



ENGAGE

An Invitation To Delighting In God's Word
Part 5 — Reading God's Word

A PLAIN-SENSE HERMENEUTIC

- The word “hermeneutic” simply means the theory or method of interpretation.
- The Bible never explicitly states what hermeneutic should be applied, but we have strong internal and external evidence for what is usually referred to as the literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation.
- Does not mean we ignore figures of speech.
- Do not force allegorical or spiritualized interpretations.

A PLAIN-SENSE HERMENEUTIC

- The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy held a summit in 1982 and adopted the following helpful statement (Article XV) on the plain sense hermeneutic:
 - WE AFFIRM the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense—that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text.
 - WE DENY the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.

A PLAIN-SENSE HERMENEUTIC

- The best evidence outside the Bible in support of the plain sense hermeneutic is that we all apply a plain sense hermeneutic in everyday conversation.
- Civilizations are built on the concept of codes and statutes, and invariably a literal interpretation is assumed.
- While the Bible does not contain an explicit statement about what hermeneutic to apply, there is overwhelming circumstantial evidence for the literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation.
- Every time God gives instructions or commands, those commands are understood literally.

READ THEN REPEAT

- Effectively engaging God's Word begins with reading the entire book under consideration and doing so effectively.
- I highly recommend several relatively fast passes through a book, followed by several slower reads, before you begin a more intensive verse by verse study.
- These are contemplative reads focused on big picture ideas and observations.

READ THEN REPEAT

- Connection points that tie together different parts of the book
- Repetition of themes and ideas
- Repetition of certain words and phrases
- Points that are emphasized
- Old Testament allusions and quotes
- Language of the Old Testament
- Organization and structure
- Development of an argument
- A purpose statement

EXEGESIS NOT EISOGENESIS

- We read and interpret a book of the Bible with the preliminary and critical goal of determining the intended message of the author of that book to the original audience.
- Once we understand the author's message to the original audience, we can proceed with identifying the timeless principles and how those apply to us today.
- We take the meaning from the text.
- The opposite practice could be called "eisogenesis," which occurs when we write a meaning into the text.

THEOLOGICAL BLINDNESS

- The most dangerous trap for serious students of God's Word is theological blindness.
- Charles Ryrie defines systematic theology as follows: "Systematic theology correlates the data of biblical revelation as a whole in order to exhibit systematically the total picture of God's self-revelation."
- Don't put the cart before the horse.

THEOLOGICAL BLINDNESS

- We need to intensively study the Bible one book at a time and allow our systematic theology to develop from that process over a course of years.
- David Anderson explains this critical point: Finally, let us remember, Systematic Theology is like a spreadsheet. Changes in one of the major points of the system will most likely cause changes in other points of the system as well. This could be good. It could lead to a new system with a greater degree of consistency, coherence, congruity, and comprehensiveness. But if it leads to increased contradictions or fails to incorporate all the evidence, perhaps the proposed change is invalid.

ASSUMING DEFINITIONS OF WORDS

- The next danger is assuming the meaning of key words.
- Consider the word “repent”
 - In English, we understand it to mean “stop sinning”
 - But the Greek term *metanaō* according to the leading Greek lexicon BDAG means “to change one’s mind”
- Common words for which definitions are assumed include elect, faith, save, soul, and wrath.

CONTEXT

- Another all too common mistake is ignoring context.
- There is external and internal context to every book of the Bible.
- External context includes cultural, historical, and political circumstances affecting the audience.
- Internal context is simply what the book says as a whole and within its subunits.

STRUCTURE AND FLOW OF THOUGHT

- Every Bible book has a structure and flow of thought.
- The single most important step in taking your understanding of a Bible book to the next level is determining the structure of the book and flow of thought that holds together the pieces to make the whole.

BIBLE AS LITERATURE

- The Bible is literature and every book of the Bible is a specific type or genre of literature.
- These include epistles (letters), historical narratives, and poetry.
- The genre informs how we effectively read what we are reading.

IGNORING THE OLD TESTAMENT

- No one has a deep understanding of the New Testament if that person does not have a solid grasp of the Old Testament.
- The New Testament authors did not write on a blank slate, and they frequently quoted the Old Testament, made allusions to the Old Testament, or wrote in the language of the Old Testament.
- Do not use the New Testament to annul or alter the Old Testament.
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LIMITED INVENTORY

- This happens when someone has a set of favorite Bible truths and they manage to find it into every passage they study or teach.
- This recycling approach is not a valid part of good exegesis.

SECRET KNOWLEDGE

- The Gnostics taught the idea of secret knowledge (called gnosis) available only to some (the pneumatics).
- We need to beware of secret knowledge approaches to interpreting the Bible and stick to the plain sense hermeneutic.
- Remember, if almost all Christians from every century before us have to be wrong in order for your interpretation to be right, then you are wrong.

SPIRITUALIZING THE TEXT

- As already noted, a plain sense hermeneutic does not deny or ignore the use in the Bible of figures of speech.
- But figurative expressions and figures of speech are not the same as spiritualizing the text.
- Consider the Song of Solomon.
- Let God speak for Himself.