

HERMENEUTICS:
A Course for GCBC Bible Institute
Lesson 2

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” - 2 Timothy 2:15

Principle 1: Interpretation must be based on the author’s intention of meaning and not the reader

- I. Only 2 sources of meaning in for the text of Scripture: (1) Source (2) Reader
 - A. Uncovering the meaning intended by the source is exegesis
 - 1. Exegesis: “to lead out of, from”
 - 2. Exegesis - “allowing the meaning in the scripture to come out by applying the proper principles of interpretation” - Thomas
 - 3. Exegesis - “It is a process in private, a perspiring task in which the Bible student examines the backgrounds, meanings, and forms of words; the structure and parts of sentences; the asserting of the original textual reading; etc.” - Dr. Stephen Lewis
 - B. “All meaning that is not the author’s meaning unavoidable comes from the interpreter and has only the interpreter’s authority behind it.” - Dr. Stephen Lewis
 - 1. Eisegesis: “to lead into”
 - 2. Eisegesis - “the reading into scripture what you want it to mean”
 - C. Must embrace authorial intent or else all authority for meaning of scripture rests in the reader
 - D. Goal: Not what I think it means to me but what did God intend for us to know
 - 1. Literal, historical/cultural, grammatical context are vital
 - a) Literal - normal reading
 - b) Dispensational/Progressive - God has changed how he deals with mankind over time as well as revealing more and more truth over time
 - c) Historical/cultural - what did the text mean to the audience living in a distinct period of history with a distinct culture
 - d) Grammatical - the text’s meaning derived from the use of normal grammatical principles

Principle 2: Interpretations must be done in the context of the passage. - “It was a ball”

- I. Context is King
 - A. The goal of biblical study ought to be determining what the author was communicating to their intended audience
 - B. To come to an accurate conclusion the context must be considered
 - 1. Immediate verse(s)
 - 2. Verse preceding and following the passage under consideration
 - 3. The book in which the passage occurs
 - 4. The dispensation in which the passage was written
 - 5. The whole of the Bible
 - 6. The history and culture of the people and time in which the passage was written
 - C. Great damage is done by cut and paste theology

Principle 3: Interpret the Bible literally (or normally) allowing for normal use of figurative language.

- I. A literal interpretation does not mean that there is no place for figurative language
- II. Read the scriptures normally allowing for figurative language such as metaphors, similes, and anthropomorphisms
- III. The Golden Rule of Interpretation: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word any its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.” - David L. Cooper

Principle 4: Use the Bible to help interpret itself. Allow the simple passage to explain the complex one. - The Bible serves as its best commentary

Principle 5: Interpretation must be distinguished from application.

- I. Interpretation is the thorough study of a passage to determine the author’s meaning
- II. Application - “...is to be derived from the meaning of the text and be a reflection of a proper principle derived from the text. What does the audience and the text’s audience have in common that can be shared as a principle?”
 - A. 2 Ti. 3:16 - All scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable
 - B. The reader must ask what benefit does this passage provide me? Is this for my faith or my practice?

Principle 6: Be sensitive to distinctions between Israel and the church and Old Covenant and New Covenant requirements

- I. The Bible is written from a dispensational perspective - God never changes as to His person but the way He has chosen to interact with His creation has changed throughout history
- II. A normal reading of scripture reveals that God has different requirements for different groups of people - i.e. Israel and the Church
- III. “Every promise in the book is mine...every chapter every line...” - Really?

Principle 7: Be sensitive to the type of literature you are reading

- I. Understanding the type or genre of literature you are reading helps to properly interpret the passage - “Plays, poems, newspapers, novels, short stories, autobiographies, science fiction, documentaries—these kinds of literary products have various features which influence how we understand their content. Likewise, we must recognize different types of composition in the Bible (both on the scale of entire books and smaller units within them), such as history, law, poetry, prophecy, gospels, epistles, etc.” - Dr. Stephen Lewis
- II. Types of literature:
 - A. Narrative - Some of scripture is simply telling a story. It is repeating the facts of what occurred. The interpretation of the text must take place before application is made, if any application is warranted. Simply finding an event in scripture does not mean it should be practice by a believer today. Was David in the right when he married Abigail following the death of her husband Nabal? The passage should be taken as narrative, and an interpretation made in context.

- B. Law - Legal literature records the rules and regulations that God provided to the nation of Israel as part of the Mosaic Covenant. This law was the rule of life for the Jew in order to be given the blessings and avoid the curses that God laid out for them. Some parts of the law are repeated for the behavior of the believer today, but similarity is not to be mistaken for identity. The Grace believer is not under law. Do not seek to apply a passage without basis for the intended audience.
- C. Wisdom - Much of what is found in scripture is general truth based on observations (Proverbs-Ecclesiastes) but is not absolute truth or promises. Many of the maxims we find in Proverbs are experiences of the authors. A soft answer does not always turn away wrath...and sometime a child departs from the training he received.
- D. Poetry - much of what is found in the poetical books is figurative in nature. A familiarity with Hebrew poetic stylings would serve any study of these books.
- E. Prophecy - Much of the prophecy found in both major and minor prophets applies to the advent of Christ. This advent is split into two parts. His second coming is even further divided into a return to the clouds and a return to the earth. The church age is a mystery to the prophets so it will not be fully revealed until Acts and the epistles. Interpreting the prophetic books without these facts in mind will lead the reader to be very confused.
- F. Gospels - Each of the gospels was written to a different audience. Matthew to the Jews, Mark to the Romans, Luke to the Greeks, and John to a universal audience. Certain facts are omitted, added, or emphasized from stories and accounts for the needs of the audience. The presence of two different genealogies is an example of this Matthew has the genealogy of Joseph giving the legal pedigree of Jesus according to Jewish custom, while in Luke we have the actual genealogy of Mary, the actual line of Jesus which would be of interest to the Gentiles. Mark repeats the term straightway, depicting the humanity of Jesus (a man of action), Luke uses the term “son of man” often, and John is basically an account of the four passovers.
- G. Parables - contrary to its common definition, Jesus stated that the purpose of the parables were to hide meaning. Near the end of the ministry of Christ, he was seeking to seal the decision of rejection from the leadership, while at the same time preparing those with an ear to hear to be the foundation of the church. It was often meant to confound the ones seeking to find fault with Jesus, while at the same time justifying his behavior and teaching those around.
- H. Acts - A normal reading demonstrates that this is a transitional book, definitely not one to rely on for doctrine for practice. A transition in biography (Peter to Paul), geography (Jerusalem outward to Rome), ministry (Jews, Samaritans, then finally Gentiles), and also in the availability of the sign gifts (avid use to waning use).
- I. Epistles - Very clear teaching for the Church today. Instructions to be followed and promises to be claimed. Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John are revealing and explaining truth to be practice for the Church.
- J. Revelation - Difficult to understand because of the prophetic nature of the book. Revelation should not however be avoided. Having an understanding of the book of Daniel as well as a general understanding of the Old Testament are needed to properly interpret Revelation. An understanding of the book will be given in the same way each other book is understood, with the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

This introduction relies heavily on a paper written by Dr. James Davis at Bible.org.

