



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 7 – HERMENEUTICS: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
LESSON 140 – THE HERMENEUTICS OF CHRIST

GOSPEL-CENTERED HERMENEUTICS – GRAEME GOLDSWORTHY

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Summary

- ▶ As we have studied about how to study the Scriptures, we are concerned with understanding the Bible as the Word of God. “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” Therefore, any of the Christian knowledge we possess must be arrived at by the application of the principles of Scriptural interpretation.
- ▶ The Person and Work of Jesus Christ is set forth in the Word of God, showing us that HE is the Word of God! He is the final interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures as presented in the New.
- ▶ To conclude our study of hermeneutics then, today we will examine the Hermeneutics of Christ.

The Person of Christ

- ▶ The hermeneutics of the Person of Christ, as distinguished from the Work of Christ, lead us to consider the God/Man.
- ▶ The person of Jesus of Nazareth was an immediate hermeneutical challenge to all of His contemporaries, including those who followed Him. He showed Himself as fully human, and yet made claims of a unique relationship to God the Father. The result was a variety of responses, ranging from charges of blasphemy deserving of death to submission and worship as is due to the One, True God. The reality of God coming in the flesh is what is clearly presented in the New Testament at the Incarnation.
- ▶ Jesus is true God; Jesus is true human; there is unity without fusion and distinction without separation.

The Person of Christ

- ▶ The history of Christological thinking shows that a number of representative heretical answers to the question about the person of Christ share a common error. Thus we have the following false solutions to the relationship of Jesus' divinity to His humanity:
- ▶ Ebionism – Jesus is human, but not divine.
- ▶ Docetism – Jesus is divine, but not human. He merely appeared to be human.
- ▶ Apollinarianism – Jesus divine spirit diminishes His humanity. He has a divine spirit but not a human spirit.
- ▶ Nestorianism – with divinity and humanity, Jesus has two natures and is two persons in one.

The Person of Christ

- ▶ The whole salvation process in the Old Testament anticipates the role of Christ in the key offices or ministries in which one person represents the whole community – the divine and human, prophet, priest, king, and mediator. Jesus dies as a man to satisfy the righteous wrath of God, but only as God could He die in total innocence as a substitute for fallen mankind.

The Work of Christ

- ▶ The hermeneutics of the Work of Christ stem from the salvation-historical aspect of the gospel. Here we are looking at what the God/Man did. What did He achieve for us in life, death, resurrection, and ascension? We are concerned then with what the gospel, seen from the point of view of the actions of God through His Son, implies for the way we understand the Bible.
- ▶ The dynamics of salvation history in the Old Testament point towards, and find fulfilment in, the dynamics of the gospel.
- ▶ The ministry of Jesus the fulfiller has immense hermeneutic significance, since it draws together all the variety of themes and events in the Old Testament that foreshadow the fullness of God's purposes.

The Work of Christ

- ▶ The pre-existence of Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, shows us that He is God from all eternity and the Creator of all things. That this eternal Creator/Word would become flesh and dwell among us sums up the action of God in Christ.
- ▶ The redemptive work of Jesus guarantees that the people of God have been put into a positive relationship to the Word of God. That means that we can read the Bible and know that in Christ we become true sons of God because of His Sonship attributed to us.
- ▶ The work of the incarnate Christ includes the living of a perfect human life in relation to God the Father.

The Glorification of Christ

- ▶ The resurrection, ascension, and glorification of Christ are summed up in the fact that He sits with the Father in glory and intercedes for His people.
- ▶ Jesus lived bodily, died bodily, rose bodily, and ascended to the Father bodily. To diminish the bodily resurrection and ascension is to hold to the paganizing gnostic heresy all over again.
- ▶ The bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus demonstrate the absolute acceptance by the Father of the work of His incarnate Son.
- ▶ The resurrection and ascension of Jesus show that the coming of the kingdom and the coming of the end happens in three ways: in the Person and Work of Christ, in the gospel age, and in the consummation when Christ returns.

The Glorification of Christ

- ▶ The ascension is the signal that the kingdom of God demands the missionary role of the church. The gospel must now go into all the world as we see in the end, people around the Throne who have come from every tribe and tongue.
- ▶ The ascension of the resurrected Christ demands a hermeneutic of the Lordship of Christ. Christ rules now in this world through the gospel as it is preached. Our weak efforts are justified in Christ, and our hermeneutical stumbles are redeemed when we see that in the final analysis, it is the Lord Himself who is the evangelistic speaker of His powerful and saving Word. The same Lord commissions His servants to relay His gospel as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

The Spirit of Christ

- ▶ The hermeneutics of the Spirit of Christ reminds us that all Three Persons of the Trinity are involved in the divine act of communication. The Father is the Communicator. The Son is the Communication. The Spirit is necessary for the Word to be a demonstration of power. Calvin spoke of the Spirit bringing us to salvation and enabling us to understand God's Word.
- ▶ The Spirit enables us to overcome the effects of sin on the rational process. He makes it possible for us to overcome our God-denying pre-understanding in order to discern the meaning of the Word.
- ▶ The doctrine of inspiration reminds us that it was the role of the Holy Spirit to guarantee that what was written down by human authors was what God intended to be written down.

The Spirit of Christ

- ▶ When we speak of authorial intent, we must take into account the intent of both the divine and the human authors.
- ▶ It is the Spirit that regenerates and brings the believer to faith in the saving work of Christ. This is the radical hermeneutical realignment whereby we start to view all things in the light of the revelation of Christ.

Hands on Hermeneutics

- ▶ The whole Protestant ethos of the Bible for the people, along with the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture would both be nonsense if only an educated specialist could understand the Scriptures. There is a place for teachers in the biblical view of the life of believers and so we do want to provide rigorous training for pastors and teachers.
- ▶ Our Bible reading programme should begin with preparation to focus on large portions, even whole books of the Bible, to better understand the unity of the Bible. Short devotionals can be useful but often lead to overlooking themes and major points of passages of Scripture.
- ▶ Read in context.
- ▶ Relate the text to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ The last stage in the function of hermeneutics is the determination of what kind of application the text's teaching can have to the Christian in his daily life.