

Hermeneutics 3 – General principles (include handouts)

Clarifications:

Allegory – When given by author, acceptable. When brought to the reader, dangerous. We can't go to 1 Samuel 17 and say that we conquer our giants when we use the weapons God gives us. The text doesn't tell us that. Ephesians 6 tells us what weapons the Christian is to use in warfare. When is it acceptable to use allegory? Take it from trusted Bible teachers and don't make it a pursuit in your own Bible studies. Allegory is very illustrative, but not instructive in the sense that what the allegory is teaching is what God meant for His people to learn from that text of Scripture.

Typology/Signs – Pointing to a reality of fulfillment. Not allegorical, directional.

Figurative speech – The parables. Fictitious like allegory, but instructive, unlike allegory.

Analogy – Eze. 37 is analogous to every regenerated soul.

Allegory is to be distinguished from typology, which sees the types (and shadows, Jonah/fish, Christ/tomb) fulfilled later in Scripture.

Allegory must also be distinguished from analogy – analogy is given for the purpose of parallel comparison. Allegory is given to launch into the abstract. An analogy is a train track running parallel to a road. Allegory is jumping from the train to a car. The parables are analogies.

1. Read the Bible under the umbrella of redemption

God created Adam and told him to take dominion over the earth. God wanted Adam to exercise a subordinate lordship over the earth, and to use it to benefit himself and all his offspring after him. By this designated lordship, underneath the supreme lordship of Jesus Christ, Adam was to reflect the character of God in all the ways he related to creation. God would, and could not, do something contrary to His own character. But Adam did. Adam decided he would at least rival, maybe surpass God's lordship, and so disobeyed the only command of God. He did not act according to the character of God, and this is what it means to fall short of the glory of God. What is the glory of God but the reflection of His divinity? What does it mean for a human to glorify God? To do the godliness of God. According to human capacity, to reflect as much as possible His divinity. And yet no human does. This is what it

means to fall short of the glory of God. Humans do not act like God and reflect His character in all that they do. This is the limitation of the old covenant. When we read Scripture prior to Jesus coming, we must remember that Israel was given laws they could not keep, though as a nation Israel was expected to keep them to symbolize their holy devotion to God. Then Jesus comes in. He perfectly reflected the divine character of God in all that He did, and gave all humans the example of what it would be like if God were to do things as a human. How can humans know how God would act if He were in their place? Look at Jesus. Now that Jesus has come and died and saved His people, they are regenerated and given life that more and more begins to reflect the perfectly God-glorifying life of Jesus. These regenerated persons, Christians, began to imitate God, and reflect His godliness in what they do and who they are. They are holy as God is holy. They glorify God; that is, they spread His godliness over the earth as they live in it. They do what Adam did not, although at times revealing they are still of his fallen lineage.

Read it as linear redemption. Don't assume that OT characters had all the NT teaching you do, mainly because they didn't. Critical question: *God is moving to redeem a people for Himself. How is He doing that in the text I'm reading?*

2. Read the Bible in light of God's promised and delivered Messiah

Prior to Jesus – there is always that hope of Israel for a deliverer that is an undercurrent to the entire OT. The OT saints look forward to Christ, the NT ones look back at him. Same Savior, just different direction of looking. Know the expectation God's people would've had given the last covenant God made with them.

3. Know your covenant context – Read the word in context of the verse, the verse in context of the chapter, and chapter in context of the book, and book in context of the covenant/testament.

4. Because God does not change, He will never act contrary to his nature, so we can use what we know of the nature of God to guide us.

Because God is the ultimate author of Scripture, and He does not change, we can expect his Word to reflect His unity. The cohesiveness of Scripture is one of the great proofs of its veracity. Some of the parts

where God describes himself are some of the easiest passages to understand: Mal. 3:6; Is. 43:10,11

5. Let Scripture interpret Scripture; especially let the clear passages interpret the unclear. If the Scripture passage you are trying to interpret is cited elsewhere in Scripture, that is critical to your study. On the contrary, never use a clear passage of Scripture to confound clear elementary verses.

6. Know whether the text you are dealing with is descriptive or prescriptive.

Descriptive merely tells what happened, prescriptive tells us what we are supposed to do.¹ Never confuse what the Bible records with what the Bible teaches. Of course, even the descriptive passages are there to teach us something, whether it's the faithfulness of God, the judgment of God, the wickedness of men, the shrewdness of Satan, the power of God, the mercy/grace of God, the victory of God's people over God's enemies, etc.

Two examples: Polygamy is recorded, but not taught – See the example of marriage in Gen. 1 and Jesus' reinforcement: "A man shall leave...and cling to his wife (singular)..."

Sometimes the descriptive can overlap with the prescriptive; this is often true of the apostles. Because of their unique role in the life of the early church, what the apostles did plays a vital role in shaping how the New Covenant church is supposed to worship. The apostolic method is a model for the new covenant church. See Acts 6:4, 20:7; Rev. 1:10 for why we gather on the first day of the week.

Often times the text will speak favorably about an individual's character and behavior; to set these forth as examples is acceptable – 1 Cor. 11:1, Philippians 3:17, Hebrews 13:7. Be careful of moralizing.

7. Familiarize yourself with the cultural background of the text. OT and NT introductions are written expressly for this purpose. Bible dictionaries are helpful for looking up people, places, and things. If you don't know what a cistern is, you'll have trouble with a passage like Jeremiah 2:13. It is good to have a general timeline of history when working through the Bible. Knowing which nations displaced and

¹ This mirrors the decretive and perceptive will of God.

preceded other nations will make a lot more sense of the biblical accounts.

8. Read the Bible longing for God's glory

Many times, we brew our coffee and sit down with our Bibles looking to see what we can apply to our lives to be better Christians. This is not wrong, but it can lead to a self-centered approach to Scripture.

Our prayer must be that of Moses, "Lord, show me *your* glory." Blind me so that I might see. This goes back to reading the Bible under the umbrella of redemption *and* God fulfilling the promise to send His Messiah. We were made to worship, and that is what we should do every time we read, study, or listen to the Word of God.