



Biblical Hermeneutics: Principles for Bible Interpretation

1. Why Bother?

Hermeneutics is a set of guidelines for interpreting the Bible. By applying certain basic principles in our reading of the Bible we can have an accurate idea of what it is saying. But before we consider these principles, we should answer an obvious question. Why bother? The answer to that question is that *God* – the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe -- speaks to us through the Bible for our good. However, we can misunderstand what he is saying as we read it. God wants to speak into your life, for your salvation and blessing. That can never happen except through a true reading of the Bible.

What, then, is the Bible? It is a revelation from God, a record of what God has done and said through human history as he has interacted with real people in real time. Its lessons are to be applied to our lives in practical ways. God has revealed himself in mighty deeds. But these actions need words of explanation for us to get their point for our lives today. The purpose of God's actions and words is to lead us to salvation and blessing in Christ who is the final Word of God and to whom all God's words point. Through the Bible, as it is read and taught and put into practice, we come into a transforming relationship with God.

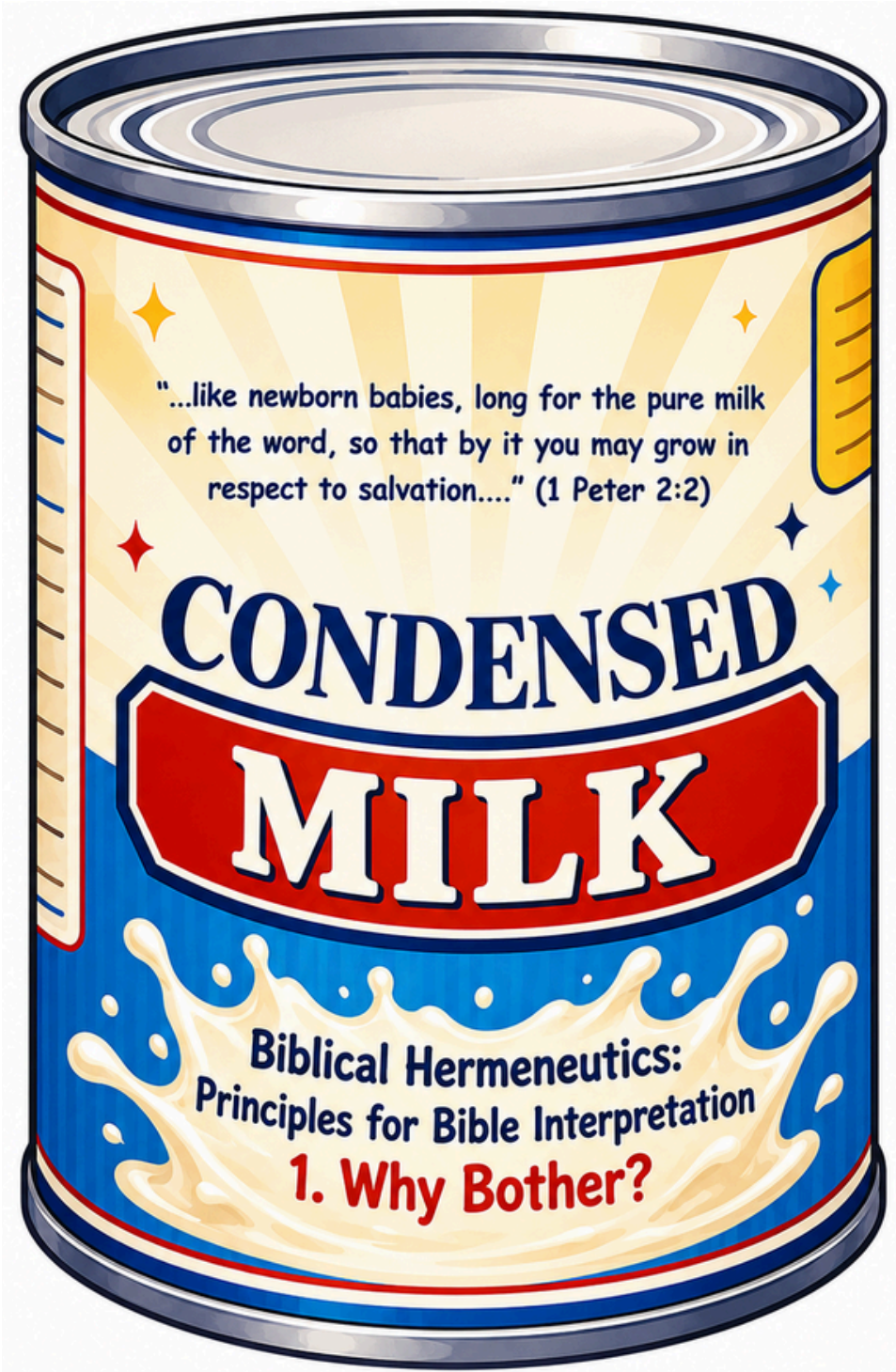
In this series we will assume the historic Christian understanding of the Bible – that what the Bible says, God says. Perhaps down the road we will make the case that the Bible versions most commonly used today are accurate translations of the originally inspired words of God, which were without error. There is a field of science, called textual criticism, that speaks to this compellingly. But more importantly, the Spirit of God bears witness to the veracity of the Bible to the hearts and minds of those he awakens.

So, why bother with hermeneutics? When I was a boy, going to a boys' club, the leaders had us watch Moody Science films designed to teach Bible lessons in an interesting way. I recall learning about the inner ear and how it worked, *or did not work*, for giving us balance. The inner ear can be helpful for maintaining balance because it sends us a falling sensation when we are falling. For example, if you have ever stood in a bus as it went around a corner your inner ear alerts you to the fact that you are tipping over. However, once you adjust your stance your inner ear adjusts to the new

angle or momentum of the bus, and you don't feel like you are falling anymore.

This becomes a hazard for pilots who fly airplanes that rely on a pilot's sight only, and not an instrument panel, when it is flown through a cloud. In a cloud the pilot without an instrument panel can only rely on the sense of balance given by the inner ear. He cannot see clearly to get his bearings. Unfortunately, the inner ear will quickly get used to the tilt of the plane and adjust so that the tilt begins to feel normal. A pilot may be veering right or left, up or down, and not know it. To illustrate this the film played a recording of a pilot caught in a cloud without an instrument panel. I remember vividly hearing the pilot desperately radioing for help as he realized he was in trouble. We heard a frantic, "Help me!" and then, "Help! Help!" and then dead silence. Without an instrument panel the pilot had no chance of flying straight and he perished.

In the same way, the Bible is our God-given instrument panel for life. We live in a spiritual cloud and without frequent reference to it, we will always veer off. We may think we are flying straight when we are not. Jesus once said to a group of religious men, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures..." (Matthew 22:29). Since they were avid Bible students, we can assume that Jesus was saying, "You are in error because you don't interpret the Bible correctly." We need the Bible to guide us in life. But we also need to interpret it correctly and that is what hermeneutics helps us do.



"...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation...." (1 Peter 2:2)

CONDENSED MILK

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