

# Discovery Class

## *Week 2 of 9: Conviction, Communication of Scripture, and What Hermeneutics Is*

Clayton Valley Church

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### Session Goals

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These are the questions this session will chase down and answer. Keep them in mind as we work through the material.

- *What is your functional authority for life?*
- *What does Scripture actually do to the person who receives and reads it?*
- *How did God's word reach us reliably across centuries of copying, translating, and interpreting?*
- *What is hermeneutics, and why does a sound method for reading the Bible matter?*

### A. Personal Conviction About Scripture

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Before we can trust what Scripture says, we have to settle where our authority comes from. Everyone lives by some final authority, whether they have named it or not.

#### **1. Choices of Authority**

- a. Reason (science, liberalism, rationalism)
- b. Experience (emotionalism, neo-orthodoxy)
- c. Institution (tradition, the church as final arbiter)
- d. Scripture

### B. Potency of Scripture

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#### **Psalm 19:7-11**

*"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."*

Each line names something Scripture does to the person who receives it: it revives the soul, makes the simple wise, gives joy, gives light, and warns. Scripture does not just inform. It acts on the one who reads it.

## C. Communication of Scripture

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Five steps connect what God wanted to say to what reaches us today. Weakness at any link would break the chain.

### 1. Revelation and Inspiration

Revelation is the unveiling of truth that could not otherwise be known.

#### **Deuteronomy 29:29**

*“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

There are two kinds: general revelation, available to everyone through creation and conscience (Romans 1:18-23; Psalm 19:1-6), and special revelation, God’s direct communication through the prophets and through His Son.

#### **Hebrews 1:1-2**

*“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”*

Inspiration is the method God used to give us that revelation in written form.

#### **2 Peter 1:20-21**

*“knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

*This is the only link in the chain that is perfect by definition. The original manuscripts, as God gave them, contained no errors.*

### 2. Transmission

Transmission is copying the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts as accurately as possible, generation after generation. Scribes were meticulous: rows and columns of a manuscript were counted, and if the count came out wrong, the copy was discarded and the work started over. We have roughly 13,000 manuscripts, in whole or in part, far more than any other ancient document, with decades rather than centuries between the originals and our oldest copies.

### 3. Translation

Translation is finding the most accurate rendering of the original languages into our own. God wants His word put into the language of His people. A paraphrase is a step beyond translation: a restatement of a translation, not an exact rendering of the original text.

### 4. Interpretation

Interpretation is finding what the author meant by what he said, and putting that meaning into terms we can understand today. The method for doing this carefully is called hermeneutics. Illumination, the Spirit making the meaning visible to us, is required alongside the method.

## 5. Application

Application is making the Word of God relevant to a person's life, in order to change the heart, not just inform the mind.

### Hebrews 4:12

*"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*

*The aim of the whole chain, from revelation to application, is for people to receive the biblical message and be changed by it.*

## D. Hermeneutics: Definition and Purpose

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### Definition

#### A. Biblical Term

HERMENEUEO means to explain, interpret, translate. Luke 24:27 uses the compound form of the same word for Jesus explaining the Scriptures concerning Himself.

#### B. Basic Definition

"Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation." (Bernard Ramm, p. 1)

Dr. James Rosscup: hermeneutics "determines the methods, techniques, rules, or principles that will best serve in determining the proper interpretation of any portion of Scripture." (Rosscup, p. 1)

It is science, because it is guided by real laws of language that we discover rather than invent. It is art, because applying those laws to an actual passage takes skill.

### Purpose

#### A. Stated

"Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation." The purpose is "to ascertain what God has said in Sacred Scripture; to determine the meaning of the Word of God." (Ramm, p. 2)

#### B. Exemplified: the Emmaus Road

##### Luke 24:25-27, 32

*"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ... They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'"*

Jesus is the model interpreter here. He does not give the disciples a new revelation. He opens up what was already written and shows them what it meant. Right interpretation did not leave them informed and unmoved. It left their hearts burning.

## Handout: Hermeneutics, Pattern and Importance

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*Take-home reference. These sections support and deepen what was taught in class.*

### **Hermeneutics: Pattern**

Scripture affirms that its words are God's own words. This is seen even in the way the writers of Scripture describe how they receive and give God's word.

- Old Testament examples: Exodus 4:12; 2 Samuel 23:2; Isaiah 6:8-9; Jeremiah 1:4, 9; Ezekiel 3:10-11; Daniel 9:2.
- New Testament examples: Matthew 5:18; Matthew 24:35; Acts 22:14-15; 1 Peter 1:10-11; Revelation 1:10, 19; Revelation 22:18-19.

### **Hermeneutics: Importance of a Proper Method**

“To determine what God has said is a high and holy task... Upon the correct interpretation of the Bible rests our doctrine of salvation, of sanctification, of eschatology, and of Christian living.” (Ramm, p. 2)

“In every one of those places where our interpretation is at fault, we have made substitution of the voice of man for the voice of God.” (Ramm, p. 2)

*Closing question for personal reflection: 2 Timothy 2:15 calls for diligent workers who accurately handle the word of truth. Given what you now understand about the care God and his people took with Scripture, and what hangs on interpreting it rightly, what does that stir in you toward that kind of careful study?*

## Homework

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Answer all three questions before next class. There is no grade. Write out your answers, then compare them honestly with the response guide on the class homework page.

### Question 1

**Read 3 John completely through, twice a day, for five days. After your 10th reading on the 5th day, write three overall observations and one question the letter raises for you.**

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***Response guide:** A strong set of observations notices specific, concrete details in the text itself (names, repeated words, commands, the relationship between writer and recipient).*

### Question 2

**Biblical counselor David Powlison references “functional beliefs” as he describes the way Christians live on a daily basis. Often our sin comes out as we act in ways that differ from what we say we believe. Several questions can be instructive in uncovering these functional beliefs: What do you want? Who / what do you fear? Where do you take refuge? What functional beliefs do you find yourself wrestling with sometimes?**

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***Response guide:** A strong response names a specific, honest example: opinions of others, financial security, career success, comfort, the approval of people who matter to you.*

### **Question 3**

**Of the five links in the communication chain, revelation and inspiration, transmission, translation, interpretation, and application, which one intrigues you the most? Why?**

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***Response guide:** Any of the five is a valid answer. Explore what makes that link stand out to you.*