:15 says, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” The word for study here has the idea of diligent labor. This verse emphasizes that proper interpretation of Scripture takes diligent effort. We should study and search the Scriptures with diligence. Scripture is divinely inspired, authoritative, and understandable. However, Scripture still requires careful interpretation.

Inspiration does not mean every interpretation is inspired. The text is inspired, not the interpreter. Inspiration guarantees the authority, sufficiency, and profitability of Scripture. Inspiration does not guarantee the infallibility of my interpretation. Someone can say “the Bible says...” and still misunderstand what the Bible means.

Hermeneutics is important because Scripture it intended to accomplish something in the life of a believer. Scripture is profitable for doctrine. Scripture teaches us what is true about God, Christ, salvation, sin, the church, the Christian life, God’s will, and many other things. Interpreters should be seeking truth. Proper hermeneutics identifies the truth being communicated by the text. Scripture is also profitable for reproof. Scripture tells us where we get it wrong. Scripture is able to identify our wrong assumptions about what is true. Scripture is profitable for correction. Scripture is able to correct us when we get it wrong. Scripture moves us from error to truth. This highlights the fact that proper hermeneutics requires humility. We should never be afraid to let Scripture correct our theology or our presuppositions. Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness. Scripture teaches us how we ought to live. Hermeneutics does not stop at understanding a list of facts, but rather it helps us understand truth that is then able to shape our lives. Scripture is meant to bring believers to a place of spiritual maturity. Scripture equips believers to do good works. However, those results will only be accomplished when we start with the right interpretation of Scripture. Therefore, good hermeneutics is not merely about getting the interpretation right – it is about faithfully handling the Word of God so that it can accomplish the purpose for which God gave it.

Why Do People Misinterpret the Bible?

There are three primary reasons why people misinterpret the Bible. The first reason why people misinterpret the Bible is simply because of ignorance. This reason does not typically involve any bad intentions on the part of the person misinterpreting the Bible. An example of this would be the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. The Ethiopian eunuch was trying to understand Isaiah 56, but he was ignorant of who Jesus was. Philip helped the Ethiopian eunuch understand the passage by explaining how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy found in Isaiah 56. Sometimes we come to a wrong interpretation of Scripture simply because we are missing some of the context. This is why studying Scripture takes time and requires diligence. Studying Scripture also requires humility because sometimes we get it wrong, and we need to be humble enough to admit when we come to a wrong interpretation because of our own ignorance. We should never become too prideful that we cannot be corrected when we get it wrong.

The second reason why people misinterpret the Bible is because of immaturity. Hebrews 5:11-14 describes how an immature believer lacks the skill to interpret the more meatier passages of Scripture. This means that a believer that is growing spiritually will be more able to interpret and digest more passages of Scripture than a believer that has stagnated in their spiritual growth. This highlights the reality that the ability to accurately interpret Scripture is a muscle that must be regularly exercised. The reality is that there are some passages that are difficult to understand. II Peter 3:15-16 says, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” This should not intimidate us, but rather it should motivate us to be diligent students of God’s Word so that way we can understand His Word better and better over time.

The third reason why people misinterpret the Bible is because of willful misrepresentation. This is the reason with the most evil intentions behind it. Not everyone is seeking the correct interpretation of Scripture. There are people out there that want to manipulate God's Word in order to back up their own message and agenda. The epistles contain many warnings about false teachers and false doctrine. False teachers and false doctrine hinder the growth of the church. That is why church discipline and separation are necessary when there are false teachers. Paul refused to "handle the word of God deceitfully" (II Cor 4:2). We also must treat God's Word with respect. We need to handle the Bible with accuracy and precision because we should not intentionally misrepresent what God said.

Questions We Should Ask When Interpreting a Text:

God is always intentional with how He reveals truth. God has currently chosen to communicate through His written Word. We should show respect for the method and means through which God has chosen to communicate. We have a source of revelation that is more sure than any individual experience.

What does the text say? We should evaluate the words, phrases, and sentences. We should consider who is speaking. We should consider who is being spoken to. To ignore these details is to show a lack of respect for the method and means through which God has chosen to communicate. We must read the text in order to identify the details of the text.

Why does the text say it this way? Why did the author choose these words? Why is the passage structured this way? There is reason why God choose those specific words, that specific writer, that specific literary genre, and that specific audience. We should not just identify these details, but we should seek to understand the significance of them.

What does the text mean? What is the writer trying to communicate to the original audience? Understanding authorial intent is key to proper interpretation of a text. How do the individual statements contribute to the overall argument? We should seek to identify the main point of the text.

How does the context affect the meaning of the text? What comes before and after that passage? What is the theme of that book? What historical circumstances are significant to this passage? What cultural practices or assumptions are relevant to the passage? What would have been in the mind of the original readers when they read this text? We should seek to understand the meaning of the text within context.

How does this text fit with the rest of Scripture? What is the first mention of this topic or doctrine? Where does this fit in the flow of progressive revelation? What other passages talk about this topic? Are there any clearer passages that help us understand this more difficult passage? Does my interpretation contradict anything that Scripture clearly teaches? We should seek to understand the meaning of the text within the overall revelation of Scripture.

How should this text be applied? What was the appropriate takeaway for the original audience? What principle is revealed from that takeaway? How should the church apply the truth from this text? What should believers believe, do, avoid, or change based the interpretation and appropriate application from this text? There is some takeaway for us as believers from every passage of Scripture. That takeaway sometimes may just be that we should believe that God is faithful. There is no passage of Scripture that is not profitable for us as believers.

The Goal of Hermeneutics:

The goal of hermeneutics is to help us better understand what God has communicated. We should learn how to identify the writer's intended meaning of a text. We should learn how to understand passages in context. We should learn how to correlate that passage with the rest of Scripture. We should learn how to faithfully apply the truth from a passage.

Homework – Choose a Passage:

Choose a passage of Scripture that you want to study more deeply. The passage can be any length, but I would recommend the passage being around 3 to 10 verses. I would also recommend it being a passage that has some interpretive challenges. The passage should be a passage that you do not have a full grasp of yet, and that you want to understand better.

Conclusion:

Faithful biblical interpretation seeks to understand what God communicated through the biblical writers before determining how that truth should be applied to us. We should show respect for the method and means through which God has chosen to give us His revelation. The goal of this class is for us to become better students of God's Word. We will seek to study God's Word with accuracy and precision.