

The Need for Interpretation

Session 1

Overview

Course Objectives

1. Develop a passion for reading and interpreting God's Word
2. Be able to ask many literary and contextual questions of Scripture.
3. Begin developing a personal hermeneutical method that seeks a correct interpretation of Scripture, with humility.

What are we about to learn?

1. What is Hermeneutics?
2. The History of Interpretation
 - The Different methods taken from Ancient Israel to today
3. The Bible, specifically the Canon
 - How did they choose the 66 books and why?
4. The Interpreter – *You*
 - What part do we play either positively or negatively in the task of interpretation?
 - Looking at who we are and how it influences our interpretations
5. What is the Goal in interpretation?
6. Understand Biblical Literature
 - General rules for Prose and Poetry
7. Understand Biblical Genres
 - Genres of the OT and NT
8. Fruits of Interpretation
 - How do we use the Bible today?
 - How do we apply it to our lives?

Why do we need to learn this?

- The Bible is God's Word to us – His Special Revelation
 - Not just a human book
 - God Breathed.
 - Authoritative and True
 - Spiritual – can change lives
 - Both Unity and Diversity – Communicated to Humanity through Humanity
 - Understandable
 - Intended to be understood and known by humanity.
- Without an organized approach or means to understanding, we would not be able to comprehend anything.
- Taking Responsibility for your faith

Richard Foster: Human beings seem to have a perpetual tendency to have someone else talk to God for them. We are content to have the message second-hand. One of Israel's fatal mistakes was their insistence upon having a human king rather than resting in the theocratic rule of God over them.¹

13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. *Hebrews 5:13-14*

You need to ask lots of questions. A lot of questions...

- “What is this text saying to me and what difference should it make in my life if any?” (42)

Terms to learn

Hermeneutics: Correctly understanding the thought of an author and communicating that thought to others.

- *Hermeneuo* – To explain, interpret or translate
- *Hermeneia* – Interpretation or Translation (40)

Exegesis – Reading the author's original meaning out of the text

Eisegesis – Reading your own meaning into the text

Eisegesis is the process of interpreting text in such a way as to introduce one's own presuppositions, agendas or biases. It is commonly referred to as reading into the text. It is often done to "prove" a pre-held point of concern, and to provide confirmation bias corresponding with the pre-held interpretation and any agendas supported by it.

Eisegesis is best understood when contrasted with exegesis. Exegesis is drawing out a text's meaning in accordance with the author's context and discoverable meaning.

Eisegesis is when a reader imposes their interpretation of the text. Thus exegesis tends to be objective; and eisegesis, highly subjective.²

How do we begin to exegete correctly? CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT!

The Role of the Interpreter

- We need to do our best to make the meaning of scripture **CLEAR**
- We will be learning how to exegete. How to do proper exegesis. The need here is to be *objective*.
- “No one comes to the task of understanding as an objective believer. (45)
- We often approach the text with our own presuppositions and preunderstandings.
- “Wonderful Things in the Bible I see, most of them put there by you and me” - Plymouth Brethren Elder in Ireland. (44)
- Our role is not to read our own ideas and interpretations into the text.

¹ Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. New York, NY: HarperCollins 1998, 24.

² Author unknown. *Eisegesis*. Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eisegesis>, accessed 2021-12-30.

What is the role of the Spirit in our interpretation?

- The HS is responsible for giving us the Bible
- The HS aids us in reading scripture (illumination)
 - o Convinces the reader that the Bible is True
 - o Apprehension, not comprehension
 - o Leads to CONVICTION of the truth of the word
- The HS does not inform us of Scripture's meaning (41)

Words and Meaning

Locution – **Text** – What is spoken or written – Matt. 5:14 – “You are the Light of the World”

Illocution – **Author** – Identifies the intention the speaker or writer has by the specific words used. (Words have meaning)

- What do they want to accomplish? Energy employed, content conveyed?
- Look at Matt. 5:16 – What was the author seeking to do? Encourage, inform?

Perlocution – **Hearers** – What the author envisioned the outcome or results to be. (46)

We are simply given the locution and must take care to assess and learn the illocution and perlocution of the authors words.

Read the Bible and read it deeply. If you do not understand something, look it up.

- If you do not understand a word, **do not use Websters Dictionary**. Use a *Lexicon*.
- If you do not understand the context of book, read an *Introduction or Survey*.
- If you cannot picture the geographical location, distance from, or other landmarks, consult an *Bible Atlas*.
- If you do not understand a topic, consult a *Biblical Encyclopedia*
- If you do not understand the passage after first going through the proper steps of exegesis yourself, consult a *Commentary*.

“To take a literary approach to the Bible means entering, living, and understanding its world before we move beyond it to abstract meaning.” (48)

Impact of Distance

There are barriers and challenges that we must face when interpreting scripture.

Temporal – We are separated by time from the events in Scripture

Cultural – We live in a very different culture here in NA than those in the ANE

Geographical – Understanding the geography of scripture helps us to understand distances travelled, locations and much else that helps with the context of the passages

Language – Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic provide a barrier to modern languages. We must take great care to understand and have humility in our ability to translate ancient languages into our modern contexts. If you can't read the original languages or do not have the ability to learn them, be mindful of the translations that you use.

Proper Biblical Interpretation is needed because the Bible was originally written to

- Someone else
- Who lived a long time ago
- Across the world
- Speaking another language
- Had different cultural values (59)

Exercise: Read 2 Timothy 4:6-13, 21

What are some of the questions that you could be asking from this passage?

What are the distances between you and the text that need to be addressed?

What pieces of context are you missing?

“True interpretation of the Bible combines both an exercise in ancient history and a grappling with its impact on our lives. Indeed, to understand fully what a text meant to its original recipients requires that we grasp something of that original impact ourselves, to the extent we are able.” (62)

Summary

1. To Discern God's message
 - a. What did God intend to communicate to us?
 - b. Avoid Scriptural abuse through *proof-texting*. Do not use individual texts out of context, simply to prove your viewpoint.
2. To Avoid or dispel misconceptions or erroneous perspectives and conclusions about what the Bible teaches.
 - a. Implementing correct interpretive methods will help you 'sound the alarm' when incorrect ideas emerge. You will begin to hear and challenge the misconceptions of others in Bible study, church, and in your everyday lives.
3. To be able to apply the Bible's message to our lives.

Always make space for God to Speak/Teach whenever studying Scripture.

- It is really easy to become so focused on the context and the passage, that we fail to remember that it is God's Word, speaking to us and into our lives.
- The goal is not to become a walking database for ancient facts.
- The goal is to correctly interpret the meaning from the text so that you can communicate God's love to others.

We must always understand that even though the bible was written by human hands, it is ultimately God's Word. We must take care to keep in perspective the eternal implications of the text, seeking to understand God's message to His people. (60-62)