

## Section 1: THE GOAL OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

### I. Introduction: What Is Hermeneutics?

1. Bibliology
2. Hermeneutics
3. Jim Rosscup: “Hermeneutics determines the methods, techniques, or principles which will best serve in getting at the proper interpretation of any part of the Bible.”

#### A. The Definition of Hermeneutics

- “Hermeneutics” – from the Greek word (ἐρμηνεύω) “hermeneuo,” which means to translate or interpret.

### HERMENEUTICS VS. EXEGESIS

- Hermeneutics: The set of underlying principles which guide the process of arriving at an accurate interpretation of Scripture.
- Exegesis: The application of those principles in which the interpreter actually \_\_\_\_\_ of the text the meaning of Scripture.
- Exposition: The communication of the meaning of the text along with its relevance to the contemporary audience.

#### In Summary:

**Hermeneutics:** the principles of interpretation

**Exegesis:** the act of interpretation

**Exposition:** the communication and application of the interpretation

The faithful teacher/expositor of God’s word is a faithful exegete of God’s word, which means he is a faithful interpreter of God’s word.

Before we can faithfully teach God’s word, we must faithfully exegete and interpret God’s word, using correct hermeneutical principles.

---

<sup>1</sup> Notes compiled from The Master’s Seminary and Matt Waymeyer Hermeneutics course, *Grasping God’s Word* (Duvall and Hays), *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Roy Zuck), and Cornerstone Church *Cutting It Straight*.

## B. The Significance of Hermeneutics

### WHY IS HERMENEUTICS SO IMPORTANT?

- Because of what the Bible is.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed

- Because the Bible meets humanity's greatest need; salvation and sanctification.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.

- Because the Bible is necessary to equip us for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 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.

Preface to the 1560 Geneva Bible: The Bible is “the light to our paths, the key of the kingdom of heaven, our comfort in affliction, our shield and sword against Satan, the school of all wisdom, the glass wherein we behold God’s face, the testimony of hi favor, and the only food and nourishment of our souls.”

Charles Spurgeon: “Nobody ever outgrows Scripture: the book widens and deepens with our years.”

- Because those who communicate and teach the Bible are mandated by God to interpret it correctly.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.

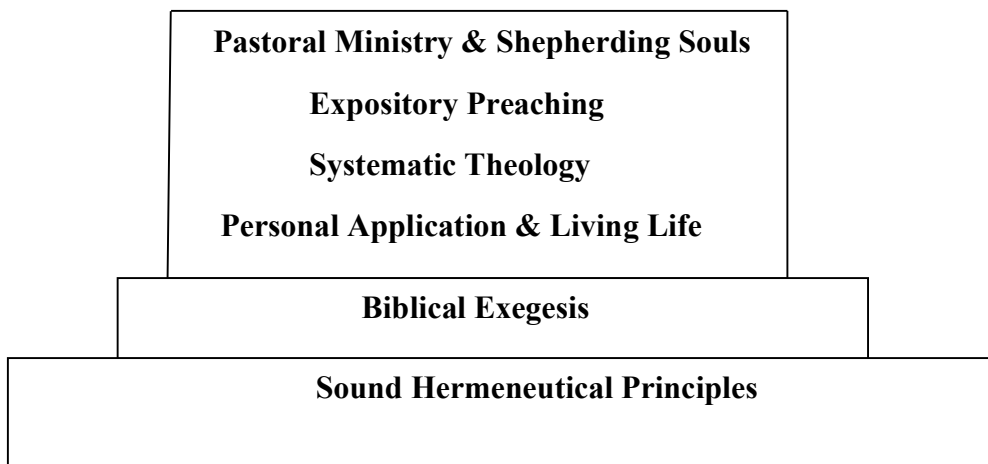
- Because the meaning of a text is not always obvious.

Sample interpretive issues:

- Are the days in Genesis 1 referring to 24-hour periods or some other long period of time?
- Since Abraham, David, and others practiced it, is polygamy OK? Why or why not?

- Should we continue the commands in the Pentateuch? The Sabbath, the food, dietary, ceremonial, and civil laws? Why not, if not?
  - Since Gideon put out a fleece to confirm God’s will in Judges 6:37, is that a legitimate method for us to determine his will in our lives today? Why or why not?
  - In Luke 15, is the prodigal son a believer or unbeliever? How do we know?
  - What is the gift of “tongues” in Acts 2? And what is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 14, and how do we arrive at a correct understanding?
  - Should head coverings, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11, be practiced today? Why or why not?
  - What is Paul talking about with reference to baptizing the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29?
  - When Paul says that Christ is “the firstborn of all creation” in Colossians 1:15, are the Jehovah Witnesses correct in concluding that he was created? Why or why not?
- Hermeneutics are important because of the foundational influence they have in life.

Matt Waymeyer: “The hermeneutical principles which guide the interpretive process form the foundation of one’s exegesis, which in turn forms the foundation of one’s (a) personal application of Scripture, (b) systematic theology, and (c) expository preaching of the Word (see Ezra 7:10). In short, these hermeneutical principles set the course for the entirety of the pastor’s [and church leader’s] life and ministry!”



**THE PATTERN OF EZRA 7:10:** Ezra set his heart to:

- Study God’s Word
- Practice God’s Word
- Teach God’s Word
  - At the foundation of the entire process is setting our hearts !

“set his heart” means: make firm. make ready, prepare, direct towards in a moral sense

**II. The Need for Bible Interpretation**

Matt Waymeyer: “Interpretation is a way of **life**. Every time you read or listen to someone’s words, you are instantaneously (and usually unconsciously) applying hermeneutical principles to seek to interpret what is communicated. However, this does not guarantee that you will interpret the words of others—or in this case, the words of Scripture—accurately.”

**A. The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:25-35**

- Philip’s question: “Do you understand what you are reading?” (v. 30)
- Eunuch’s answer: “How could I, unless someone guides me?” (v. 31)

**THEREFORE:**

- The ability to *read* Scripture does not guarantee the ability to understand it.
- Proper hermeneutics can help one interpret what the Bible says.

**B. Ezra and the Levites in Nehemiah 8:1-12**

- The Role of the Levites:
  - They *read* the Word of God (v. 8a)
  - They *explained* the Word of God (v. 7b)
  - They gave the *sense* of Word of God (v. 8b)
- The Response of the People:
  - “They *understood* the reading” (v. 8c)
  - “They *understood* the words which had been made known to them” (v. 12c)

**THEREFORE:**

- The ability to *hear* Scripture does not guarantee the ability to understand it.
- Proper hermeneutics can help someone understand/interpret what the Bible says.

**The Point:**

Accurate Bible interpretation is not automatic; there is a need to carefully apply sound principles of hermeneutics. Like anything worth doing in life, it is a learned skill. There is a right way and a wrong way to do hermeneutics.

**III. The Prerequisites for Bible Interpretation**

Just like any rigorous skill in life, there are preconditions and requirements to accurately interpret Scripture. If any of these are missing, one's ability to correctly interpret and understand God's word will be hindered.

a. Regeneration

1 Corinthians 2:11-14 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, <sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. <sup>14</sup> But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

1. Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and thus indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is the prerequisite to properly ascertaining Scripture.
2. The Holy Spirit is our light into the mind of God.
3. The Holy Spirit does not help you see a deeper, mysterious meaning in the Bible, but the meaning of the Bible.
4. The Holy Spirit is not given to discover the secret meaning of Scripture, but the **single meaning**.
5. Being saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit does not guarantee personal infallibility. It is still possible to incorrectly interpret his word.

6. Having the Spirit does not preclude hard work in Bible study. He **enables** hard work and fruit from doing so.
7. That all believers are indwelt by the Spirit indicates **all** can understand his word.

b. Reverence and respect for God's Word

Psalm 138:2 I will bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.

Isaiah 66:2 "For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."

2 Timothy 3:15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

1. The Scriptures are called holy and should be treated as such.

c. Prayer

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.

Psalm 119:26 I have told of my ways, and You have answered me; Teach me Your statutes.

Psalm 119:33-36 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. <sup>34</sup> Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all *my* heart. <sup>35</sup> Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it. <sup>36</sup> Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to *dishonest* gain.

d. Willingness to submit and obey

Hebrews 5:11-14 Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

James 1:19-22 *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

1. Bible interpretation is not a morally neutral act. Idols and an unwillingness to submit can cloud understanding.
  2. We do not approach Scripture in judgment seat over it, but in submission under it.
  3. Sanctification and correct hermeneutical ability go together.
- e. Interaction with the Church (local church and global)
1. Local: Willingness to have my thinking of, and living before, God checked by other believers in the local church.
  2. Global: Willingness to check interpretations with faithful, sound commentators.
  3. We should suspect ourselves and our understanding of Scripture if we have a lone-ranger Christian approach to the local church.
  4. Committed, consistent, and candid relationships in the local church are God's design to exercise his good care over us. This brings shape to our sanctification, which sharpens our understanding of Scripture.
- f. Willingness to put in much effort

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent...

1. No verse of Scripture yields its meaning to a lazy people. (A.W. Tozer)

- g. Desire to pass on to others

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Romans 15:14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

2 Timothy 2:2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Titus 2:3-4 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, <sup>4</sup> so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children

1. The importance of understanding how to interpret and pass on God's word is governed by the new identity all Christians have been mercifully given: disciple-makers.
2. We are commanded to, by God's grace, share God's word with the lost so that they are converted to Christ.
3. We are commanded to share God's word with other believers so that they grow in Christlikeness.

**NOTE:** See the doctrine of Illumination from Bibliology study

#### **IV. The Goal of Bible Interpretation**

##### **A. Introduction**

Matt Waymeyer: "Before actually sitting down to study a given passage of Scripture, it is essential for the interpreter to have a clear understanding of the proper goal of Bible interpretation."

##### **B. The Goal of Interpretation**

Matt Waymeyer: "Simply stated, the goal of Bible interpretation is *to discover the original, divinely intended meaning of the author who wrote the text.*"

Our goal is to keep with the authorial intent of Scripture.

This means we are to keep in mind that:

1. Each of the sixty-six books of the Bible was written by a particular author to a particular audience at a particular point in time.
2. In writing what he did, each biblical author sought to communicate information to his readers, information he expected them to understand.
3. The goal of today's interpreter is to answer the question: *What did the biblical author intend his original reader(s) to understand?*



**The single goal stated:**

- “to discover the original meaning and intention of the text” (Ramm)
- to arrive at “a clear understanding of the author’s original intention” (Fee)
- “to arrive at the meaning of the text that the biblical writers... intended their readers to understand.” (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard)
- “to determine what the text of Scripture itself says and means” (Zuck)
- “to determine what the passage meant in the biblical context—that is, what it meant to the biblical audience” (Duvall and Hays)

**Example:** When Paul exhorted Timothy not to “lay hands on anyone too hastily” (1 Tim 5:22), the *question* is: *What did the apostle intend Timothy to understand when he wrote this?*

**Essentials on the meaning of Scripture:**

- The meaning of Scripture first existed in the mind of God.
- It was communicated through the human author.
- It is contained in the text.
- It is fixed and unchanging.
- It is objective and intelligible.
- It exists apart from the human interpreter.
- The goal of the interpreter is to discover this meaning.

Duvall and Hays: “We do not create meaning out of a text; rather, we seek to find the meaning that is already there.”

**C. The Quest for Objectivity**

God’s word is objective. The job of the interpreter is to discover the objective meaning without introducing his own subjectivity.

Waymeyer: “The unfortunate tendency of many interpreters is to ignore the author’s intention in favor of the question: ‘What does the Bible mean to *me*?’ The problem with this approach is that what the Bible means to any given

interpreter is *irrelevant*, for the true meaning of Scripture is found in the intention of the original author, *not* in the interpretation of the contemporary reader.”

- **Instead of asking, “What does this text mean to me?” we ask, “What does this text mean, whether or not I exist?”**
  
- Instead of asking, “What does this text mean to me?” ask, “What does this text mean to God?”
  - Since Scripture is God’s word, what it means to God is what it means. That meaning is determined according to the principles of hermeneutics.
  
- Instead of asking, “What does this say for me and the plan for my life?” ask, “What is this text saying about God and his sovereign plan of redemption for his glory?”
  
- Instead of asking, “What kind of plans and things can I get for myself from this text?” ask, “What kind of me is necessary for God’s plan as revealed in this text?”

Gordon Fee: “A text cannot mean [now] what it never meant [then]. Or to put that in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken.”

- Therefore, the idea of “that is simply your interpretation” is a **myth**. There is no such thing as “your interpretation,” “my interpretation,” and “another’s interpretation.” Rather, there is only God’s interpretation, which is the single meaning of the text and the authorial intent.
  
- We do not dare have “our interpretation” as it pertains to the word of God. Scripture is God’s inspired word. Thus, God set the meaning of each text. Our job is to apply correct hermeneutics, not to define, but discover God’s interpretation of the text.

Waymeyer: “The subjective approach of ‘What does the Bible mean to me?’ must be rejected in favor of the objective approach of seeking to discover the fixed meaning inherent in the text itself.”

Robert Traina: “The Scriptures are distinct from the interpreter and are not an integral part of him. If the truths of the Bible already resided in man, there would be no need for the Bible. The Bible is an objective body of literature which exists because man needs to know certain truths which he himself cannot know and which must come to him from without. Consequently, if he is to discover the truths which reside in this objective body of literature, he must utilize an approach which corresponds in nature with it, that is, an objective approach.”

### **EISEGESIS VS. EXEGESIS:**

- Eisegesis: prefix *eis* meaning “into” and involves reading meaning *into* the text
- Exegesis: prefix *ex* meaning “out of” and involves reading meaning *out of* the text

### **KEY QUESTION:** Why *exegesis* instead of *eisegesis*?

Waymeyer: “If one interpreter is free to read into a verse what he wants it to mean, and another can read into it what *he* wants it to mean—and if neither interpretation is inductively drawn out of the text itself—both interpreters have rejected the right of Scripture to speak on its own and have exchanged the truth and authority of God’s Word for their own ideas.

The primary challenge in the quest for objectivity is the presence and influence of *presuppositions*. A presupposition is a preconceived idea that may affect the interpreter’s understanding of a given text of Scripture. Although not all presuppositions are bad or counterproductive, they often make it difficult for the interpreter to be objective in his interpretation of the text.”

Preconditions which can hinder discovering the objective meaning of a text:

- what someone previously told him the text means
  - what his theological beliefs will (or will not) “allow” the text to mean
  - what he would prefer the text to mean
  - what he expects the text to say
  - what makes sense to him
  - his own experience and what “rings true” with that experience
  - his own culture or circumstances (which are not those of Scripture)
  - his previous superficial study and understanding of the text
- Sound hermeneutics:
- labors to allow the text to say what it says, nothing more and nothing less.
  - allows the text to dictate the singular meaning.
  - requires that the interpreter become a servant to the text, not a judge over it.
  - seeks to allow God his sovereign place of rule in speaking by bringing out (exegesis) the meaning of the text.
- John Calvin: “It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”

Waymeyer: “Respect the “First-Amendment Rights” of the text. Allow the Bible to have freedom of speech. This involves a willingness to honor the authority of God’s Word by affirming whatever Scripture teaches, even if it is contrary to one’s presuppositions. It also involves a willingness to let Scripture correct and refine those presuppositions. In a word, it involves *humility*.”