

A Biblical Foundation for the Christian Life

Lesson 3 – Bibliology – The Bible

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because there are laws that guide it. It is an art because the laws must be skillfully applied. The term comes from the Greek verb ἑρμηνεύω meaning to translate, to interpret. This verb is found in John 1:42; 9:7; and Hebrews 7:2. The nouns ἑρμηνεία, translation, interpretation, and ἑρμηνευτής, interpreter, also appear in the New Testament.

Examining the Scriptures is the absolute and objective standard for validating Bible teaching (Acts 7:11). There must therefore be an absolute and objective method for interpreting and understanding the written Bible message. A literal hermeneutic is that method, as Jesus Himself illustrates (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

Two Obvious Axioms of General Hermeneutics

1. The Bible communicates via human languages; therefore, it must be interpreted linguistically.
2. The Bible communicates God's thinking; therefore, it must be interpreted logically.

God designed us to think and Biblical Christianity trains you to think (2nd Timothy 2:15). In context, we also will recognize that a faulty hermeneutic is destructive (2nd Timothy 2:14).

Inductive Study

What is truth? – Pontius Pilate (John 18:38)

There are two ways we can approach scripture:

1. Inductive – facts
2. Deductive – premises, assumptions and presuppositions, something you assume is already true

The question must be asked: Do we derive at the meaning of the text from the doctrine, or do we understand the doctrine because the text presents it?

The Inductive method

1. Observation – What does it say?
 - a. Who? Who was writing? To whom was the message originally written? Who are the people involved in the scenario?

- b. What? What's happening? What's said? Is it a command, an exhortation, a rebuke, a question, an answer, a prayer, a quotation of other scripture, something else? What's the main point? What key words or phrases are used? What's the context? What literary style is being used? Is it narrative, conversation, parable, prophecy, poetry, a letter, or a sermon?
 - c. When? Are there time references? Are there words related to the past, present, or future? Look for words like after, until, then.
 - d. Where? Are there locations mentioned—towns, roads, rivers, mountains, regions, or other landmarks?
 - e. Why? Are there any clues about why things are being said or done?
 - f. How? Is there an explanation about how things are done?
2. Interpretation - What does it mean?
 - a. Interpret Literally - What did the original author intend?
 - b. Interpret Grammatically - Obey the laws of grammar, look for the plain sense.
 - c. Interpret Historically - How would the original audience understand it?
 - d. Interpret Contextually - How does it fit into the surrounding verses and the whole book?
 - e. Interpret Scripturally - Compare scripture with scripture.
 3. Application - What do I do with it?
 - a. Does the text have an application for me? Primary or secondary?
 - b. How do I make application?
 - c. Proper application is built on proper interpretation (2nd Timothy 2:15).
 - d. Submit in humility to the scriptures (2nd Timothy 3:16-17).

Some Practical Exercises in Hermeneutics

1. The bible interprets itself (Matthew 13:1-9, 19-23; Revelation 1:12-20; Daniel 2).
2. Jesus and Paul used a literal hermeneutic (Genesis 1; Matthew 19:4-6; Romans 5:12ff).
3. When the plain sense makes sense, don't look for any other sense (Isaiah 20).
4. Looking at context (Ezekiel 4:9).

Further Reading

Rolin Thomas Chafer's Syllabus of Studies in Hermeneutics