

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

#### ***Necessity of Hermeneutics***

Biblical hermeneutics bridges the gaps between the Scriptures and us. We are separated from the Scriptures by culture, history, geography, language, thought pattern, and worldview. Thus, biblical hermeneutics will bring us (and the people we minister to) into the text and biblical homiletics will bring the text to the people where they are.

#### **Good interpretation:**

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:15)

ὀρθοτομοῦντα orthotomounta (“rightly dividing”) – originally this word meant “to cut a path in a straight direction” or “cut a road across a country that is forested or otherwise difficult to pass through in a straight direction” so that the traveler may go directly to his destination. When it came to the NT, its meaning was slightly changed to mean “to guide the word of truth along a straight path,” like a road that goes straight to its goal without being turned aside by wordy debates. Therefore, Paul urges Timothy, and all students of God’s Word, to work diligently in figuring out what the right interpretation of the Word of God is.

#### **Bad interpretation:**

“He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (2 Pet 3:16)

Some portions of Scripture are simply written and easily interpreted; other parts are more difficult and require deeper study. The WCF recognizes this distinction. Not everything is clearly understood, but that which is most essential to Christian faith and life is clear to anyone using the normal means (reading, study, prayer, attendance on the preaching of the Word). This doctrine is called the perspicuity of Scripture.

“All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” (WCF 1:7)

## ***Inspiration***

Every student of the Bible must start with the presupposition that the Scriptures are inspired and inerrant. Inspiration and inerrancy cannot be proved by any scientific method, even though this method can confirm their truth at various points. This conviction must be a fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration. Ultimately, while other sources of evidence may lead us to highly regard the Bible, we believe that the Bible is inspired and inerrant because it claims to be so, and the Holy Spirit gives us faith to believe.

## ***The Interpreter’s Life and Attitude***

- The interpreter must be born from above – John 3:1-12; 1 Cor 2:6-16
- The interpreter must depend on the Holy Spirit – 1 Cor 2:10-13; John 16:12-15

“In order to appreciate and use the Bible, the reader of it must himself have the same spirit which enabled its writers to understand their revelation of God and to record it.... To find in it the Spirit of God the reader must himself have that Spirit.” (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 13)

- The interpreter must study the Word and the things related to the Word (biblical languages, history, geography, culture, etc.) – Ezra 7:9-10
- The interpreter must humbly consult others.
- The interpreter must act upon the Word – Mark 4:24-25; Luke 8:21

Illumination in the Scriptures is not given just so the interpreter can look intelligent before his audience, but that he might live according to the light given and be an example both in speech and life. If we have hearing ears and obedient hearts we will be shown more.

## **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting written literature; specifically, biblical hermeneutics refers to the interpretation of the text of the Bible. Hermeneutics refers to the general principles the interpreter follows when doing his work.

The term comes from the Greek language; the word is found in various forms in the NT:

Luke 24:27, And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained (διερμηνεύω *diermeneuo*) to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

1 Corinthians 14:26, What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation (ἐρμηνεία *hermeneia*). All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

1 Corinthians 14:28, If there is no interpreter (διερμηνευτής *diermeneutes*), the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

Irenaeus used this term in speaking of the gospel of Mark: “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching” (*Against Heresies* 3:1:1).

“Hermeneutics is the science of the correct interpretation of the Bible. It is a special application of the general science of linguistics and meaning.” (Ramm, 11)

## **Exegesis**

This word comes from the Greek term ἐξάγω *exago*, which means “lead or bring out.”

John 1:18, No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (literally, “has *exegeted* [him]”).

It is the “bringing out” of the true meaning of the written word by applying the principles of hermeneutics, the practical application of hermeneutics to a particular passage. While many interpreters agree on the principles of hermeneutics in general, they often differ on the exegesis of a particular passage. Hermeneutics has been described as a science, while exegesis is an art.

Thus, theology and exposition are based on the prior work of exegesis, which in turn is based on the principles of hermeneutics.

## ***Eisegesis***

This term represents the opposite of exegesis. In Greek it means to “lead or bring to.” For example,

Luke 2:27b, [Jesus’] parents brought in (verb εἰσάγω *eisago*) the child Jesus [to the temple] to do for him what the custom of the Law required.”

In our context the term means to bring one’s own ideas into the text, rather than bringing out the text’s ideas. Of course, this is undesirable.

## ***The grammatical-historical-theological method***

This method of exegesis depends on the grammatical construction of the passage, the literary and historical context of the passage, and the theological context of the author and Bible as a whole.

Grammatical-historical-theological exegesis often is called literal exegesis. By this designation we mean the normal interpretation which would be expected from the average intelligent reader. This interpretation recognizes the normal patterns of language, including figures of speech, parables, etc.

- Grammatical – Our Lord used words of a human language to reveal himself to us.
- Historical – These words were given to us in a historical context.
- Theological – These words are part of a whole and must be understood as such.

## ***Letterism***

Letterism is an extreme form of literal interpretation which does not recognize figures of speech, and unnaturally forces words and figures.