

How to Study the Bible

Material Adapted from *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* by Bernard Ramm & Class notes

THE PROTESTANT SYSTEM OF HERMENEUTICS

A. _____ : The Foundation

1. It has a Moral & Spiritual Aspect. The Bible is a spiritual book and demands the interpreter meet a minimum of spiritual qualifications. (1 Cor. 2:14-16; 1 John 2:27). The interpreter must approach the Bible from the spiritual dimension of faith, trust, prayer and piety.
2. It has a Supernatural Aspect. The Bible records the acts of God's intervention into His creation and so also records supernatural events. Biblical criticism is engaged to save from being deceived or deluded or left naive. It strives to discover the true text and true rules of interpretation and application. Critical problems are approached with trust that further research and investigation will resolve the issues. (Archeology is an example).
3. It has a revelational aspect. The Bible is God's communication to man and as such condescends to man's language. In doing so particular word can gain new depth and connotation. (i.e. faith, love, mercy, redemption, heaven, salvation, judgment).

B. _____ : The Goal

The goal of the Bible interpreter is to understand God's revelation so that the spiritual prosperity of man can be promoted. The Bible is not an end - it is the means to an end. (John 5:39 - 2 Timothy 3:16,17)

C. The Protestant Method of Hermeneutics.

1. _____ Perspectives
 - a. The Clarity of Scripture: It has puzzling and perplexing parts, but as a whole, man can make sense of it. External clarity - examination of the historical and grammatical data. Internal clarity provided by the Holy Spirit
 - b. The _____ of Revelation: God's revelation must come to man in an anthropological form. I.e., God accommodates the message so that can apprehend God (Apprehend - to become aware of God - man cannot comprehend - to understand)
 - c. Progressive nature of revelation: This is not immaturity to maturity or imperfect to perfect, but from incomplete to complete. It goes from Old Testament to the New Testament bringing man up from the theologically simple to complex. This is by God's initiative and design, not man's. (DANGER: Do not read the NT back into the Old, but show how the OT is completed in the NT)
 - d. _____ interprets Scripture. Obscure passages in Scripture must give way to clear passages. This is the practical application of the Reformers principle of the sufficiency of Scripture.
 - e. The _____ of Faith. "The constant and perpetual harmony of Scripture in the fundamental points of faith and practice deduced from those passages in which they were discussed by the inspired penmen either directly or expressly, and in clear, plain, intelligible language." I.e., there is a perpetual harmony of Scripture in the fundamental points of faith and practice. DANGER: This cannot be bound to a "system" that will miss things or read into the text. Biblicism over systemization.

Two degrees of an Analogy.

- 1) _____: Teachings in the Bible that are clear, persistently stated and supported by Scripture so that there is no question as to meaning (i.e., the "fundamentals")
- 2) _____: Teachings which do not always rest on clear statements, but rather on strong inferences and logical deductions (Slavery, etc.). These cannot be dogmatic.

The strength of a doctrine is based on: a) Number of passages, b) correspondence between different passages, c) clarity of passages, d) number of different authors addressing same doctrine.

Application of the Analogy of Faith

1. Strong, clear doctrine is not contradicted by contrary obscure passages (Trinity)
 2. A clear passage neither supported or contradicted by the Analogy of Faith may serve as the basis for a doctrine, but its position is not strong (anointing with oil)
 3. Doctrine based on an obscure (unclear) passage and not supported by the analogy of faith can only be held with reservation (Deacon's wives - 1 Timothy 3:11).
 4. Doctrine based on clear passages that appear in contradiction with other clear passages or the Analogy of Faith are both held with the resolution reserved for the future when either human understanding of information increases (which may not be until Heaven). (God's sovereignty vs. man's volition - ability to choose / "free will")
- f. The _____ of Meaning of Scripture: Exegesis, not eisegesis. Allowing for prophetic passages, there is not a multiplicity of meanings to a passage. This is against the allegorical school; cultic abuse of Scripture and Protestant Pietism (which takes text mystically for present application - i.e., I am thinking about taking a trip, & in my devotions I read about Paul on a missionary journey, so I go. If I read about David staying in Jerusalem, I would have stayed).
- g. One interpretation with many applications. Sound exegesis is separated from application with the latter made after the former is done.
2. _____ Principle: The literal or Historico-grammatical method.
Historical propriety. The meaning to those originally written must first be determined. Scripture is not to be interpreted contrary to progressive revelation. Literal meaning is not letterism, but *"the natural or usual construction and implication of a writing or expression; following the ordinary and apparent sense of words; not allegorical or metaphysical."*
 - 1) The Literal method is normal usage for any type of literature.
 - 2) All secondary meanings depend on a literal stratum of language.
 - 3) This method controls exegetical abuse of Scripture.

There is a priority given to the original languages in this method. The purpose of language is imparting thoughts. Studies in the meaning of words, the structure of grammar and the historical context are all vital to understanding the thoughts that were intended to be imparted.

_____ is important, but it is limited.

- 1) Where contradictions occur one statement must be false - unless there is a difference in meaning. (2 Samuel 24:24 vs 1 Chronicles 21:24,25).
- 2) Truth must accord with truth, but two opposite statements are sometimes harmonized when all the facts are known (There is an universal offer of salvation but only the elect are saved).
- 3) An assertion of truth excludes only that which it opposes - i.e., a truthful statement has limits. (That Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and is therefore God's son, does not mean that He does not have half brothers and sisters - Matt. 12:46)