

## Biblical Interpretation – Hermeneutics

Before examining any teaching of Scripture, it is important to have a clear understanding of proper Scriptural Interpretation.

Whenever interpreting Scripture we do not interpret Scripture with human reason as our guide! Rather SCRIPTURE MUST INTERPRET SCRIPTURE.

As we go into some of the procedures, it may seem that our reason is guiding the way, but it can and must only be Scripture Guiding the Way, and the Holy Spirit Who Works through Word and Sacrament. To properly interpret Scripture we use:

**Exegesis** – This is a study of the grammar from the original languages. Hebrew / Aramaic for the O.T. and Greek for the N.T. It is for this reason that it is so vital that we have Pastors who are trained in the original languages.

When a layperson is not able to work in the original languages, then it is important to have multiple translations of the Scriptures so that a comparison can be made of each translation. Keep in mind that the KJV is a very accurate and literal English translation of Scripture. Another good English translation is also the NIV. There are Bibles that actually have 4 different translations on both of the facing pages.

**Dogmatics** – A system of Principles based upon passages pertaining to the same doctrine of teaching.

In other words - gather together a collection of all the Bible Passages pertaining to one particular teaching or doctrine and then, *“let nothing be taught contrary to the sum total of what is set forth in all the statements / passages of Scripture clearly dealing with the specific matter under discussion.”* (pg. 21 - *The History & Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics*, by Prof. David Kuske)

Let the more easily understood passages of Scripture interpret those that are more difficult to understand. Remember, GOD’S WORD NEVER CONTRADICTS ITSELF. If it seems that God’s Word is contradicting itself, the problem is with the person doing the interpretation.

Isaiah 55:8 – *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” Declares the Lord.”*

II Peter 3:14-18 – *“So then dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave Him. He 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. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

**Context** – When determining the meaning of any Bible Passage it is important to take each individual passage within its context. In other Words: Read the sections prior to and following each specific passage. If this is not enough, one may need to read the entire chapter or even the entire book of the Bible. To understand the Context one also needs to understand who the writer is as well as the Recipient. It is also important to understand the circumstances / history behind each particular book of the Bible.

Sometimes it may be necessary to import passages from other parts of the Bible to pull in the total meaning of a passage. Of course this is overlapping in the practice of Dogmatics.

When Preaching, teaching and studying the Word of God one needs to encompass the “Whole Counsel of God’s Word”.

**What God Says, God Means** – When God led the writers of the Bible to put His Word on Paper, God had / has one intended meaning.

When you write a letter to someone, you have one intended meaning. Sometimes the reader may not understand what you put on the paper, but You as the writer still had one intended Meaning.

The Meaning which is intended does not change just because the reader does not understand.

The same is true of God’s Word. Just because some individual does not understand what is on the paper, does not mean that the meaning has changed.

**Etymology** – The Study of the meaning and history of Words.

This can also be helpful. However there is a warning. Words change their meaning over the years. A Greek or Hebrew Word which meant one thing at the time that it was written may not mean the same today. Thus it is important to know what the word meant AT THE TIME that it was written.

A present day example would be the word “gay”. At one time this word meant to be happy or joyful. Today it can mean anyone who is a homosexual.

Another example is the word “square”. When using this word does it refer to a shape having four sides, or does it mean that the person is strange or different from others?

Other Issues in Interpreting Scripture:

**There is a Language Gap:**

Knowing Greek and Hebrew helps to bridge the gap, but there are some shades of meaning and some nuances of grammar in the Hebrew and Greek languages which can never be fully captured in the English Language.

**The Cultural Gap:**

Things which were common in the place and time in which the writer lived may not be common or well known to us. Our Wedding and funeral customs are different as well as farming practices and political and economic systems.

**The Spiritual Gap:**

Faith is an indispensable requirement for true interpretation of the Scriptures.

Between the Believer to the Unbeliever there is a Spiritual Gap.

*“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him (the unbeliever), and he can not understand them,”* (I Cor. 2:14)

While it is possible for an unbeliever to know in an outward way what the words of Scripture say, it is not possible for him to know them in the same way as the believer does.

Two Presuppositions which are fundamental to sound Biblical Interpretation are:

1. All Scripture centers in / on Christ.

*“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But **these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.**”* (John 20:30-31)

2. All Scripture is verbally Inspired by God.

*“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* (II Peter 1:20-21)

STUDY THE BIBLE!

KNOW THE TRUTH!

THEN WHEN YOU HEAR FALSE DOCTRINE YOU WILL RECOGNIZE IT AS FALSE!