

The Necessity of Hermeneutics in Bible Study

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Many Christians increase their faith by studying the Bible. Even though some may enjoy reading famous biblical passages such as, David and Goliath, Daniel in the Lion's Den, and the woman at the well, there are several difficult passages that are not so easy to read and understand. For those hard challenging passages, there are methods that have been developed to help readers understand and interpret the Bible. Hermeneutics is the study of interpreting the Bible. Students of the Bible (whether matriculating through the halls of academia or just learning at home or a local bible study) will find that hermeneutics is necessary to increase biblical knowledge base, deepen an understanding of the Word of God, and enable correct application of the Bible to daily living.

Before examining the relationship between hermeneutics and bible study, its meaning should be more clearly defined. The following sources give their account on matter. According to www.christianpublishinghouse.com: "Let's just remind ourselves of the meaning of hermeneutics. The word 'hermeneutics' is derived from the Greek word *hermeneuo* which means to translate or interpret ... The word *hermeneuo* came to refer to the bringing of someone to an understanding of something. Biblical hermeneutics is the science and art of interpreting the Bible. By means of various principles, it seeks to discover the precise meaning of the original authors of Scripture." Werner G. Jeanrond had written an abstract shared on www.link.springer.com that says, "By hermeneutics we mean the theory of interpretation. The word contains a reference to Hermes,

the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology. Hermes' task was to explain to humans the decisions and plans of their gods. Thus, he bridged the gap between the divine and the human realm. Similarly, hermeneutics is concerned with examining the relationship between two realms, the realm of a text or a work of art on the one hand and the people who wish to understand on the other hand.”

According to www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com, “ Hermeneutics is an English translation for the Greek word meaning ‘translation.’ We could use it to say it is the hermeneutical explanation, exposition, expression, rendition, or translation of Scriptures in the Bible. When someone is applying biblical heremeneutics they are explaining the act of difficult or unfamiliar terms or even translating a word or words from one language to another.” www.answeringenesis.org reports, “Hermeneutics ... the branch of theology that focuses on identifying and applying sound principles of biblical interpretation. While the Bible is generally plain in its meaning, proper interpretation requires careful study and is not always an easy task.” It is stated by www.quora.com that, “Hermeneutics is simply the art and science of interpretation which is governed by rules of interpretation to determine what any portion of Scripture says, ‘...There is a simple meaning of any particular passage which has been given by the author, so we need to understand what was being said by the author. Different applications of a text comes after understanding the meaning of the text. ‘What does this passage mean to you?’ is the usual question bible teachers ask. But the real question is ‘What did this passage mean by the author,’ Being removed by the time when the writer wrote

does not mean we cannot understand exactly what the author intended to say. Our interaction with the text gives us the meaning and understanding of the message written and it's very possible by the method of hermeneutics to understand the author's original intent." Further noted and meticulously detailed by www.wikipedia.org , "Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation concerning the books of the Bible. It is part of the broader field of hermeneutics which involves the study of principles of interpretation for all forms of communication, nonverbal and verbal. While Jewish and Christian biblical hermeneutics have some overlap and dialogue, they have distinct separate interpretative traditions. Talmudial hermeneutics refer to Jewish methods for the investigation and determination of the meaning of the Hebrew Bible as well as rules by which Jewish law could be established....Methods by which the Talmud explores the meaning of scripture:

- Grammar and exegesis
- The interpretation of certain words and letters and apparently superfluous and/or missing words or letters, and prefixes, and suffixes
- The interpretation of those letters which, in certain words are provided with points
- The interpretation of the letters in a word according to their numerical value
- The interpretation of words by dividing it into two or more words

- The interpretation of a word according to its consonantal form or according to its vocalization
- The interpretation of a word by transposing its letters or by changing its vowels
- The logical deduction of a *halakah* from a scripture text or from another law.

“The rabbis of the Talmud considered themselves to be the receivers and transmitters of an Oral Torah as to the meaning of the Scriptures. They considered this Oral Tradition to set forth, the precise original meanings of the words revealed at the same time and by the same means as the original scriptures themselves. Interpretation methods listed above such as word play and letter counting were never used as logical proof of the meaning or teaching of a scripture. Instead they were considered to be a *smakhta*, a validation of a meaning that was already set by a ruling tradition or a homiletic backing for rabbinic rulings.”

“Until the Enlightenment biblical hermeneutics was usually seen as a form of special hermeneutic (like legal hermeneutics); the status of scripture was thought to necessitate a particular form of understanding and interpretation.”

“In the nineteenth century, it became increasingly common to read scripture just like any other writing, although the different interpretations were often disputed. Friedrich Schleiermacher argued against a distinction between general and special heremeneutics, and for a general theory of hermeneutics applicable

to all texts, including the Bible. Various methods of higher criticism sought to understand the Bible purely as a human historical document.”

“The concept of hermeneutics has acquired at least two different but related meanings which are in use today. Firstly, in the older sense, biblical hermeneutics may be understood as the theological principles of exegesis which is often virtually synonymous with principles of biblical interpretation or methodology of biblical exegesis. Secondly, the more recent development is to understand the term ‘biblical hermeneutics’ as the broader philosophical and linguistic underpinnings of interpretation. The question is posed: ‘How is understanding possible?’ The rationale of this approach is that, while scripture is ‘more than just an ordinary text’, it is certainly ‘no less than an ordinary text.’ Scripture is in the first analysis ‘text’ which human beings try to understand in this sense, the principles of understanding any text apply to the Bible as well (regardless of whatever other additional specifically theological principles are considered.”

“In this second sense, all aspects of philosophical and linguistic hermeneutics are considered to be applicable to the biblical text as well. There are obvious examples of this in the links between 20th century philosophy and Christian theology.”

“Biblical scholars have noted the diversity of interpretation by Protestant and to a lesser extent by Catholics. The Catholic Church asserts the capital

importance of biblical interpretation and Catholic scholars recognize some diversity in the Bible.”

“This form of theological hermeneutics in the mainstream Protestant tradition considers Christian Biblical hermeneutics in the tradition of explanation of the text, or exegesis, to deal with various principles that can be applied to the study of Scripture. If the canon of Scripture is considered as an organic whole, rather than an accumulation of disparate individual texts written and edited in the course of history, then any interpretation that contradicts any other part of Scripture is not considered to be sound. Biblical hermeneutics differs from hermeneutics and within traditional Protestant theology, there are a variety of interpretive formulae such formulae are generally not mutually exclusive, and interpreters may adhere to several of these approaches at once. These formulae include (according to J. E. Hartill 1960 Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics, Grand Rapids:Zordervan):

- The Historical Grammatical Principle
- Alternate mutually exclusive models of history
- The Dispensational model or the Chronometric Principle
- The Covenantal Model
- The New Covenantal Model
- The Ethnic Division Principle
- The Breach Principle
- The Christo-Centric Principle

- **The Moral Principle**
- **The Discriminational Principle**
- **The Predictive Principle**
- **The Application Principle**
- **The Principle of Human Willingness in Illumination**
- **The Context Principle**
- **The First Mention Principle**
- **The Progressive Mention Principle**
- **The Comparative Mention Principle**
- **The Full Mention Principle or The Complete Mention Principle**
- **The Agreement Principle**
- **The Direct Statement Principle**
- **The Gap Principle**
- **The Threefold Principle**
- **The Repetition Principle**
- **The Synthetic Principle**
- **The Principle of Illustrative Mention**
- **The Double Reference Principle**
- **The Numerical Principle**
- **The Symbolic Principle**
- **The Typical Principle**
- **The Parabolic Principle**

- **The Cellegorical Principle**

To reinforce the idea that hermeneutics is necessary for bible study, www.bartleby.com says, “The primary need for hermeneutics is to determine and understand the meaning of biblical text. The purpose of hermeneutics is to bridge the gap between our minds and the minds of the Biblical writers through a thorough knowledge of the original language, ancient history, and the comparison of Scripture with Scripture.” www.biblicalarchaeology.org reports, “For as long as there have been biblical texts, there have been biblical hermeneutics, or biblical interpretations.” More validation of the importance of biblical hermeneutics is found in www.kingstheaway.org which states, “The way you interpret the Bible is important Hermeneutics is the study of how to interpret the Bible. To have a ‘hermeneutic’ means to have a way of interpreting the Bible....Everybody who reads the Bible has a hermeneutic. Everybody interprets the Bible one way or another. “

“Hermeneutics gives us the power to change how we interpret the Bible, so we aren’t just swept along by the assumptions of the culture around us. By examining and understanding those assumptions, we can decide whether they’re good ones or not and then potentially change them. We can gain insight into other people ways of reading the Bible. This can help us both not to assume that someone elses understanding of the Bible is wrong when its different from ours and to see the riches and value in their understanding.”

Students of the Bible can deepen their understanding of the Word of God by implementing hermeneutics. According to www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com, “Hermeneutics can unfold a new meaning or reveal something that is hidden from casual readers of the Bible and make obscure words expound into their full significance. Hermeneutics can help us understand the original intent of the Scripture, give us a proper interpretation, allow us to understand it more deeply, and then apply it to our everyday lives. Hermeneutics agrees with how we can discern difficult to understand passages or verses. We can use the adjacent scriptures, the chapter itself, or even the entire book to see the specific purpose of one verse. The next time you hear the word hermeneutics used, I hope you can see the importance of using good biblical hermeneutics for bible study, for preaching, for Sunday School, and for reading the Bible.”

In www.gotquestions.org, the case for hermeneutics deepening understanding of the Scriptures gets stronger by using the three basic laws of hermeneutics: “The most important law of biblical hermeneutics is that the Bible should be interpreted literally. We are to understand the Bible in its normal or plain ‘meaning’ unless the passage is obviously intended to be symbolic or if figures of speech are employed. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. Some interpreters make the mistake of trying to read between the lines of Scripture to come up with isoteric meanings that are not truly in the text, as if every passage has a hidden spiritual truth that we should see to decrypt. Biblical hermeneutics keeps us faithful to the intended meaning of Scripture and away

from allegorizing Bible verses that should be understood literally. A second crucial law of biblical hermeneutics is that passages must be interpreted historically, grammatically, and contextually. Interpreting a passage historically means we must seek to understand the culture background and situation that prompted the text. For example, to fully understand Jonah's flight in Jonah 1:1-3, we should research the history of the Assyrians as related to Israel.. A third law of biblical hermeneutics is that Scripture is always the best interpreter of Scripture. For this reason, we must always compare Scripture with Scripture when trying to determine a passage. For example, Isaiah's condemnation of Judah's desire to seek Egypt's help and their reliance on a strong cavalry (Isaiah 31:1) was motivated, in part, by God's explicit command that the people not go to Egypt to seek horses (Deuteronomy 17:16). Some people avoid studying biblical hermeneutics because they mistakenly believe it will limit their ability to learn new truths from God's Word or stifle the Holy Spirit's illumination of Scripture....Biblical hermeneutics is all about finding the correct interpretation of the inspired text."

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