

## Hermeneutics 5 – Grammatical/Historical Interpretation

The Bible was written by the Holy Spirit moving upon the human author to write. Naturally, the Bible was written in human language.

### **A. The Words** - Following Berkhof:

“No true exegesis happens from the English.” – Pastor Carl > it can still be helpful to read another English translation if you are having trouble understanding a phrase.

1. Know roots of words – “*kavod*,” means to be glorious, but it comes from the root “to be heavy.” Baptizo in the Greek, which is transliterated “baptize,” means “to dip, immerse, or plunge.” We want to avoid reading modern terminology back into the Scriptures without warrant. For instance, saying that it was a *Carcharocles megalodon* that swallowed Jonah. We don’t know what swallowed Jonah beyond “dag gadol” – “big fish” in Hebrew.

Software: PowerBible, e-sword, studylight.org. You can spend as much as you want on Bible software. The Collector’s edition of Logos is \$10,800 as of 2/24.

2. Unless the author of Scripture tells us so, the written word on the page had one meaning the author intended. The author was not trying to say two things by using one word without giving us an explanation. When the author repeats a word in the same context, assume it has the same meaning unless the author gives you reason to do otherwise. Obvious examples – Matt. 8:22 “Let the dead (spiritually) bury their dead (physically).”

3. Different types of grammatical construction

a. The metaphor – “when one object is likened to another by asserting it to be that other, or by speaking of it as if it were that other.” (Berkhof) Berkhof notes 6 metaphors in Psalm 18:2. Jesus himself uses one to refer to Herod in Luke 13:32.

When God is said to have body parts or human emotions, these are metaphors known as anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms, respectively. While many created things are used to tell us something about the character of God, we must recognize the inadequacy of these

things. Don't get caught up in the details – When parables and metaphors are used, there can be a temptation to try and align every last minute detail with some real life corollary (how is a tree/light like God...). This is a danger. We must look for the general idea behind the text. Fascination for minutiae is an exegetical swamp that is very easy to drown in.

b. The synecdoche – When a part is used for the whole or a whole for the part. (Read page 84 in Berkhof). We use synecdoche all the time: Whole for the part: my truck is broken, the radiator is broken. I had a bad day, it was really just a bad event in the day.

Part for the whole: I got my first set of wheels, I bought my first car.

c. Figurative speech – we must be careful to distinguish what is meant as figurative. The Lord's supper: "This is my body, take and eat." This was obviously figurative, because the disciples started eating the bread and not gnawing on Jesus.

"Sun stand still" in Joshua 10 and Ps. 104:5. Compare to Psalm 75:3.

"Figurative language is neither second rate, less clear, nor less authoritative than more literal language." – Mark Chanski

d. Metonymy – Using the name of one thing for another e.g., "state = government." Luke 24:27, "Moses and the prophets = Scripture"

e. Euphemism – avoids being offensive. Acts 7:60 "fell asleep = dead."

f. Litotes – Affirmation by negation: "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). Which means a broken a contrite heart He will accept.

g. Hyperbole – An intentional over-statement: Gen. 22:17; John 21:25

h. Irony – Denotes exactly the opposite of what is being said: 1 Kings 18:27, "Maybe Baal is on a journey, asleep..."

## **B. Historical Interpretation –**

"The Word of God originated in a historical way, and therefore, can only be understood in the light of history...It is impossible to understand an author and to interpret his words correctly unless he is seen against the proper historical background." – Berkhof

To the degree we are ignorant of history, we do disservice to our own study of the Bible. When I studied with Pastor Liddle, he had me study some history alongside theology. I'm studying through medieval church history right now, and it's got some pretty arduous reading.

1. Know the author's purpose for writing his book.

Against what historical background was this book of Scripture born?

Where does he tell you his purpose and intention for the letter?

Who were the original recipients and what was their situation like?

These questions are frequently answered in the beginning portions of many study Bibles.

An awareness of these things will help us stay with his line of thinking and not pull out questions that he is answering: 1 Cor. 7:1 – “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” This is a statement the church at Corinth had made and Paul picks up to answer and goes on in chap. 7 describing how and when it is good for a man to touch (“have sexual relations with”) a woman. 1 Cor. 7:1 is not giving us any biblical principle to follow, but instead a question that was asked that must be read in context of Paul's following answer.

Study of the thoughts of the author frequently requires us to look at more than just a verse at a time.

2. Be careful of writing off certain texts on the grounds that they are too closely tied to a foreign culture to be useful to us.

This essentially denies the sufficiency of Scripture and its timeless quality. 2 Timothy was not just for Timothy. Galatians was not just for the church at Galatia.

3. We must recognize that some cultural norms in Bible times are not authoritative or normative for us today:

a. Luke 11:7 – “in bed with my family” – families today are not required to all sleep in one bed together

b. Luke 22:14 – “reclined at table” – laying back on a couch is not required while eating

When we started 1 John together, it was important that we looked at the rise of Gnosticism in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, because that was something that John attacked directly in that 1<sup>st</sup> epistle.

There must be a reconstruction, as much as possible, of the world in which the biblical author lived in. The political scene, the environmental and geographical scene, the financial situation, the social circles, the theological background of the author and the characters within the

writing, all (or at least some of these) need to be taken into consideration when studying through a book of the Bible.

Not only the author, but the original audience and their circumstances need to receive a kind of world-reconstruction as well. If we don't know what the original author meant to say to his original audience, then we cannot hope to arrive at any kind of meaning for us today.

4. Guard against an anti-supernaturalistic reading of the history of the Bible (Going back to higher criticism). How big is your God? Just because we can't scientifically explain something to our satisfaction, doesn't mean it is to be allegorized away or worse, dismissed altogether. The Bible has always been ahead of science, archaeology, biology, and we must remember that science is a handmaid to the Scriptures. How can we maintain that "every word of God is pure" if we constantly use the tool of science to constantly beat on the Scriptures? Instead, we should be using the Scriptures to further implore us to scientific discovery.

Mark Chanski:

"The Bible is almost totally limited and bound culturally" – It's a strange book to modern man and no intellectual could possibly accept such a primitive worldview - **extreme left**

"The Bible reflects few or no cultural anachronisms" – modern culture is out of step with the Bible and we should be reproducing biblical culture – **extreme right**

"The Bible discloses eternally binding truth in and through a cultural form" – the historical culture must not be discarded, nor idolized – **wise center**