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Understanding

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS



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Understanding Biblical Hermeneutic

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RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

Key Scripture:
2 Timothy 2:15 — "Study to shew thyself approved unto God... rightly dividing the word of truth."

1. WHAT IS BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS?

Biblical hermeneutics is the art and science of correctly interpreting and understanding the Word of God. It is the process of discovering what God intended to communicate through the biblical writers and how those truths should be understood and applied today. Hermeneutics helps us move beyond personal opinions, assumptions, traditions, and emotions to accurately understand the meaning of Scripture within its proper context. Simply put, biblical hermeneutics teaches us how to read the Bible responsibly, interpret it faithfully, and apply it correctly. Without sound hermeneutics, people can easily misunderstand Scripture, misapply biblical truths, and develop erroneous beliefs. Through proper interpretation, we gain a clearer understanding of God's character, His purposes, His will, and His plan for our lives. As believers, we are called to rightly divide the Word of Truth, handling Scripture with reverence, diligence, and spiritual maturity so that we may grow in knowledge, walk in truth, and faithfully teach others (2 Timothy 2:15).

Biblical hermeneutics is the disciplined study of how to properly interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.

IT IS THE PROCESS OF ASKING:

"What did God mean when He inspired this text?"
"What did it mean to the original audience?"
"How does it point to Christ and fit into the whole counsel of Scripture?"
"How should it be faithfully applied today?"

Hermeneutics protects us from making the Bible say what we want it to say, and teaches us how to hear what God actually said.

KEY PRINCIPLE IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION:

Good hermeneutics requires exegesis, not eisegesis. A faithful student of Scripture seeks to understand God's Word as it was intended, rather than using Scripture to validate personal opinions, traditions, or agendas.

2 Timothy 2:15 — "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

WHAT IS EXEGESIS?

Exegesis is the careful and accurate process of drawing out the original meaning of a biblical text. The word comes from a Greek term meaning "to lead out" or "to draw out." In exegesis, the goal is to discover what the Scripture actually says and what the original author intended to communicate to the original audience. Exegesis requires studying the context, historical background, grammar, culture, and surrounding passages so that the Bible can speak for itself. Rather than forcing our own ideas into the text, we allow the text to reveal God's intended message. Sound biblical interpretation is built upon good exegesis.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION:
Exegesis means drawing the meaning out of the text.
We ask:

- What does the passage say?
- What did it mean to the original audience?
- What was God communicating through the writer?
- How does this truth apply today?

Example: When studying David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17), exegesis seeks to understand the historical event, God's purpose in the story, and what the text teaches about God's power and faithfulness.

WHAT IS EISEGESIS?

Eisegesis is the opposite of exegesis. The word means "to lead into" or "to read into." Eisegesis occurs when a person inserts their own opinions, assumptions, emotions, experiences, or preconceived ideas into a biblical text instead of allowing the text to speak for itself. Rather than discovering the author's intended meaning, a person practicing eisegesis makes the Scripture say what they want it to say. This often leads to misinterpretation, false doctrines, and applications that are not supported by the Bible.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION:
Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into the text.

Instead of asking, "What does God mean?" the person asks, "How can I make this verse support what I already believe?"

Example: Taking a verse completely out of context to support a personal opinion or doctrine that the passage was never intended to teach.

EXEGESIS	EISEGESIS
Draws meaning out of the text	Reads meaning into the text
Seeks the author's intended meaning	Seeks to support personal ideas
Respects context	Ignores context
Leads to sound doctrine	Often leads to error
Asks, "What does God say?"	Asks, "What do I want this to say?"

2. WHY IS BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS IMPORTANT?

Biblical hermeneutics is important because wrong interpretation leads to wrong belief, wrong teaching, and wrong living.

A. It helps us rightly divide the Word
2 Timothy 2:15 - We must study so we can correctly handle the truth of Scripture.

B. It protects the church from error
2 Peter 3:16 shows that unstable people can twist Scripture to their own destruction.

C. It keeps preaching biblical, not emotional
A preacher must not just preach inspiration; they must preach interpretation.

D. It helps us apply Scripture accurately
The Bible was written for us, but not every passage was written directly to us. Hermeneutics helps us know the difference.

E. It reveals Christ properly
Luke 24:27 says Jesus explained in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

3. FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS BEFORE INTERPRETATION

Before studying Scripture, we must believe:
A. The Bible is inspired by God
2 Timothy 3:16 — "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..."

B. The Bible has authority
Isaiah 40:8 — "The grass withereth... but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

C. Scripture does not contradict Scripture
God is not confused. If there appears to be contradiction, deeper study is needed.

D. The Holy Spirit helps us understand truth
John 16:13 — "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth..."

4. THE MAIN GOAL OF INTERPRETATION

The goal is not to ask first, "What does this mean to me?"

The proper order is:
1. Observation — What does the text say?
2. Interpretation — What does the text mean?
3. Application — How should I respond?

Never apply a Scripture before you understand what it means.

THE THREE ESSENTIAL STEPS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Every time we study the Bible, we should follow three simple but essential steps: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. First, we begin with Observation by asking, "What does the text say?" This requires reading the passage carefully and paying attention to the words, people, places, events, commands, and repeated ideas without making assumptions. Next comes Interpretation, where we ask, "What does the text mean?" Here, we seek to understand the author's intended message by considering the context, historical background, grammar, literary style, and comparing Scripture with Scripture. Finally, we move to Application by asking, "How should I respond?" Once we understand what God originally meant, we then determine how that timeless truth should transform our beliefs, attitudes, decisions, and daily lives. In simple terms: Observation discovers what God said, Interpretation discovers what God meant, and Application determines how we should live because of it. Skipping any of these steps can lead to misunderstanding or misapplying God's Word. A faithful student of Scripture always observes carefully, interprets accurately, and applies obediently.

5. RULES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

RULE 1: INTERPRET SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Context is one of the most important rules.
Ask:
What comes before this verse?
What comes after this verse?
Who is speaking?
Who is being spoken to?
What issue is being addressed?
A verse removed from context can become a false doctrine.

RULE 2: INTERPRET SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

Clear passages help explain difficult passages.
Example: Do not build doctrine from one unclear verse. Compare it with the full witness of Scripture.

RULE 3: UNDERSTAND THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ask:
When was this written?
What was happening historically?
What culture was involved?
What covenant were they under?
What problem was being addressed?

RULE 4: KNOW THE LITERARY GENRE

The genre of a passage determines how it should be interpreted. Before asking, "What does this passage mean?" first ask, "What kind of literature am I reading?" A Psalm should not be interpreted exactly like an Epistle, a Proverb should not be read like a historical narrative, and the symbolic visions of Revelation should not be interpreted in the same way as the straightforward teachings of Romans. Understanding the literary genre is one of the foundational principles of sound biblical hermeneutics.

You do not interpret Psalms exactly the same way you interpret Romans.
You do not interpret Revelation exactly the same way you interpret Proverbs.

SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL GENRES

GENRE	PRIMARY FOCUS
Law	God's commandments and covenant with Israel
History	God's work through historical events and people
Poetry	Worship, prayer, praise, emotion, and beauty
Wisdom	Practical godly living and the fear of the Lord
Prophecy	God's warnings, promises, and future plans
Gospels	The life and ministry of Jesus Christ
Parables	Spiritual truths illustrated through everyday stories
Epistles	Christian doctrine, church instruction, and practical living
Apocalyptic	End-time events, spiritual warfare, judgment, and Christ's final victory

TYPE OF WRITING	BOOKS OF THE BIBLE	WHAT IS IT?	HOW TO INTERPRET IT?
Law (Torah/ Pentateuch)	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	Records creation, God's covenant with Israel, commandments, civil laws, ceremonial laws, and moral laws.	Consider the historical setting, covenant context, and distinguish between moral, ceremonial, and civil laws. See how Christ fulfilled the Law
History	Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Acts	Records historical events, people, victories, failures, and God's dealings with His people.	Understand that historical narratives describe events but do not always prescribe behavior. Look for God's purposes and principles within the events.

TYPE OF WRITING	BOOKS OF THE BIBLE	WHAT IS IT?	HOW TO INTERPRET IT?
Poetry	Job, Psalms, Proverbs (many poetic sections), Song of Solomon, Lamentations	Uses figurative language, imagery, symbolism, parallelism, and emotion to express worship, wisdom, grief, and love.	Recognize poetic devices. Do not interpret every phrase literally. Focus on the message the imagery communicates.
Wisdom Literature	Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon	Provides practical instruction for living wisely, fearing God, relationships, work, and daily life.	Understand that many Proverbs are general principles, not absolute promises. Interpret them in harmony with the rest of Scripture.
Prophecy	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Malachi	God's messages through prophets involving repentance, judgment, restoration, and future events including the Messiah.	Determine whether the prophecy was fulfilled historically, partially fulfilled, or awaits future fulfillment. Consider both immediate and prophetic contexts.
Gospels	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John	Records the life, ministry, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.	Read each Gospel within its audience and purpose while comparing parallel accounts. Always view Jesus as the central focus.
Parables	Primarily found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke	Simple earthly stories used by Jesus to teach profound spiritual truths.	Identify the main central truth. Avoid assigning symbolic meaning to every small detail unless Jesus explains it.
Epistle (Letters)	Romans through Jude	Letters written to churches and individuals to teach doctrine, correct error, encourage believers, and instruct Christian living.	Read the letter as a whole. Identify the author's purpose, audience, historical situation, and theological argument before applying individual verses.

TYPE OF WRITING	BOOKS OF THE BIBLE	WHAT IS IT?	HOW TO INTERPRET IT?
Apocalyptic Literature	Daniel (chapters 7-12), Revelation (also portions of Ezekiel and Zechariah)	Uses vivid symbols, visions, numbers, angels, and imagery to reveal God's ultimate victory, future judgment, and the coming Kingdom.	Interpret symbols carefully using Scripture to explain Scripture. Avoid speculation and keep the focus on God's sovereign plan and Christ's ultimate triumph.

RULE 5: PAY ATTENTION TO WORDS AND GRAMMAR

The Importance of Grammar in Biblical Interpretation

One of the most important aspects of biblical hermeneutics is paying close attention to the grammar of the text. Every word in Scripture was intentionally inspired by God, and even the smallest words can significantly affect the meaning of a passage. As you study the Bible, look for repeated words, commands, promises, warnings, contrasts, questions, and connecting words such as **"therefore," "but," "if," "because," "for,"** and **"so that."** These grammatical clues reveal how ideas are connected and help us follow the author's flow of thought. For example, the word **"therefore"** points back to something previously stated and introduces a conclusion or application. The word **"but"** signals a contrast, while **"if"** often introduces a condition. Ignoring these grammatical details can lead to misunderstanding the text or taking a verse out of context. Careful attention to grammar enables us to accurately understand God's intended message and rightly divide the Word of Truth. As the saying goes, **"Big truths are often found in small words."**

Look at repeated words, commands, contrasts, promises, warnings, and conjunctions like:

Therefore
But
If
Because
For
So that

Small words can carry major meaning.

RULE 6: DISCOVER THE AUTHOR'S INTENDED MEANING

The question is not, "What can I make this say?"
The question is, "What did the inspired author intend to communicate?"

RULE 7: INTERPRET THE OLD TESTAMENT IN LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Christ is the fulfillment of the law, prophets, sacrifices, priesthood, and promises.
Matthew 5:17 — Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

RULE 8: DO NOT BUILD DOCTRINE FROM ISOLATED SCRIPTURES

Doctrine must be built from the whole counsel of God.
Acts 20:27 — Paul said, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

RULE 9: SEPARATE DESCRIPTION FROM PRESCRIPTION

Some passages describe what happened, but they are not commanding us to do the same.
For example, the Bible records lies, murders, polygamy, betrayal, and sin, but recording it does not mean God approves it.

RULE 10: LET THE PLAIN MEANING STAND

When Scripture plainly says something, do not over-spiritualize it.
Not every mountain means government.
Not every river means revival.
Not every door means opportunity.
Sometimes the text simply means what it says.

6. COMMON MISTAKES IN BIBLE INTERPRETATION

A. Proof-texting
Using one verse to prove a point while ignoring the context.

B. Reading yourself into every passage
Not every text is directly about you.

C. Spiritualizing everything
This can lead to imagination instead of interpretation.

D. Ignoring covenant differences
Some instructions were given under the Mosaic Covenant, while believers now live under the New Covenant in Christ.

E. Preaching personal opinion as doctrine
A preacher must know the difference between revelation, interpretation, application, and opinion.

7. HERMENEUTICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK EVERY TEXT

When studying a passage, ask:
Who wrote it?
Who received it?
What is the setting?
What is the main subject?
What problem is being addressed?
What does this reveal about God?
What does this reveal about humanity?
Is there a command to obey?

Is there a promise to believe?
Is there a sin to avoid?
Is there an example to follow?
How does this point to Christ?
How does this apply today?

8. HOW TO PRACTICE HERMENEUTICS IN BIBLE STUDY

Step 1: Pray Before You Study

Ask the Holy Spirit for illumination, humility, and truth.
Psalm 119:18 — "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

STEP 2: READ THE PASSAGE SEVERAL TIMES

Read slowly.
Read the whole chapter.
Read the verses before and after.
Read in more than one translation if needed.

STEP 3: OBSERVE THE TEXT

Mark:
Repeated words
Commands
Warnings
Promises
People
Places
Time markers
Contrasts
Questions
Cause and effect

STEP 4: RESEARCH THE BACKGROUND

Find out:
Author
Audience
Date
Purpose
Cultural setting
Historical events
Covenant context

STEP 5: IDENTIFY THE GENRE

Is it poetry, prophecy, narrative, epistle, wisdom, or apocalyptic writing?

STEP 6: FIND THE MAIN IDEA

Summarize the passage in one sentence.

Example:
"This passage teaches that believers must endure trials with faith because God uses testing to produce maturity." **James 1:2-4**

STEP 7: COMPARE SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE
Find related passages that support and clarify the meaning.

STEP 8: DEVELOP SOUND APPLICATION
Ask:
What must I believe?
What must I repent of?
What must I obey?
What must I teach?
How should this transform my life?

9. HOW TO USE HERMENEUTICS WHEN PREPARING A SERMON
STEP 1: START WITH THE TEXT, NOT YOUR IDEA
Do not begin with a topic and force the Bible to support it. Begin with Scripture and let the message come from the text.

STEP 2: STUDY THE PASSAGE IN CONTEXT
Before preaching one verse, understand the paragraph, chapter, book, and biblical theme.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY THE AUTHOR'S MAIN POINT
Ask: "What is God saying through this passage?"

STEP 4: BUILD THE SERMON AROUND THE TEXT
Your sermon points should come from the passage, not just from creativity.

STEP 5: SUPPORT EVERY MAJOR POINT WITH SCRIPTURE
Do not make strong claims without biblical support.

STEP 6: EXPLAIN BEFORE YOU EXHORT
Good preaching does not only declare; it explains.

The preacher should answer:
What does this mean?
Why does it matter?
How do we live it?

STEP 7: APPLY THE TEXT FAITHFULLY
Application should flow from interpretation.

Bad application asks: "How can I make this sound powerful?"
Good application asks: "How does this truth confront, correct, encourage, and transform us?"

10. EXAMPLE SERMON PREPARATION FLOW

TEXT: ROMANS 12:1-2 KJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. [2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

OBSERVATION

Paul says "therefore," meaning he is connecting this instruction to what came before.
He appeals to believers by the mercies of God.
He commands them to present their bodies as living sacrifices.
He warns them not to conform to the world.
He calls them to be transformed by renewing the mind.

INTERPRETATION

Because of God's mercy, believers must offer their entire lives to God in worship and resist worldly conformity through renewed thinking.

APPLICATION

Believers must surrender their bodies, thoughts, habits, desires, decisions, and lifestyle to God.

SERMON POINTS

1. Mercy is the foundation of surrender.
2. True worship requires the whole life.
3. Transformation begins with the renewing of the mind.
4. A renewed life proves the will of God.

11. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN HERMENEUTICS

The Importance of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation

The Holy Spirit is indispensable in biblical interpretation because He is the divine Author who inspired the Scriptures and the One who illuminates them to the hearts and minds of believers. While careful study, sound hermeneutical principles, and historical research are essential, they are not enough on their own. We also need the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual understanding, wisdom, discernment, and conviction so that we not only understand God's Word intellectually but also embrace and obey it. The Holy Spirit never reveals anything that contradicts the written Word; instead, He brings clarity to what God has already spoken. Therefore, every time we study the Bible, we should begin and end with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to open our understanding, guard us from error, and lead us into all truth. Sound interpretation is the result of diligent study under the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES

John 16:13 (NKJV)

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth..."

1 Corinthians 2:12–14 (NKJV)
"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God... But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him... because they are spiritually discerned."

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NKJV)
"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..."

2 Peter 1:20–21 (NKJV)
"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Psalm 119:18 (NKJV)
"Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law."

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE:

The Holy Spirit is our Illuminator, not our replacement for study. We are called to diligently study God's Word while depending on the Holy Spirit to illuminate its truth, deepen our understanding, and empower us to faithfully live out what He has revealed.

Hermeneutics is not only academic; it is spiritual.
We need the Spirit for illumination, conviction, wisdom, and application.
However, the Holy Spirit will never give a private interpretation that contradicts the written Word.

2 Peter 1:20–21 teaches that Scripture did not come by private interpretation, but holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

1 John 2:20,27 NLT
But you are not like that, for the Holy One has given you his Spirit, and all of you know the truth.
[27] But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true-it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.

12. FINAL CHARGE

Biblical hermeneutics is necessary because the Word of God must be handled with reverence, accuracy, and submission. We are not called to use Scripture to support our opinions; we are called to submit our opinions to Scripture. **A sound interpreter is not just someone who knows how to read the Bible, but someone who allows the Bible to read them**.

Final Scripture:
Nehemiah 8:8 — "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

Nehemiah 8:8 NLT — They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.