

Session 5: Hermeneutics and Christian Growth

Hermeneutics = the study of the principles of interpretation

Exegesis = the actual interpretation of the Bible

Hermeneutics establishes the principles by which exegesis is practiced.

I. Hermeneutical Systems

- A. **Allegorical hermeneutics** - assumes that the Bible has various levels of meaning and tends to focus on the spiritual sense, the moral sense, as opposed to the literal sense.

Allegorical systems arise when the interpreter cannot accept literal interpretations of Biblical passages.

The actual words are not understood in their literal sense but instead hold symbolic meaning. The issue is that the interpreter determines the symbol and its meaning.

- B. **Literal interpretation** – This commonly used theological term refers to the plain, normal, natural reading and meaning of the text. The words used carry their normal grammatical meaning.
- C. **Semi-allegorical / semi-literal interpretation** – When the reader cannot agree with a normal reading, the rules of allegorical interpretation must be applied.

II. Principles of Normal Hermeneutics

- A. **Interpret grammatically** – Words are the vehicle of thoughts. Because the meaning of any passage must be determined by the study of words and their relationships within sentences, determining their grammatical sense is the starting point of interpretation.
- B. **Interpret contextually** – Words and sentences do not stand in isolation from one another. The contexts of the words and sentences must be studied to see the relationship that each verse sustains to the ones that precede and follow it. Context will involve sentences, paragraphs, books, as well as the Bible as a whole.

- C. **Interpret historical** – Historicity only has a bearing on the text when the text points to its impact. While historical facts might help us in understanding the mindset of the reader or the context in which the reader lived, they do not play a part in the meaning of the text unless the text itself asserts that influence.
- D. **Interpret progressively** – In the process of revealing His message to man, God would add and/or change in one era what He gave in another.
- E. **Dispensationalism** - considers Biblical history as divided by God into dispensations or ages to which God has allotted **distinctive** administrative principles.
- **Innocence** – Adam was under probation before the Fall. It ended with Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden.
 - **Conscious** – From the Fall to the Great Flood. It ends with the worldwide deluge.
 - **Human Government** – After the Great Flood, humanity was responsible for enacting the death penalty. It ends with the dispersion at the Tower of Babel.
 - **Abrahamic Covenant** – From Abraham to Moses. Ends with the refusal to enter Canaan and the 40 years of unbelief in the wilderness.
 - **Mosaic Law** – From Moses to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Ends with the scattering of Israel in AD70.
 - **Age of Grace** – From the cross to the rapture of the church.
 - **Tribulation** - Some include the tribulation in the age of grace, and some have the tribulation as its dispensation.
 - **Millennial Kingdom** – A 1000-year reign of Christ on earth centered in Jerusalem. Ends with God's judgment on the final rebellion.

III. **Illumination**

Illumination – the ministry of the Holy Spirit in which He helps the believer to **understand** the truth of the Bible.

- John 16:12-15
- 1 Cor. 2:9 – 3:2

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in illumination.

- The Spirit is the **teacher**, and His presence in the believer guarantees the availability of this ministry to all believers.
- Unbelievers, therefore, **cannot** experience this ministry. Even though they may achieve a high level of understanding of the Bible, they consider what they know basically as foolishness.
- The Spirit's teaching encompasses "**all** the truth," including that of "what is to come," i.e., Christian doctrine, including prophecy.
- Carnality in the believer can **thwart** this ministry.
- The purpose of the Spirit's ministry is to **glorify** Christ.
- The Spirit will use those who have the gift of **teaching** to carry out His ministry (Rom. 12:7; 1 John 2:27). This includes the writings of those who, now dead, have left the results of the Spirit's work in their lives in that written form.

The experience of illumination is not by direct revelation. The Canon of Scripture is closed!

IV. **Christian Growth**

Progressive Sanctification – It is the ongoing, lifelong process by which a believer, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is transformed to become more and more like Jesus Christ. It is a gradual process of spiritual growth that begins at salvation and continues until death or the return of Christ.

It is a divine-human cooperative where the Trinity, the Word of God, and the person are involved in putting off sin, transforming the desires of the heart, and putting on righteousness.

A. Preparing the Heart

- **Pray**: Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to guide you. Pray for understanding, wisdom, and a receptive heart. Ask God to speak to you through the text and to reveal what He wants you to learn.
- **Remove Distractions**: Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Put away your phone and anything else that might compete for your attention.

- **Gather Your Tools:** Have a notebook, pen, and a good translation of the Bible, and any additional resources ready.

B. Observations

- **Read for the Big Picture:** Read the entire passage, chapter, or even the whole book in one sitting to get the overall context and flow of thought.
- **Read Carefully and Multiple Times:** Read the passage again, slowly and thoughtfully. Look for key details.
- **Ask Observational Questions:**
 - **Who?** Who are the people involved? Who is speaking? Who is the audience?
 - **What?** What is happening? What are the key events, ideas, or commands?
 - **When?** When did this take place?
 - **Where?** Where did this happen?
 - **Why?** Why is this being said or done? What is the purpose of this passage?
- **Mark Your Bible:** Underline or highlight key phrases, circle repeated words, and make notes of your observations in the margins. Consider using an **inductive** method of marking your Bible.

C. Interpretation

- **Consider the Context:** A text without a context is a pretext for a prooftext.
- **Look for Cross-References:** Use a cross-reference Bible or a concordance to see if other passages in Scripture shed light on the one you're studying. Scripture interprets Scripture.
- **Identify the Main Point:** What is the central message or theme of this passage? What is the main truth the author is trying to convey?
- **Consult Resources Lastly:** It can be helpful to consult a reliable commentary or study Bible notes *after* you have done your own observation and interpretation. Use these resources to confirm or refine your understanding, not to replace your own study.

D. Application and Implementation

1. Application of God's Word

a. Definition

Application is the process of taking a universal truth from Scripture and relating it to your specific circumstances, needs, and spiritual growth.

b. Key Aspects

- i. **It's an intellectual and spiritual process:** It involves asking questions like, "What does this passage teach me about God, myself, and the world?" and "What do I need to confess or repent of?"
- ii. **It identifies the specific changes in belief or behavior that God's Word requires.**
- iii. **It's the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through the Word and impresses upon us the right application for our lives at a particular moment.**

2. Implementation of God's Word

a. Definition

Implementation is about putting the application into practice. It's the concrete, practical steps you take to live out the truth you have applied to your life.

b. Key Aspects

- i. **Moving from Theory to Practice:** Implementation is the action phase. It's where you move beyond just knowing what you should do and actually start doing it.

- ii. **Creating a Plan:** Implementation often involves creating a specific plan or strategy.

For example, if the application of a passage is "I need to spend more time in God's Word," the implementation would be the specific steps you take to make that happen: "I will wake up 15 minutes earlier each morning to read the Bible," or "I will join a Bible study group."

- iii. **Requires Discipline and Effort:** While application is a revelation of what needs to be done, implementation is the hard work of consistently doing it.

FEATURE	APPLICATION	IMPLEMENTATION
Core Idea	Understanding the relevance of God's Word for my life.	Putting the relevant truths into action.
Key Questions	What does this mean for me?	How will I do this?
Biblical Parallel	James 1:23-24	James 1:25
Process	A personal, prayerful, and introspective process of learning and discerning	A practical, deliberate, and sometimes difficult process of disciplined action.