

## Hermeneutics – Deviant hermeneutical approaches

1. *The allegorical approach* – This approach sees the persons, places, and events in the text as merely symbolic, and to truly understand the text you must discern what each of the nouns in the text really represent. Pilgrim's Progress, Holy War and The Chronicles of Narnia are all allegorical works (Song of Solomon?)

Allegory is not always bad: see the women's bible study that we had here last year on Esther. Esther symbolized the Christian, Artaxerxes symbolized God, Esther's queenly robes symbolize the righteousness that Xtians must have to approach God, and the extension of the king's scepter is an allegory for the grace shown to sinners by God. This is a neat way to teach Esther, but when we allegorize we must remember that that is likely not the meaning that God had for that text. What did God mean in the book of Esther? Showing his sovereignty in political affairs, that you reap what you sow, that God would not allow his old covenant people to be exterminated until their Messiah had come.

A brother here preached a sermon on Jeremiah 38 – Jeremiah represents sinners, in the pit. Ebed-melech represents Christ, who throws rags down to Jeremiah, and the rags represent the gospel which will save him. Jeremiah "sinners" need to do something with the "gospel" (put the rags under his arms) if they will be saved.

This approach was common in the early church (Spurgeon even used allegory). You had the ancient school at Alexandria, where Judaism, Gnosticism, and Neo-Platonism all meshed together. As we know from working through 1 John, worldly philosophy and Christianity do not go together. That is an unequal yoking. God is making foolish the wisdom of this world, 1 Cor. 1:20; 3:19. Allegory is not entirely useless, but it is dangerous. Its like dynamite – if you're careful with it and use it properly, you can get some *dynamic* results.

There is one instance of allegorizing in the NT: Gal. 4:21-24. Paul was under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost when he wrote that. We are not when we seek to allegorize, and must exercise great caution.

*What are some problems with the allegorical approach?*

1. It tends toward Gnosticism (it tries to go from the physical of the text to spiritual mystical realms while ignoring the physical).

2. It makes God out to be playing cosmic hide-and-seek (Neo-platonism, the unknowable “One” who is the subsistence of all things.)
3. It destroys the historicity of the Christian faith. If Jesus didn’t actually die on the cross and walk out of His grave, we have NO hope, 1 Cor. 15:14.
4. It fosters individualism through private interpretation. If Scripture is entirely allegory, then how do you know whose allegory is correct? You can arbitrarily choose whatever the people want to hear to gain followers, all the while muzzling the voice of Scripture. It makes Scripture into a snake that reveals itself only to your allegorical tune. *Scripture doesn’t bow to us, we bow to Scripture.*
5. If you want to teach Scriptural doctrines, go to those passages that teach them, and don’t try to force an allegory on God’s holy word. If its something that needs to be taught, then go to where God said it, and don’t try to speak for Him elsewhere in his word with your own forced allegory.

#### *The four-fold meaning –*

The fourfold meaning grew out of the allegorical interpretation and was prominent in medieval times. The fourfold application considered the

- Literal – “One day in Israel...”
- Moral – How we live by this text
- Spiritual – The mystical (allegorical) interpretation of the text
- Heavenly – What this text teaches us about the world to come

It was this fourfold interpretation that the Reformers came up against. Luther mercilessly mocked the allegorical method, and it became the general consensus that the allegorical method was deceptive, something akin to literary rape.

*Higher Criticism* – After the glorious awakening of the protestant reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, you had the Enlightenment (better called the Endarkenment) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The paradigm shift of the Enlightenment was the exaltation of human reason over the authority of the Scriptures. Instead of God telling man what to do through His Word, man told God that they would do what they want and he probably didn’t exist anymore. We are still reeling from the side effects of all the poison that was dumped in the intellectual well at the Enlightenment. The Scriptures became subject to what we call “higher criticism”:

- Source criticism – what sources did the authors of Scripture use?

- Form Criticism – how did the oral reports of historical events take form in written revelation?
- Redaction criticism – how did the biblical author compile and/or edit their work before it was a completed manuscript?

These criticisms called into question all the claims of the Bible, and as a result, hermeneutics took several blows:

Liberal theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wanted all the religious romance of Christianity without all the rigid dogma. So they stripped the names and themes of Christian figures and doctrines and tried to create something saccharin, sweet and innocent upon first taste, but really only artificial and ultimately deadly at the last.

Liberal theologians stripped all supernatural elements from the text of Scripture – no miracles, no virgin birth or resurrection, and no divine appearances. The liberal hermeneutic cast suspicion all over the Bible, and rendered the Bible to be nothing more than another ancient near east document. When you read liberal theologians, you don't get the impression that God is supreme and magnificent, you get the impression that the liberal author's mind is supreme and magnificent.

Applications:

1. Be careful of trying to force square pegs into round holes – Scriptures that are meant to teach one thing but we want to use them as a springboard to teach what we want to teach.
2. Avoid using the Scriptures as a launching pad into mystical realms to try and find some hidden meaning.
3. We bow our minds to Scripture, not Scripture to our minds

Suggest books to follow along:

Louis Berkhof's "Principles of Biblical Interpretation"

Robert Plummer's "40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible"