

Hermeneutics, Lesson 1

Hermeneutics – from the Greek word *εραω*, meaning “to speak.” The Greek God Hermes, the God of speech, gets his name from this same Greek root. “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted (Greek: *διερμήνευσεν*) to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:27

What is hermeneutics? “The science of establishing the principles, methods, and rules needed in the interpretation of written texts” – Mark Chanski. Simply put, the science of interpretation. From Protestant Biblical Interpretation by Bernard Ramm: “Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system, and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation.” This is why every preacher preaches a text differently. Some will say that hermeneutics is better caught than taught, and for laypeople that sit under a preaching using good hermeneutics, they will know poor ones when they encounter them.

Hermeneutics is a tool that we use to do the work of exegesis. Exegesis is a transliteration of the Greek verb meaning “to lead out.” When we do exegesis we are trying to lead out the meaning of the text.

Exegetical theology is the idea of digging the meaning of the text out of the text, using the shovel of hermeneutics. There is also biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, and practical theology.

Exegesis and hermeneutics are related in the same way preaching and homiletics are related.

Hermeneutics is necessary because we stand at a distance from the circumstances which the biblical books were written in and the people they were written to. We need hermeneutics to guide us as we collect historical data and compare them to the words written about the circumstances and the people of history.

Did you ever run into somebody who says, “I just believe the Bible. The Bible is all I need.” Or, “I have no creed (of confession), I just believe the Bible.” That’s good, *but what is the Bible is teaching?* Not, “what do you

believe the Bible is teaching?" One reason I cannot stand the modern idea of small groups or youth groups in the church today is you have nothing but a bunch of teenagers with open Bibles asking "what does this passage mean to you?" Let me make this abundantly clear: It doesn't matter in the least what any Bible passage means to me or means to you. **All that matters is "what did God mean when He said it?"** If we start with what God meant when He spoke, then we can begin to make true application of the text to our lives.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness," 2 Timothy 3:16 God did not breathe into the writings of Peter, Luke, John, and Paul and make them inspired. The Scriptures we possess are the result of God's exhaling. God could've said many things, but what He has said is sufficient. What He repeats and emphasizes we certainly don't want to miss. So they are important, and we must take care how we handle them. You will often hear a term used to describe the special kind of hermeneutics that we used when referring to the Scriptures – "Hermeneutica Sacra."

Why are hermeneutics important?

1. Because apart from the Holy Spirit the Scriptures are a closed book to us, 1 Cor. 2:10,11.
2. Because God has spoken divine truth in time and space (in which we are geographically and chronologically removed), and this truth is sufficient for all we need in this life, 2 Peter 1:3
3. Because all Scripture is not equally clear, Ps. 119:18
4. Because we are prone to errors, hobby-horses, and ax-grinding when it comes to our interpretation of the Scriptures.
5. Because we only have light from the Scriptures as far as we understand them, Hosea 4:6
6. Because our adversaries' armor is often weakest in their hermeneutical joints (the OT not being a moral example)¹
7. Because to distort Scripture is to destroy oneself, 2 Peter 3:16
8. It is impossible to interpret Scripture in a vacuum. The exegete needs more than just the words on the page (Jer. 29:11). You must understand

¹ Bashing babies heads on the rocks isn't hard to understand in the light of human depravity and the divine conquests of Israel

the history against which the words were written, and of course the help of the Holy Spirit. “If the exegete allows his (or her) own context to ask questions that distort the message of the biblical text he or she is interpreting, the biblical text is still there awaiting the interpreter who will ask of it the questions that will yield a truer interpretation.” – Dr. Michael Haykin. Which is one way of saying, unless you ask the right questions, you’ll get the wrong answers.

9. To follow the example of our Savior (Luke 24:27), and worship and love and serve Him more the better we know and understand Scripture.