

How to Study the Bible

An introduction to hermeneutics and Bible study methods

INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Intro self?

Pray.

Over the next three months, our aim is to help you gain a practical understanding of how to study the Bible on your own. Your personal growth in studying the Bible is one of the most important keys to know God intimately and grow deeper in the Christian faith.

However, as everyone knows who has attempted to study the Bible on their own, Bible study has many obstacles to overcome.

The Bible was not written while any one of us or our parents, grand parents, great-grand parents or even great-great grand parents were alive. It was not written in a culture in which any of us were raised. It was not written in a language most of us know. And, the Bible is a massive book. How are we to understand what is in it?

To help us in our approach, we need to break the subject of Bible study into two parts:

1. The Theory of Bible Study: Hermeneutics
2. The Practice of Bible Study: Methods

So you can see on the schedule there, our first four classes will study the theory of Bible study, the next 6 classes will apply the theory to a particular book of the Bible giving you hands-on training in how to study the Bible, and then we'll spend 3 weeks talking about how to teach the Bible based on the study of the Bible.

So much of teaching God's Word rightly depends upon the right approach to studying the Bible. That's why we're planning to spend more time on the study portion, and then conclude with a few lessons on teaching the Bible.

So let's jump in this morning and talk about hermeneutics.

HERMENEUTICS

What is hermeneutics? And why do we have to use such big, complicated words in church?

Words are important. Words carry meaning. Terms signify something specific and summarize in a single word what might take multiple phrases to communicate. Hermeneutics is such a term.

As a matter of fact, hermeneutics is perhaps one of the most important words of which you and I could learn the meaning. Most theological differences between Christians could be summarized as hermeneutical issues.

What are some of those theological differences determined by hermeneutics?

Most of the ways people wrongly use the Bible could be described as the results of hermeneutical problems.

Hermeneutics determines what you believe the Bible says, what you believe God is like, who Jesus is, what the Holy Spirit does in the life of the Christian today, what salvation is and how it affects your life as well as what our future will be like. I would say these are some very significant issues.

That makes hermeneutics a very important subject, not only for the theologians in the classrooms of seminaries, but also for the laymen in the trenches of life. Heaven and Hell could be at stake with a right or wrong understanding and use of Hermeneutics.

So, we want to learn a bit about this theological term named, “hermeneutics.” What is hermeneutics? Why do we need to know hermeneutics? What is the difference between hermeneutics and Bible study?

All of these are questions we want to answer (and that you will need to know the answers to) during this introductory session.

WHAT IS HERMENEUTICS?

Let's start with you. How would you define the term hermeneutics?

The History of the Term Hermeneutics:

One author says this, "The English word "hermeneutics" comes from the Greek verb 'hermeneuo' and the noun 'hermeneia'. These words point back to the wing-footed messenger-god hermes in Grecian mythology. He was responsible for transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp. He is said to have discovered language and writing and was the god of literature and eloquence, among other things. He was the messenger or interpreter of the gods, and particularly of his father Zeus. Thus the verb 'hermeneuo' came to refer to bringing someone to an understanding of something in his language (thus explanation) or in another language (thus translation)." Basic Bible Interpretation, Roy B Zuck p. 19.

So – Hermeneutics is: THE SCIENCE AND ART OF INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

It Includes:

Rules

Guidelines

Principles

Theory

As a Science:

IT REQUIRES RULES, LAWS OBJECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE, THOUGHT

IT DEALS WITH FACTS AND RESULTS OF EXAMINATION AND OBSERVATION

As an Art:

IT REQUIRES SKILL IN APPLYING THE RULES AND PRINCIPLES

IT TAKES TIME AND CAREFUL THINKING DEVELOPED OVER TIME

WHY DO WE NEED HERMENEUTICS?

EXAMINE: Acts 8:26-40 –
A Man Who Needed Hermeneutics

Acts 8:26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert *road*.) **27** So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, **28** and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. **29** Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.” **30** Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” **31** And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

“HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;
AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

33 “IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;
WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?
FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH.”

34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?” **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. **36** As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” [v. **37** omitted **TC issue**] **38** And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. **40** But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

EXAMPLE: Have you ever been to a small group Bible study and heard or asked the question: What does this mean to you?

This is why we need hermeneutics. With a post-modern approach to Scripture, there is no authority in Scripture, but in the reader of Scripture.

Our bibliology can very quickly be neutered by our hermeneutics. We can talk all day about how the Bible is inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient, and then turn around and undercut all of that with a hermeneutic that places the authority of interpretation with the reader instead of the writer/the text itself.

I'm going to give you the whole first part of the class, if you get nothing else, the entire semester, get this:

What we're after is what God says, what God means, and so hermeneutics/Bible study is all about discovering the divinely intended meaning that was communicated by the original author, to the original audience, in the original context.

I'm getting ahead of myself – we'll talk more about that in a couple weeks...

TURN TO: 1 Corinthians 15:29, "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?"

What Does This Verse Mean? What does it mean to you?

Bret: "I wish I knew. If you think you have a really clear understanding of what this verse means, you probably don't. At the minimum it means, that your connection to Christ so dependent on the resurrection of the dead that it defines your public identity."

We need hermeneutics to dig into passages like this. But know this passage is an outlier. What we can also say is that the Corinthians knew exactly what this meant. And our lack of understanding is not because of something wrong with the passage, but something due to our distance from the original, again that's abnormal for Bible study...

Here are a few reasons why we need hermeneutics:

1. Because the Bible is a **book**.

Every book or document need to be understood the way the author intended it to be understood.

We'll get into this much more in a couple of weeks as we talk through presuppositions. For now, suffice it to say, that the presuppositions of the Bible itself are that meaning resides with the original author and his intention.

Ok, let's talk about that a little bit...

Turn to 1 Cor 5...

1Cor. 5:9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; **10** I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. **11** But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one. **12** For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? **13** But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

What is this passage about? – church discipline

But who does Paul assume, who does he presuppose determines the meaning of what he wrote?

Himself. And he assumes and presupposes that they could and would and should understand that through the normal means of communicated language. He presupposes the clarity of the God-created means of communication in language...

Turn to John 21...

John 21:20 Peter, turning around, *saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following *them*; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” **21** So Peter seeing him *said to Jesus, “Lord, and what about this man?” **22** Jesus *said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!” **23** Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but *only*, “If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you?”

Again, not the main point, but you can clearly see John's presupposition about language and meaning. Who determines it? How do we understand it?

We need hermeneutics because the Bible is a book using language and presupposes that we can understand the meaning of it.

2. Because the Bible is a Book From and About God

Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God

It is important that we understand God correctly:

"The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God.

Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on His character. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is – in itself a monstrous sin – and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. Always this God will conform to the image of the one who created it and will be base or pure, cruel or kind, according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges.

Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place.

Perverved notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear. . . . So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God."

The Knowledge of the Holy A. W. Tozer, pp 1-4.

To understand the Bible incorrectly is to put ourselves at risk in misunderstanding God.

The Bible is not primarily a book about man:

“We need to know the correct method of biblical interpretation so that we do not confuse the voice of God with the voice of man.” *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, Bernard Ramm, p 1.

We need hermeneutics because the Bible is a divine-human book:

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; **17** so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Scripture is God’s Word, but how did God’s Word come to us? What was the process by which the divine Word was given to man?

Turn to 2 Pet...

2Pet. 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. **17** For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased” — **18** and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. **19** So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. **20** But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, **21** for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

What is Peter saying? The revealed, written Word of God is more sure than what he saw with his own eyes. Why? Because it’s from God, perfectly, flawlessly communicated through man.

Men spoke from God in such a way that what they intended to communicate with their language, with their words, that they communicated to their original audience, in their original context, written in Scripture is God’s Word and their intended meaning, is God’s intended meaning. He communicated his intention through their intention... Again, more on that in a couple weeks...

3. Because the Bible is a Book Containing Various Kinds of literature

EXAMPLES:

Genesis-Chronicles – largely narrative

Leviticus – largely legal

Job, Psalms – largely poetry

Proverbs – maxims (also didactic/teaching)

Romans-Jude – letters

Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation - Prophecy

The kind of literature you are reading determines how you approach it in understanding that literature the way the author intended the reader to understand it.

Modern Examples: newspaper; History Book; Poetry; a Novel; Theology Book.

Each kind of literature has certain guidelines a reader must follow if they are to understand and use it correctly.

We have to be a little careful here. Sometimes a whole book of the Bible gets thrown into a genre category and interpreted in light of that, and scholars will sometimes force that categorization or it's a stretch to categorize it in that way, or is it really a category that even exists?

So genre should inform our hermeneutics, we should take it into account, but it's not a lens through which we view Scripture...

4. Because the Bible is an **Ancient** Book.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- Language:

See – 1 John 3:6 – The Greek Present Tense

NASB: No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

ESV: No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

- Customs:

1 Corinthians 11 – Head Coverings

- Geography:

Revelation 2-3 – 7 Churches of Asia Minor

Rev. 3:14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

Rev. 3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. **16** ‘So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Not to get into the details here, but suffice it to say that Laodicea would’ve been familiar with lukewarm water because of where they were situated geographically...

5. Because the Goal of Bible Study is **understanding to apply.**

Transformed lives bring God glory

Examine the following texts:

Psalms 19:7-14 – Salvation is based upon a correct understanding of the Bible.

Psa. 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
 The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
 The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
 The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.
10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
 Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
 In keeping them there is great reward.
12 Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.
13 Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins;
 Let them not rule over me;
 Then I will be blameless,
 And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
 Be acceptable in Your sight,
 O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – Spiritual growth and stability are based upon a correct understanding of the Bible.

2Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; **17** so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

John 17:17 – Becoming like Christ is based upon a correct understanding of the Bible.

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

We must be very careful in the way we study, so we can be very careful in the way we apply it personally and communicate it publicly to others.

“Interpretation is the step that moves us from reading and observing the text on to applying and living it out. Bible study is an intellectual pursuit in which we seek

understanding of what God says. But Bible study must go beyond that to include spiritual discipline, in which we seek to put into practice what we read and understand.

Heart appropriation, not merely head apprehension, is the true goal of Bible study."

Basic Bible Interpretation, Roy B. Zuck, p 13

A Great Theme Verse for Hermeneutics is:

2 Timothy 2:15 – "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. "

OR Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HERMENEUTICS AND BIBLE STUDY?

Hermeneutics	Bible Study
The first step in the process of understanding the Bible	The whole process of understanding the Bible
The rules that govern Bible study.	Application of the rules to Biblical texts.
The theory behind Bible study	The practice of Bible study.

"Hermeneutics is like a cookbook. Exegesis is the preparing and baking of the cake, and exposition is serving the cake."

Roy B. Zuck, Basic Bible Interpretation, p 22.

"[Hermeneutics] stands in the same relationship to exegesis that a rule-book stands to a game. The rule-book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. The rules are not the game, and the game is meaningless without the rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics." Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Hermeneutics, p 11