



INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS¹

PART ONE: GETTING INTO THE SUBJECT

Session I: The Importance of Hermeneutics

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INTRODUCTION: Welcome to the study of Hermeneutics! We enter into the subject by means of three considerations:

FIRST CONSIDERATION: THE MEANING OF HERMENEUTICS: Like other words in theology (trinity, providence, sacrament, rapture), *Hermeneutics* is not a biblical word as such. Note its ~

A. Greek origin: *Hermeneutike* in ancient Greece was a derivative of the verb *hermeneuein* (to interpret), and was first used in a technical sense by the Greek philosopher Plato (427–348 BC). The term bespoke what we now call *General Hermeneutics*, and had to do with language, literary composition, matters of common experience, and history.

B. Biblical equivalents: The term *Hermeneutics* isn't biblical, but the idea is:

(i) *The Old Testament:* The noun “interpretation” (*pitrōn*) is found in Genesis 40-41—Joseph’s interpretation of dreams. Also, the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew verb *pātar* (*p’shar*), meaning “to interpret” is found in Daniel 2-5—Daniel’s interpretation of dreams. Dreams, we recall, were a form of special revelation under the Old Covenant.

(ii) *The New Testament:* By New Testament times, multiple closely connected words came to mean “to interpret”. One prominent verb is:

(a) *diermeneuō* used in Luke 24:27: “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted [*diermēneusen*] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (cf., 1 Cor. 14:27), but it can also mean to translate (Acts 9:36).

(b) Another verb used is that of *methermēneuō* (to interpret or to translate): Matthew 1:23; Mark 15:22, 34; John 1:38; Acts 4:36, 13:8.

(c) Another verb is *ermēneuō* (to explain, interpret, translate): John. 9:7; 1 Corinthians 12:10; and Hebrews 7:2.

What we call *Biblical* or *Sacred Hermeneutics* amounts, though, not just to *General Hermeneutics* but to *Special Hermeneutics* (the interpretation of specific types of literature such as law, history, prophecy, poetry, etc.) since all these genres are found in Scripture.

SECOND CONSIDERATION: THE MAGNITUDE OF HERMENEUTICS: It is not enough to believe that the Bible is God’s Word, we must also interpret it aright. I like to say that a high use of Scripture must accompany a high view of it. There are two reasons for this:

First reason: Hermeneutics is strategically important: God has been doing great things in Africa over the last century and more. According to the Pew Research Center, Africa now has 631 million Christians, or 40+% of the population. That is more than the entire Christian population of the world in 1910. Then Africa had but 2.1% of the global population of Christians, but today Africa has 24.2%. Indeed, in 2018 Africa became the continent with the greatest percentage of professing Christians. We rejoice, then, that written Word has been sown, the living Word has been experienced, and the sanctifying Word is at work (Jn 17:17). Consider, though:

(i) *The need of the church:* Known for her joy and enthusiasm, the church in Africa is also known for her extremes. While she is not alone in this, we hear of many outlandish claims being made in Africa which bring the gospel into disrepute. Writes Bernard Ramm, “We need to know hermeneutics thoroughly if for no other reason than to preserve us from the folly and errors of faulty principles of understanding God’s Word”.² Without reliable hermeneutics, we are prone to:

¹ The following material was first taught in Mzuzu, Malawi, June 25-27, 2024, in a church workers’ conference titled “*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*”. The conference was jointly sponsored by *From His Fullness Ministries* and *Logos Ministries* (Malawi), and financially supported by *Word and Deed* (North America). Given the original context of the addresses, the distributed lectures have used in the main U.K. conventions.

² Bernard L. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, third revised ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1970), 2.

(a) Rip texts from their contexts.

(b) Ignore the location of a text along the progression of revelation/redemptive history.

(c) Take literally what was meant figuratively, or allegorize what was meant literally.

(ii) *The threat to the church:* Islam, having captured North Africa after the sixth century, has aspirations on the whole of the continent. Islam obtains devotees by financial enticements (free education for children) or terrorism (*Jihad*), but Christianity seeks to grow by teaching the inspired Word of God in dependence on the Spirit of God. It is crucial, then, that the church be rooted in Scripture, not being blown about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). In this regard, there is a special onus on preachers not only to preach individual sermons but to teach believers how to interpret the Bible for themselves. This is essential for the equipping of the saints for ministry. (Eph. 4:11).

Second reason: Hermeneutics is spiritually important: Five factors explain this:

First factor: Our minds are naturally darkened: The fall of man has negatively impacted our thinking. Whereas Adam and Eve heard from God directly and understood him, the Fall thwarted our ability to do so:

(i) *We still know of God (Rom. 1:18-20), but our race no longer knows God personally.*

(ii) *We no longer understand God as we could when we were in relationship with God.* Even in Christ, we yet see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12).

(iii) *We no longer have the desire or ability of ourselves to avoid error.* We rebel against God mentally before we rebel against him in deed.

Second factor: Our gifts differ: Our job as preachers is to bring diversely gifted people together around God's Word:

(i) *Some are intelligent, others less so.*

(ii) *Some are educated, others are uneducated.*

(iii) *Some are analytical thinkers (relishing the epistles), others artistic (relishing the poetry of the Psalms).*

(iv) *Some speak one language or thought form, others another.*

Third factor: Our callings are graciously ordered: Many are called chiefly to listen to God's Word preached and taught, others to preach and to teach. It is imperative that preachers and teachers not only love God's Word but are a safe pair of hands in interpreting it for God's people. Accordingly, ministers need:

(i) *A biblically-derived theological framework from which to interpret individual passages.*

(ii) *The tools to exegete the passages (literally, to "lead out" their truths).*

(iii) *A readiness to answer questions arising from Bible studies, house visitation, youth work, etc.*

(iv) *The ability to defend biblical truth.* We are not only to positively teach the Scriptures but to counter error; not only to feed the sheep but to guard them against wolves (Acts 20:28-31).

Fourth factor: Our God has authoritatively spoken: It is an immense privilege to have God speak to us. Let's take that in—God SPEAKS! And he speaks to US! It follows that once we understand this, we take the trouble to interpret what he has said with great care. Protestants are especially mindful of this, for we believe that the Scriptures are the *sola fidei regula* and not just the *prima fidei regula*. Bernard Ramm rightly notes then that, "*There is no profit to us if God has spoken and we do not know what He has said. Therefore it is our responsibility to determine the meaning of what God has given us in Sacred Scripture*". This, Ramm says, is "*a high and holy task*."³

Fifth factor: Our reading is culturally conditioned: We are at a distance from God's initial speech by thousands of years and by thousands of miles. We have:

(i) *Different languages:* Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek compared to those we use. Not only do the languages differ, but also their structures. English, for instance, is analytical. The sense is found in the order of the words: "The boy played with the ball." New Testament Greek is agglutinative, meaning that

³ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 2.

sentences depend not on word order but on word endings (the declining of nouns and adjectives and the conjugation of verbs). Moreover, there is the challenge of finding in translation equivalent words to use. Each word may have what Ramm calls “a little pool of meanings”.⁴ We have to find which word best fits the context. This is determined not simply by the etymology (root meaning) of the word in view, but from the context of its usage.

(ii) *Different culture*: Culture, says Ramm, “is all the ways and means, material and social, whereby a given people carry on their existence.”⁵ Interpreters must understand the culture of the people under consideration in their time and place. The culture changes throughout the history of redemption. The Hebrews had different patterns of life from the Gentiles. How did families relate? How did societies function? What were their economic practices, military, systems, agricultural methods, social customs (e.g. adoption), and religions?

(iii) *Different geography*: Whereas history is the plot of Scripture, geography is its scenery. By appreciating how different peoples perceived their geographical location, we better understand Scripture. Geography helps to know:

(a) Directions of travel.

(b) Political jurisdictions.

(c) Statements of Scripture: Eg. On this rock (Matt. 16:18); synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:13); going out into the wilderness (Mk 1:12).

In short, the interpreter has to bring the text to the reader and the reader to the text of Scripture.

THIRD CONSIDERATION: THE MAPPING OF HERMENEUTICS: Having considered why we, especially as pastors, need to know how to interpret the Bible, we must also know where the interpretation fits into the overall process of expounding Scripture. While vital, Hermeneutics is not a solitary step to the exposition and application of Scripture. It is one of a number of steps:

Step one: Reading the Bible: Since our minds, by nature, are darkened, a mere reading of the Bible is insufficient to come to a true knowledge of it. Its

spiritual truths must be spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:9). We must, in effect, possess the same Spirit as the one who inspired the Scriptures. To quote Marcus Dods, “to find in [the Scriptures] the Spirit of God the reader must himself have the Spirit.”⁶ Let’s break this down. We must:

(i) *Be born again* (Jn. 3:8).

(ii) *Have a passion to know God in his Word*. We seek God for this.

(iii) *Have a deep reverence for God (a posture of humility)*. We are teachable!

(iv) *Be utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit to guide and direct*. We must be sensitive to the indwelling Spirit for our illumination.

(v) *Have a readiness to benefit from the labors of others indwelt by the Spirit in large measure*. Our reading of Scripture is not isolationist but occurs in the context of the Spirit’s work in the community of faith. We are not enslaved to the views of others (cf. the Bereans, Acts 17:11), but we must have the humility to appreciate that God has raised up others who know the biblical languages better than we do, etc. We take, then, a “trust but verify” approach to the thought of those faithful and informed believers who preceded us.

Reading the Bible in this Spirit-filled sense we are best situated to glean correctly from it, to profit from it spiritually, and to teach it correctly.

Step two: Interpreting the Bible: It is at this point that Hermeneutics comes into its own. The interpretation of Scripture arises from reading the Word and paves the way for the bringing out of Scripture what is there. Note in this regard, that Hermeneutics is:

(i) *A science*: Biblical Hermeneutics applies to Holy Scripture the general science of linguistics and meaning. The discipline formulates particular rules to guide the interpretation of the Bible.

(ii) *An art*: Since the rules of the science are manually rather than automatically applied, there is an art or skill involved in the interpretation. Write Ramm, “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.”⁷ Hermeneutics bespeak how we get to the bottom of both the

⁴ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 5.

⁵ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 5.

⁶ Quoted in Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 13.

⁷ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 1.

breadth and depth of biblical meaning and close the gap between the text and the reader of Scripture.

Step three: Exegeting the Bible: Exegesis arises from a Greek word found in John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known [Exēgēsato, Aor. Ind. of Exēgeomai, to be a leader, to detail, set forth, narrate, recount].” Traditionally, Hermeneutics has been seen as the interpretation of the Bible, and exegesis as the outworking of the interpretation as it applies to the text at hand. States Ramm, “*Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics*.”⁸ On this understanding, “*Hermeneutics studies the theory of interpretation and refers to exegesis only to illustrate its points. Exegesis deals concretely with the text and refers to hermeneutics only to argue a point*.”⁹ Yet, more recently it has been recognized increasingly that we cannot rightly interpret the Bible without first roughly exegeting it. To do so, the reader, notably the preacher, asks several questions:

(i) *Which Testament am I in?* Does the text look toward the Messiah or back on him? Is it set within the infancy or maturity of the church (Gal. 3:23–4:7)?

(ii) *Which genre am I in?* History, law, wisdom, the Gospels, epistles, or apocalyptic literature? Is the genre narrative, prose, poetry, or visionary?

(iii) *Which author am I in?* How does his life bear on the passage at hand? Where do I find out more about him? Has he written other books that might include biographical details, the same themes, words, and concerns?

Steps two and three are, then, a revolving relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis: some exegesis goes into interpreting Scripture; in turn, the interpretation leads to a more formal exegesis. “*Therefore,*” writes Ramm, “*any division between exegesis and hermeneutics is somewhat artificial. Scholars did not develop a theory of hermeneutics from abstract considerations, but the practical issues of exegesis . . . drove them to the formulation of hermeneutical theory.*”¹⁰

Step Four: Expounding the Bible: Whereas the relationship between exegesis/hermeneutics and hermeneutics/exegesis is circular, that between exegesis and exposition is linear. The exposition of the Scriptures grows out

of the exegesis, somewhat like a plant growing out of soil. In exposition, the expositor determines from the passage or text under consideration the dominant thrust (main theme) of the passage, and then organizes the prior exegesis into points, each of which loops back to connect with the dominant thrust.

Step five: Applying the Bible: Exegesis and exposition deal with Scripture historically understood, but application brings the meaning of Scripture (or the given passage) into the local or contemporaneous context. It renders the text useful in our time and place. Ramm reminds us that, “*Exegesis without application is academic; application that is not grounded in exegesis is either superficial or misleading or even both.*”¹¹ In other words, exposition and application, although distinct, are inseparable. Lecturers may focus on exposition but application should still be included. Preachers press on to the application.

Regardless, the application must be based on a thorough exposition of the text or passage at hand. The application is not to be random but tied to the text. Fundamentally, the expositor must discern whether the passage or text speaks chiefly to the regenerate or unregenerate. The former require a message of salvation, the latter a message about Christian living. Care is needed in getting this right. I recall as a young preacher setting out to preach a gospel sermon from Amos 4:12—“*Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!*”—until I realized that God was speaking to his people. Yet, how many preach evangelistically from Revelation 3:20—“*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*”—notwithstanding the fact that our Lord addresses in the text his lukewarm people?

When the passage addresses the regenerate, it will also suggest the type of application needed, whether devotional, hortatory (exhortation), or practical.

Sometimes preachers weave the application through their sermons, at least after each main point (which is best), and sometimes they reserve it to the end. Sometimes, even often, the application is both suffused and concluding.

⁸ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 11.

⁹ Bernard L. Ramm, “Biblical Interpretation” in Bernard L. Ramm and Others, *Hermeneutics*, fifth printing (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 9.

¹⁰ Ramm, “Biblical Interpretation” in Ramm and Others, *Hermeneutics*, 9.

¹¹ Ramm, “Biblical Interpretation” in Ramm and Others, *Hermeneutics*, 10.

Whichever the approach, application constitutes an integral part of pulpit ministry.

CONCLUSION: Biblical or Sacred Hermeneutics has everything to do with the Word of God. The discipline, though, must be distinguished from God's Word:

A. Whereas Holy Scripture is the product of divine revelation, Hermeneutics depends on divine illumination. The former arises from the extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit, the latter from his regular influence.

B. Whereas divine revelation is infallible, divine illumination seeks to overcome human darkness. Since this victory is gradual Hermeneutics remains in this life a fallible discipline. We always need to bring our hermeneutics back to the light of Scripture. It is Scripture and not our hermeneutics that is ultimately the interpreter of Scripture.

C. Whereas Scripture is our final authority for faith and conduct, Hermeneutics is a discipline in progress. The church ever seeks to get closer to the meaning of Scripture. Thus, expositors and theologians are to go about interpreting Scripture with humility. Ramm notes that the history of Hermeneutics warns us against thinking that *our* way of interpreting Scripture is the *only* way to interpret it.¹² Let's be on our guard against:

(i) *Subjectivism*: What I think. Subjectivism is the interpretation of Scripture isolated from tradition or a Spirit-filled community.

(ii) *Provincialism*: What my community/tradition of theology thinks must be right. Since Scripture is its own interpreter (self-authenticating), all views of Hermeneutics are subject to scriptural examination.

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<sup>12</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 23.

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. To date, what has guided your personal interpretation of Holy Scripture?
2. How do you go about preparing your sermons?
3. From your experience, why do you think Biblical Hermeneutics is so critical to the church in your country/on your continent?



## INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS PART ONE: GETTING INTO THE SUBJECT

### Session 2: The History of Hermeneutics (I)

Instructor: Dr. Tim J. R. Trumper

**INTRODUCTION:** Having gained an idea of what Hermeneutics is about, our next two sessions consider its history. Some find history boring but bear in mind its practical value. The history of Hermeneutics teaches us:

- (a) The weight the church has placed on interpreting Scripture.
- (b) The options the church has developed for interpreting Scripture.
- (c) The importance of deciding how we are to interpret Scripture.
- (d) The value of our Protestant, Reformed Hermeneutics.
- (e) The errors we need to avoid in interpreting Scripture.

As church history unfolded, multiple schools of interpretation developed:

**1. THE ALLEGORICAL SCHOOLS:** Writes Bernard Ramm, *“Allegorical interpretation believes that beneath the letter or the obvious is the real meaning of the passage.”*<sup>13</sup> This interpretative school predates Christ:

**A. Greek Allegorical Schools:** Greek allegorizing arose from a tension between philosophy and religion. To render religion acceptable to the philosophically minded, the religious began interpreting stories of the gods allegorically rather than literally.

**B. Jewish Allegorical Schools:** Greek allegorizing spread to Alexandria, where first Jews and then Christians lived. Jewish confidence in the law of Moses was challenged by Greek philosophical literature. Some Jews adopted allegory to balance esteem for the law of Moses and for Plato:

(i) *Aristobulus of Alexandria (180–124 B.C.):* Said to be the first Jewish philosopher, he asserted that Greek philosophy borrowed from the Old Testament, especially from the law of Moses. By interpreting the law of Moses allegorically, Aristobulus sought to demonstrate that Greek

philosophy could be found in the law of Moses. Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius considered him to be a stoic allegorist.

(ii) *Philo the Jew/of Alexandria (20BC–54AD).* A contemporary of both Jesus and Paul, Philo loved both the Hebrew faith and Greek philosophy, formulating about 20 rules for allegorizing Scripture. To him, the literal sense of Scripture is its body and the allegorical sense is its soul. The former was for the immature and the latter for the mature. Although Philo did not deny the historical in Scripture, he understood passages to qualify for allegorizing if:

- (a) Something deemed unworthy was said of God.
- (b) A statement seems to contradict another.
- (c) The passages are allegorical.
- (d) The passages contain symbols since symbols are understood allegorically not literally.
- (e) The passages allow for the law of double interpretation, with natural objects signifying spiritual things. Yet, Philo’s rules led to some absurd interpretations such as Abraham’s marriage to Sarah commending marriage to abstract wisdom.

**C. Christian and Patristic Allegorical Schools:** Allegorical interpretation which arose from the Greeks and was borrowed by Jews, came to be used by Christians and largely dominated hermeneutics until the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Christian allegorism arose from the belief that the Old Testament is a Christian document. This stance helped the church to oppose Marcion of Sinope (110–60) who taught that the Old Testament is irrelevant, and helped with the communication of the gospel. Yet, the church, in relying so much on allegorism, missed the opportunity to perceive in Scripture the progress of revelation. Allegory became the means of understanding parables, enigmas, and riddles, but they read the typological (the pointers to greater future fulfillment) as allegorical (the fanciful underlying meaning), thereby obscuring the more obvious meaning of Scripture. The interpreter thus came to govern the meaning of Scripture more than the Scripture itself. Scripture’s ability to determine its meaning

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<sup>13</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 24.

gave way to the random views of the interpreter. Note some examples of patristic approaches:

(i) *Clement of Alexandria (150–215)*: He claimed 5 possible meanings of Scripture:

- (a) The historical sense (actual events).
- (b) The doctrinal sense (theological and moral).
- (c) The prophetic sense (predictive prophecy and typology).
- (d) The philosophical sense (meaning in natural objects and historical persons); (e) a mystical sense (deeper meaning).

(ii) *Origen (185–253)*: Heavily influenced by Philo, Origen countered the hyper-literalists (literally applying symbols, metaphors, and poetry), demonstrating to the Jews that the New Testament has its roots in the Old Testament, and to the philosophical that the Scriptures are trustworthy. In the process, Origen taught that:

- (a) The literal meaning is the preliminary level of Scripture, for it is the body of Scripture, whereas the moral sense is the soul of Scripture and the allegorical sense is its spirit.
- (b) Right interpretation depends on the grace given to us by Christ.
- (c) True exegesis of Scripture must be spiritual for a spiritual book requires a spiritual interpretation.
- (d) The Old Testament is preparation for the New Testament. Thus, the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New Testament superseded. Between the Old and New Testaments there exists continuity and divergence. Thus, Origen viewed the Old Testament as now out of date.

(iii) *Jerome*: A scholar of antiquity (Vulgate), Jerome began as an extreme allegorist but came under the influence of the literal school of Antioch. He thus retreated into the historical and literal interpretation, while yet remaining an allegorist. Seeking to combine the two approaches, his allegorism kept him from the extreme literalism of the literalist Jews, yet he continued to interpret the New Testament allegorically.

(iv) *Augustine (354–430)*: He was influenced by the allegorism of Ambrose of Milan during his struggle with the crass literalism of the Manichaeans (see

the Glossary). He justified allegorical interpretation by a misinterpretation of 2 Cor. 3:6, “*the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*” In his work *De Doctrina Christiana*, he put forward a number of controlling hermeneutic principles:

- (a) Genuine Christian faith is necessary to interpret Holy Scripture. The inner spirit of the exegete is as important as his technical equipment.
- (b) Although the historical and literal are not the end of Scripture, we must hold them in high regard.
- (c) Scripture has more than one meaning and therefore allegorical interpretation is appropriate. Since the test of Scripture is love, literal passages leading to dissension must be allegorized.
- (d) Biblical numbers are significant, for numbers and logic are eternal truths.
- (e) The Old Testament is a Christian document because it is a Christological document.
- (f) The task of the expositor is to get meaning out of the Bible rather than to read it into the Bible. We must express accurately the thoughts of the writer.
- (g) We must consult the *analogy of faith*, the true orthodox creed when interpreting, but our orthodoxy must combine love with the *analogy of faith*—the two controlling principles of hermeneutics.
- (h) No verse is to be studied as a unit by itself. The Bible is not a string of verses but a web of meaning. Context is vital. If the interpretation is not secure it cannot be made a matter of the orthodox faith.
- (j) While we depend on the Holy Spirit, he is not a substitute for learning the Scriptures. We need to know the elements of Scripture, its history, languages, genres, customs, etc..
- (k) The obscurer passage must yield to the clearer passage.
- (l) No interpretation must undermine the harmony of revelation, yet we must factor in the times (the progress of revelation). E.g., polygamy conflicts with monogamy only if we ignore the chronology of the times.

**D. Catholic Allegorism:** By the Middle Ages, the allegorical school continued to dominate. Catholic allegorists divided the interpretation of Scripture

between the literal and the spiritual (or mystical), but viewed the latter as more important. Note ten features of Catholic interpretation:

(i) *The use of the Latin Vulgate for public lectures, disputations, and expositions.* The Bible includes the Apocrypha. Catholic interpreters wrestle with the priority of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, and the Latin translation.

(ii) *The acceptance of the Church's official teaching about biblical introduction, authorship, and verses officially interpreted:* About 20 of them. The Church is:

(a) The custodian of Scripture.

(b) The transmitter of the Scripture in its oral and written forms.

(c) Since the written form is obscure it needs an official interpreter. The church fulfills this role since she bears the true tradition (oral and written). No passage can be interpreted in contradiction to the Roman Catholic doctrinal system. Indeed, the church condemns the right of private interpretation (interpretation by the analogy of faith).

(iii) *The foundational role of the literal and historical interpretation:* Aquinas argued for the literal and historical, and stated that no doctrine could be erected on just spiritual exegesis.

(iv) *The belief that the Scriptures possess spiritual/mystical meaning beyond the literal:* There can be more than one meaning of Scripture because Scripture comes from God but also because truth can be spiritual and figurative as well as historical and literal. Accordingly, the Church codified the patristic emphasis on spiritual or mystical interpretation. A passage may have:

(a) An allegorical or future and prophetic meaning.

(b) An eschatological meaning (pointing to the church triumphant).

(c) A tropological meaning (teaching a way of life). While the spiritual meaning goes beyond the historical or literal meaning, it must be built upon it.

(v) *The belief that the Church Fathers guide interpretation:* Despite the high regard for the Church Fathers, three rules of interpretation applied:

(a) The interpretation must be about faith and morals. Interpretations about historical or scientific matters are not binding.

(b) The Fathers must bear witness to the catholic tradition (what is believed everywhere in the church).

(c) The Fathers must have unanimous witness to given interpretations.

Notwithstanding these rules, much medieval exegesis substituted the study of the Fathers for the exegesis of Scripture.

(vi) *The belief that obscure and partial teaching of the Scriptures is to be explained by the fuller unwritten tradition of the Church:* The catholic scholar is not obliged, then, to find the full teaching of all doctrine in the Bible (e.g., prayers for the dead, veneration of Mary, confession, and the supremacy of Peter).

(vii) *The belief that the Bible is to be understood according to the principle of development:* The catholic scholar sees the New Testament as the seed of the apostolic church from which the modern Roman Catholic Church has developed. She justifies this by:

(a) The principle of implication (we are bound to believe not only all that is in the Scriptures but what may be properly deduced from it).

(b) The principle of *epigenesis*: J. H. Newman in *The Development of Christian Doctrine* articulated the idea that seeds don't just enlarge, they develop and change.

(viii) *The use of Leo XIII's Encyclical Providentissimus Deus to express the Roman Catholic Church's attitude toward Protestantism:* Non-Roman Catholic writers can be helpful but we cannot expect the sense of Scripture to be found in them. Protestants, though, have impacted Roman Catholic hermeneutics, pressing Catholic theologians to acknowledge that:

(a) The Fathers could be extreme allegorists.

(b) literal interpretation is foundational.

(c) That literal interpretation is not immature.

**2. THE LITERAL SCHOOLS:** Advocates of this school, writes Ramm, "*accept as basic the literal rendering of the sentences unless by virtue of the nature of the sentence or phrase or clause within the sentence this is not possible [e.g.,*

*figures of speech, allegories]*".<sup>14</sup> Ramm continues, "we should be satisfied with the literal meaning of a text unless very substantial reasons can be given for advancing beyond the literal meaning, and when canons of control are supplied."

**A. Jewish Literalism:** Ezra is considered the first of the Jewish interpreters (Ezra 7:1-6). Interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures was needed because in Babylonian captivity the Jews began speaking Aramaic. Ezra's making sense of the Scriptures to the Jews is generally regarded as the first instance of Biblical or Sacred Hermeneutics. In captivity, they lost their temple, land, capital, and religious customs, but gained a system of Jewish exegesis. Two Hermeneutical views emerged: *Karaites* (literalists) and *Cabalists* (allegorists). Consider two matters:

*(i) Surviving principles:*

- (a) A word must be understood in terms of its sentence, and a sentence in terms of its context.
- (b) biblical texts dealing with similar topics should be compared (a third passage can relieve an apparent contradiction).
- (c) A clear passage is given preference over an obscure one that deals with the same matter.
- (d) Very close attention is to be paid to spelling, grammar, and figures of speech.
- (e) Logic is useful to applying Scripture to life problems not specifically treated in the Bible. This is what we call theological Hermeneutics.
- (f) That God in revealing himself to Israel accommodated and culturally conditioned his revelation.

*(ii) Arising difficulties:*

- (a) The Jews didn't always abide by the rules.
- (b) the Jews developed a hyper-literalism (*letterism*).
- (c) They tended to miss the essentials and made mountains out of the inconsequential.

(d) They believed that because Scripture came from God it must have multiple meanings. This led to fantastic rabbinical interpretations.

(e) Great authority was given to such interpretations.

(f) Eventually the perspectives of the *Karaites* and *Cabalists* merged leading to bizarre attempts at interpretation: (i) *Notarikon* (each letter of a word stands for another word); (ii) *Gemetria* (the endowing of words with numerical value, allowing for arbitrary association of verses); (iii) *Termura* (the permutation of biblical words to extract new meanings). Ramm, "In the exaltation of the very letters of the Scripture, the true meaning of the Scripture was lost".<sup>15</sup>

**B. Syrian School of Antioch:** Whereas the school of Alexandria in North Africa was allegorist, the school of Antioch was literalist. Founded either by Dorotheus and Lucius toward the end of the third century or by Diodorus, later Bishop of Tarsus (author of a treatise on the principles of interpretation), the school is said to have been "the first Protestant school of Hermeneutics". In Antioch, the Christian community sought to avoid both the *letterism* of Jewish hermeneutics and the *allegorism* of the Alexandrian community. Note ~

*(i) The prominent figures:* (a) John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (347–407): Regarding all of Scripture as the infallible Word of God, Chrysostom was a considerable expositor, surpassing all with his oratory (nicknamed golden-mouthed). (b) Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (350–428). Theodore held liberal views of the Bible and was famous as a critic and interpreter. His expositions were intellectual and dogmatic. Together, John and Theodore furthered the development of true scientific exegesis. They argued that we find the literal interpretation of the Bible in order to access its profitable use, and were far in advance of the grammatical-historical interpretations of the Reformation period. They therefore rejected the allegorical interpretation, restraining some of the Alexandrian extremes, influencing medieval exegesis, and paving the way for the Protestant Reformers.

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<sup>14</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 48.

(ii) *The main principles:* The school:

- (a) Maintained the primacy of the literal and historical interpretation of Scripture.
- (b) Argued that the literal was plain-literal and figurative-literal (anthropomorphisms, etc), thereby avoiding letterism.
- (c) Avoided the dogmatic exegesis developing in the West, specifically the RC authoritarian exegesis, insisting that theology must be governed by the literal and historical meaning of Scripture.
- (d) Defended the reality of Old Testament events (over against the Allegorists).
- (e) Substituted allegorism with a more sane typological approach. Whereas the Allegorists looked for the spiritual meaning above the narrative, the literalists insisted the historical and Messianic were woven together. The school viewed the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament as typological rather than allegorical.
- (f) Argued that the literalists were better equipped to defend the unity of Scripture, for they factored in the progressive revelation of Scripture, central to which is Christ (prophesied and fulfilled).

**C. The Victorines:** A strong historical and literal school existed in the Abbey of St. Victor, Paris. As the Jewish scholars in Antioch influenced the Christians there toward literalism, so the Jewish scholars of the medieval period influenced likewise the Victorines. Leading Victorines included Hugo, Richard, and Andrew of St. Victor. They insisted that: (i) Liberal arts, history, and geography were basic to literal exegesis. (ii) Literal exegesis gave rise to doctrine, and doctrine to checks on allegorization. (iii) The spiritual sense could not be truly known until the literal sense was known. (iv) The literal sense carried over into an emphasis on syntax, grammar, and meaning. The true interpretation of the Scriptures involves not *eisegesis* but *exegesis*.

**D. The Protestant Reformers:** Note three main matters ~

(i) *Preparing for Martin Luther:* Although traces of the views of the School of Antioch and the Victorines found their way into the thought of the Reformers, two other developments paved the way for the Reformation:

- (a) The philosophical system of Occam: In Thomism, natural religion

mediated between philosophy and revelation. Occam, however, was a nominalist and isolated revelation and reason. Reason focused on nature, philosophy, and science, but revelation dealt with theology, salvation, and faith. Occam taught that the knowledge of God and the authority for dogma rests on revelation and not reason. This is significant for Luther was raised in this thinking, and thus he esteemed the Bible over philosophy. He thus appealed to Scripture and reason (logical deductions), over against RC which appealed to Scripture, reason, Thomist philosophy, councils, creeds, and the Fathers.

(b) The Renaissance interest in philology: In particular, Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), a humanist and lawyer encouraged the study of Hebrew by translating Rabbi David Kimchi's Hebrew grammar into Latin. Then came Erasmus' first published Greek New Testament in modern times (1516). Thus, by the printing of the Hebrew Bible in 1494, all the Scriptures were available for study. Luther was well equipped to do so for he knew Hebrew, Greek, and the Latin Vulgate.

(ii) *The principles of Martin Luther:* Six principles are discernible ~

- (a) The psychological principle: Faith and illumination are essential to interpretation. We depend on the leading of the Spirit.
- (b) The authority principle: The Bible is the supreme and final authority in theological matters, and is above ecclesiastical authority.
- (c) The literal principle: Whereas the scholastics had, following the allegorists, distinguished the literal and spiritual, subdividing the spiritual into the allegorical, anagogical, and tropological, Luther maintained the primacy of the literal. In rejecting allegory (at least, as used by Roman Catholics), Luther accepted the primacy of the original languages and promoted the historical and grammatical principle (highlighting grammar, times, circumstances, and conditions of the writer; and the context of the passage).
- (d) The sufficiency principle: The Bible is perspicuous. Scripture interprets Scripture. It does not need the aid of Church tradition. We have the *analogy of faith* consistent, as it is, with the organic, theological unity of the Bible.

(e) The Christological principle: The end of interpretation is not to find the literal meaning but to find Christ. Everything, Luther taught, concerns him. The whole Bible is, then, a Christian book.

(f) The Law-Gospel Principle: Heavily influenced by Galatians, Luther understood the doctrine of justification to repudiate the Roman Catholic addition of works for salvation as it had the Judaizers' addition of circumcision and the law of Moses. Luther insisted, then, that we must distinguish law from gospel. The law is God's word about sin which drives us to our knees, the gospel is God's grace and power to save. No interpretation of Scripture should confuse law and gospel.

(iii) *The place of John Calvin:* Whereas Luther broke through to a new Protestant hermeneutic, Calvin became the first truly systematic interpreter of Scripture, writing commentaries on most books of Scripture. He:

(a) Insisted on the illumination of Scripture;

(b) Rejected allegorism, calling it Satanic since it led men away from the truth of Scripture;

(c) Upheld the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture (thus rejecting the medieval fourfold meaning of Scripture and the use of Scripture to justify presupposed dogma). He emphasized instead grammatical exegesis, philology, the necessity of examining context, and the necessity of comparing Scriptures which treated common subjects.

(d) Calvin showed marked independence of exegesis, breaking with both Catholic exegesis and any other worthless exegesis.

(e) Calvin exercised caution in interpreting Messianic prophecy, advocating due consideration of the historical setting of prophetic and Messianic scriptures.<sup>16</sup>

**E. Post-Reformation:** The principles of the reformers established the general spirit and rules of Protestant orthodox interpretation. Yet, not all post-Reformation exegesis was of such a high order. The interpretation of the Scriptures in the cause of the system of theology occasioned the temptation to start placing the system over Scripture. This process of

ratiocination dried out some of the biblical interpretation and could slant it more toward the defence of Protestant doctrine than the exposition of biblical truth. However, a significant advance was made by Johann August Ernesti (1707–81), whose *Institutio Interpretis* (1761) maintained that the skills and tools of classical studies were basic to New Testament exegesis and that grammatical exegesis took priority over dogmatic exegesis. Ernesti encouraged exegetes of all classes to begin with grammatical interpretation.

It was during this period that Croatian Lutheran Flacius Illyricus wrote the first attempt at a scientific treatment of Hermeneutics (1567).

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¹⁶ For more, see Marvin W. Anderson, "Reformation Interpretation" in Ramm and Others, *Hermeneutics*, 81–91.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Why is the Protestant Reformation so vital to the interpretation of Holy Scripture?
2. How are we Protestants capable of falling into Roman Catholic error in the use of Holy Scripture?



INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS
PART ONE: GETTING INTO THE SUBJECT
Session 3: The History of
Hermeneutics (II)
Instructor: Dr. Tim J. R. Trumper

INTRODUCTION: Chronologically, we have advanced from times B.C. to the post-Reformation era of the seventeenth century. Along the way, we have sketched two main, opposing schools of thought: the allegorical and the literal.

Perhaps, it is unsurprising that once the church broke from the yoke of the Church of Rome numerous other schools emerged. Again, I summarise chiefly Ramm's historical sketch in his *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*:

3. THE DEVOTIONAL SCHOOL: They emphasised the edifying aspects of Scripture and the development of the spiritual life. Note:

A. Medieval Mystics: Better known for its scholastics and intellectual rigour, the medieval period also created mystics who majored in personal, spiritual experience. Besides belonging to the literal school, the Victorines were also mystics (especially Richard Victor). Likewise, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153). Bernard stressed how much love for God was essential to the knowledge of God. The principal biblical book of the mystics was the *Song of Songs*, bespeaking God's love for his people and their delight in God by way of physical pleasure. Bernard preached numerous sermons on the Song of Songs (*Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*), promoting charity rather than speculative scholasticism.

B. Post-Reformation Pietism: Bernard had a point, for in the generations following the Reformation there developed a period of theological dogmatism, which was marred by heresy hunting. The problem lay not with creedal Protestantism but with the loss of Christ's balance of grace and truth. F. W. Farrar in his *The History of Interpretation* claims three curses of the period: tyrannous confessionalism; exorbitant systems, and contentious bitterness. "They read the Bible by the unnatural glare of theological

hatred".¹⁷ Accordingly, Pietism emerged as a reaction to the spirit of theological discussion and to fanciful exegesis. Pietism sought to recover the notion of the Bible as spiritual food for personal edification. Prominent Pietists included:

(i) *Philip Jakob Spener (1635–1705)*: Influenced by Richard Baxter, Spener published *Pia Desidera* (1675), maintaining that the Bible is God's instrument for effecting true spirituality. Spener organized his *Collegia pietatis* for believers to meet together for Bible study, devotions, and prayer.

(ii) *August Hermann Francke (1663–1727)*: Much more the scholar, linguist, and exegete, initially he founded the *Collegium Philobiblicum* to study the language of Scripture and its impact on spiritual life, but later went to the University of Halle which became the center of Pietism. He argued for (i) frequent reading of Scripture; (ii) discretionary use of commentaries; and (iii) belief in the need of regeneration to understand the Bible.

(iii) *Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752)*: He studied under pietists, and was impressed by their spirituality, fellowship, emphasis on grammatical-historical interpretation, and their application of Scripture to spiritual life. His work *Gnomon* became a landmark in the development of the textual criticism of the New Testament.

Pietism thus became most influential, impacting the Moravians and Count von Zinzendorf, the Puritans, Methodists (John Wesley), Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, the Quakers, and down to the present:

- (a) In the way we read the Bible (for personal edification).
- (b) The expectation that preachers will be devotional/have application. This is necessary since preaching and teaching differ.

That said, devotional interpretation falls prey to:

- (a) Allegorizing (especially the distortion of the Old Testament records to obtain the spiritual blessing).
- (b) Over-compensating, substituting application for exegetical and doctrinal studies of the Bible. Solid and reliable spiritual application requires solid exegesis and doctrinal perception.

¹⁷ Cited in Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 60.

4. THE LIBERAL SCHOOL: The late eighteenth-century Enlightenment gave rise to rationalism. Rationalism rejects all in the Bible not acceptable to the rationalist mind. Thus, it challenges the authority of Scripture. Note the Liberal School's seven principles of interpretation:

First principle: The "modern mentality" must govern our approach to Scripture: The modern mentality is a series of presuppositions: Acceptance of:

(i) *Higher education standards.*

(ii) *The validity of the scientific outlook and method.*

(iii) *The rejection of what is deemed to contradict it (eg., miracles, depravity, hell).*

Second principle: A new definition of inspiration: Liberalism rejected a supernatural view of inspiration (verbal, plenary, dynamic). The inspiration of Scripture was reduced to the Bible's ability to inspire others. Thus, the Bible was said to be but a human document, with human insight into truth, or the human discovery of religious truths. On this understanding, we receive only what accords with the spirit of Jesus, thus the theological or doctrinal content of Scripture is not binding.

Third principle: The supernatural is redefined: It no longer refers to the extraordinary, miraculous, etc, but only to what is above the material order (or beyond natural processes, such as prayer, ethics, pure thought, immortality). Thus, much of Scripture is rejected as folklore, or mythology.

Fourth principle: Evolution is applied to Israel and its documents: The primitive and crude come earlier, and the advanced and elevated later. Thus, Israel is regarded as an evolution rather than a divine creation (elected, called, etc.). Thus, liberals rearrange the Hebrew books, placing the prophets before the law, and rearranging also some New Testament books. Thus, liberals developed Form or Historical Criticism (*Formgeschichte*), arguing that the New Testament was created by the Christian community to meet the needs of the church and is therefore not the accurate reflection of the life of Christ. For a classic statement of liberalism see Adolf von Harnack's *What is Christianity?*, and J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* for the classic response.

Fifth principle: The notion of accommodation applied to the Bible: Calvin taught a principle of accommodation wherein God accommodates his principles to the weakness and sinfulness of man (eg., divorce). His was a principle of accommodation in line with the gospel. Yet, in liberalism, the accommodation overturns the gospel. Paul, so liberals argue, only had the option of describing the gospel in bloody Jewish sacrifices, and so his doctrine of atonement is not binding on us. Liberalism thus reshapes the gospel according to contemporary ideas, stripping it of Old and New Testament influences.

Sixth principle: The Bible was interpreted historically: The liberal goes beyond painting the historical backdrop of books and passages. He claims that social conditions created theological beliefs. Accordingly, those recorded in Scripture are not necessarily correct or moral. The goal is to understand how the beliefs arose. Liberalism, however, breaks down the uniqueness of the Scriptures, of Israel, viewing Israel's religion as a continuity/syncretism with the religion of the surrounding peoples. Liberalism repudiates the predictive element of typology and prophecy.

Seventh principle: The welcome influence of philosophy: Immanuel Kant has been especially influential, reducing religion to ethics and moral will, for his interpretation of Scripture was moral, not theological. Deism likewise made ethics the essence of religion (see *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*). Then came George Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), teaching that Christianity is the highest form of religion in which human freedom (inner rationality) is finally realized. Thus, for liberals, Christianity became a religion of reason. David Strauss (1808–74) applied Hegelianism to the New Testament and, later, Julius Welhausen (1844–1918) to the Old Testament.

5. NEO-ORTHODOXY: Typically, dated back to 1919/1921 and the (re-) publication of Karl Barth's *Der Roemerbrief*, neo-orthodoxy gained its name from its partial severance from liberalism. It is also known as *crisis theology* because it majored on God's judgment of man. Yet, despite its emphasis on the transcendence of God, the Word of God, and the recovery of the gospel, neo-orthodoxy fell short of biblical and theological orthodoxy. Note its six hermeneutic principles:

First principle: The revelation principle: Although reacting against liberalism, Neo-orthodoxy bought into liberalism's denial of biblical

inspiration. The Bible is not an harmonious whole but a series of contradictory systems and ethics. Some parts of the Bible are sub-Christian contradicting modern science, and some are anti-Christian. Neo-orthodoxy thus contradicts the classic view of propositional revelation and derides the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture as but the mechanical and dictation theory of inspiration. Neo-orthodoxy thus charges Reformed orthodoxy with bibliolatry. Neo-orthodoxy teaches instead that divine revelation is not verbal but the communication of God's presence. The Word of God is Christ. Thus, rather than believing that the Scriptures are inspired, the neo-orthodox teach that the inspiration is in Scripture. Revelation becomes not only God speaking of his grace and forgiveness but also of man's response of faith. On this understanding, the Bible is but a record of and witness to inspiration. Whereas Liberalism saw no Word behind the words of Scripture, neo-orthodoxy looks for the Word behind the words of Scripture.

Second principle: The Christological Principle: God's Word to man is Jesus Christ. Only those parts of the Bible related to him are binding (a form of Lutheranism?). Doctrine is only understood in relation to Jesus Christ.

Third principle: The totality principle: Neo-orthodoxy, represented by Barth, Emile Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr and others, pushed back against the idea of establishing doctrines on proof-texting. Rather, doctrines need to be established from the totality of Scripture, guided by the Christological principle.

Fourth principle: The mythological principle: Whereas liberals rejected such elements of Scripture as the creation of man, the fall, etc., the neo-orthodox interpreted them mythologically. Thus, the neo-orthodox interpret doctrine seriously but not literally. To them, their understanding of myth is not pagan or classic but biblical. Myth they regard as a form of communication, an historical dress for bringing out religious truth. E.g., creation, Fall, Second Coming. Whereas pagan and classic myths are the product of human imagination and tradition, biblical myths are imperfect attempts to set forth what is transcendental about man's religious existence. Since biblical myths do not assume literal history, they have been called psychological interpretations.

Fifth principle: The existential principle: Following the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, the neo-orthodox regard the reading of the Bible

grammatically and historically as necessary—some as history and some as myth, the history revealing that revelation has occurred—but insufficient. We must read the Bible as God's Word, not carelessly, academically, or professionally, but expectantly, awaiting conversation with God and of receiving revelation again. The Bible is ultimately, then, a book about existence. We read it existentially, believing it to become the Word of God to the reader. We may not be intellectual readers but we can become existential readers. The latter receive the blessing.

Sixth principle: The paradoxical principle: Kierkegaard also influenced this principle. If man is limited and sinful and God is wholly other, he cannot have unambiguous knowledge of God. What truth man has of God appears paradoxical or dialectical. He knows God but doesn't know him. Thus, neo-orthodoxy teaches Christian doctrine by means of assertion and counter-assertion. In this regard, neo-orthodoxy stands over against the pantheistic theology of Friedrich Hegel (God is seen in everything). God is one and yet three; God is absolute holiness, yet unmeasured love; man is a creature but possesses the spirit of the transcendent; man uses reason to understand God, yet God is beyond reason; man is responsible in sin, yet sins inevitably; man is both creative and destructive; the cross is foolishness yet wisdom; man loses his life but to save it. In short, religious reality is too rich to be stated in strictly non-contradictory terms, and yet the paradoxes are not contradictory. Accordingly, neo-orthodoxy became known as dialectical theology.

6. THE BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL (Heilsgeschichte) SCHOOL: We can summarize the school by means of its two main influences ~

A. Von Hoffman of Erlangen: Amid the orthodoxy and liberalism of the nineteenth century, Johann Christian Conrad von Hoffman of Erlangen (1810–77) aimed to break the impasse between Lutheran orthodoxy and Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of liberal theology. Specifically, von Hoffman was influenced by—

(i) . *Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1854):* Whereas Schleiermacher, under the influence of romanticism saw religious experience as the point of departure for theology, critical study of the Bible, and Lutheran orthodoxy, von Hoffman sought to ground religious authority in:

(a) Scripture.

(b) The history and fact of the church.

(c) The experience of regeneration.

(ii) *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854)*: He saw in “holy history” or salvation history the manifestation of the eternal absolute (rather than a series of chronicled events). The supreme content of superhistory is Jesus Christ. Von Hoffman ran with this to teach:

(a) The importance of biblical history: Since history has roots in the past, meaning in the present, and pointers for the future, we need knowledge of it to study prophecy—both the immediate historical content and the fulfillment intended. Von Hoffman viewed this as the organic view of Scripture. The view holds that all Scripture is bound by holy history. While not the first to see the importance of salvation history (Irenaeus, Calvin, Edwards), it is said that von Hoffman was the first to apply it to the problems of exegesis in a systematic way.

(b) The central point of history: God is the agent, Christ the focal point.

(c) The Holy Spirit both inspired the Scriptures and guides the church: Von Hoffman thus spoke out against dogmatizing our interpretations of Scripture. We must be sensitive to the Spirit’s leading. Interpretation is not static but dynamic. We begin with the historical event and not with proof-texting. Every passage or verse of narrative has a historical context essential to proving doctrine.

B. Otto Alfred Piper (1891–1982): Naturalised American, Piper admits indebtedness to von Hoffman’s Salvation-history principle, claiming to be neither liberal, neo-orthodox, nor fundamentalist. He was thus rejected by both liberals and fundamentalists. Piper saw the authority of Scripture not in its claim to verbal inspiration (as espoused in post-Reformation dogmatics), nor in some higher knowledge (as in forms of Gnosticism), but in the facts more comprehensive and important than anything else we know of: Jesus Christ, salvation through faith, what we need for life. Thus, Scripture is vindicated by the sense we have that it is true. God speaks to us through it. Thus, the authority of the Bible is subjective. The interpreter is guided by:

(i) *The quest for the life-movement of the book under consideration (the unity of the book, readership, and influence of context on the interpretation).*

(ii) *The comprehension of the message (locating each idea in the author’s total view of life, connecting the author’s worldview to our own).*

(iii) *The appropriation of the message (ensuring first the book or document is authentic). Only by response and in response to Scripture do we know it to be the Word of God.*

Such a subjective view survives critical studies of introduction, canon, and text.

7. THE BULTMANNIAN SCHOOL: This last approach brings us to the mid-1950s, to Rudolph Bultmann and his prodigies. Together, they focused on New Testament interpretation. Note the school’s seven principles:

A. The scientific principle: All facts must be settled by science and all history must be settled by the ordinary process of historians. This rules out the miraculous, for readers of Scripture must never sacrifice their intellects. In Bultmannianism supernatural Christianity is vanquished.

B. The critical principle: Bultmann was influenced by the *Religionsgeschichtliche schule* (“History of Religions School” which emphasised the degree to which the Bible and the ideas contained within it were the products of their cultural milieu). The New Testament words, concepts, and expressions are to be determined by an exhaustive study of their whole historical, literary, sociological and religious backgrounds. Meaning comes not from divine revelation but from contemporary religion or philosophy. The historical setting becomes more important than exegesis.

Bultmann also made use of form criticism (*Formgeschichte*, tracing out the history of the literary forms in a document). Cultures have established models, forms, literary genres by which they perpetuate their traditions. The “new hermeneutic” sees the New Testament the same way, and so the Gospels, in particular, are to be interpreted by research into the forms of the Gospels (pronouncement stories, miracle stories, myths, legends, and *novellen* [short stories]). The New Testament is more a culturally conditioned document rather than a divine revelation. See Bultmann’s *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*.

C. The mythological principle: Bultmann claims that the first-century church expressed the faith in mythological terms. Bultmann understood myth to possess three criteria:

(i) *the statement of the faith in a worldly, external, objective way.*

(ii) *the assertion of something contrary to science (e.g., miracles).*

(iii) *Doctrinal statements not acceptable to modern man.* Bultmann has thus “enormously inflated” the concept of myth. This directly influences Bultmann’s hermeneutics.

D. The demythological-existential principle: According to Bultmann’s 1941 essay “New Testament and Mythology” the first duty of the interpreter is to recognize the mythological character of a passage of Scripture. Since myths are not believable by modern man, we must regard them as records of existential encounters. Indeed, Bultmann regretted that they were put in mythological forms. In this Bultmann was influenced by the existentialism of Jewish philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). It is said that Bultmann only accepted from the New Testament what passed through Heidegger’s existentialism.

E. The dialectical principle: If something is historical or objective it cannot be existential, and if existential it cannot be objective or historical. Faith lives only by decision and not by historical or objective supports. Yet, Bultmann made an exception for the cross, for it cannot be subject to criticism. It is an event of both Roman history and God’s salvation.

F. The revelational principle: Whereas orthodoxy stressed propositional revelation (truths, doctrines), modern interpreters believed revelation to be an existential encounter. Revelation, then, is not a quality of Scripture but an experience. God’s Word is not to be equated with the Holy Scriptures for they are but a record or witness that revelation occurs. It does so in the existential encounter between God and man. Explains Ramm, “*God speaking a supernatural Word when not heard or believed by any man is not revelation to Bultmann*”.¹⁸ As in neo-orthodoxy, the interpreter looks for revelation not in Scripture but in the Word within the words.

G. The law principle: Bultmann didn’t believe that the Old Testament in any way predicts the New Testament. The Old Testament is not a Christian book but a book of law revealing how man fails his existential character. The positive message of Scripture is in the New Testament. Thus, Bultmann influenced the radical movement called the New Hermeneutic. It was further

developed by Ernst Fuchs (1903–1983) and Gerhard Ebeling (1912–2001), in three ways:

(i) *The critical principle:* Whereas Bultmann only accepted the cross as an historical fact, those coming after him sought a broader historical basis for preaching. Thus, there developed “*the quest for the historical Jesus*”, which sought to lessen the perceived tension between history and faith.

(ii) *The hermeneutic principle:* Whereas in traditional Hermeneutics, the church sought to understand Scripture, in the New Hermeneutic the church seeks to understand her own world and experience and to give expression to it. Thus, the New Hermeneutic sought to transform classic Hermeneutics from a theological into a philosophical discipline.

(iii) *The language principle:* No longer ought preaching to arise from classic Protestant grammatical-historical interpretation. It arises from existential language the speech-event ~ man’s response to God and God’s response to the act of decision or faith.

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<sup>18</sup> Ramm. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 89.

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Holy Scripture faces three enemies—traditionalism, rationalism, and emotionalism. How would you describe them?
2. Of all the schools of interpretation we have sketched, which are clearly identifiable as opposed to the authority of Scripture? To which enemy would you attach each of them?
3. Which schools do you see represented in your country/on your continent (maybe not in name, but in the way of approaching Scripture)?



## INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

### PART TWO: GETTING INTO THE BIBLE

#### Session 1. The Foundation of Hermeneutics

Instructor: Dr. Tim J. R. Trumper

**INTRODUCTION:** Thus far, we've introduced the discipline of Hermeneutics, its importance and its history. We now ask what we need to know to rightly interpret the Holy Scripture, both for our sakes and for those whom we serve. In short, we need true perception:

**A. A true perception of ourselves:** No matter who we are, we must approach the Scriptures humbly. Humility is appropriate on account of—

(i) *God:* The Bible is a book like none other. Other books we read, but this is *the book* that reads us. Almighty God—omnipresent and omniscient—reveals in his Word that he knows us better than we know ourselves. Thus, unlike in liberalism we stand under and not over the Word of God.

(ii) *Ourselves:* Even though God has taken the initiative in revealing himself to us, and has done so clearly, our pride blinds us to his revelation. Accordingly, we stand with those in history who understood the need of the Holy Spirit to see God's truth. Indeed, hermeneutics when undertaken with debased or carnal minds and shunning dependence on the Holy Spirit, either limits or distorts what we can understand. The rightful interpretation of Scripture requires much prayer, not for revelation (we have that!), but for illumination. Writes Sinclair Ferguson, "*It is by reading Scripture under the Spirit's influence, rather than by skill in logic, that trust [and understanding] in God's Word is born*".<sup>19</sup> Certain schools of interpretation have understood this to one degree or another—the allegorical (Augustine), literal (Luther, Calvin), devotional (Spener, Francke, Bengel), neo-orthodox (sort of! Barth), biblical-theological (von Hoffmann and Piper)—but not the liberal and Bultmannian schools. Their exalted view of man dismisses dependence on the Spirit.

**B. A true perception of the Scriptures:** Humility is vital but not solitary. We also need to perceive that while the Scriptures possess a humanness (different Testaments, progression, and authors), they always and ever possess a divineness and are God's Word to man. The divineness explains the unity of Scripture—one God, one plight, one gospel. Liberals and Bultmannians, by contrast, either refuse to recognize this unity, or, in their spiritual blindness they cannot. Thus, Biblical or Sacred Hermeneutics must rest upon a reliable understanding of God's Word. While no one approaches Scripture unaffected by their context, those born again, and willfully subject to God and his Word, do their best to listen to Scripture, and refuse the historic enemies that have so marred the hermeneutics of Scripture, namely, traditionalism (notably Roman Catholicism), rationalism, and romanticism.

Beginning, then, from a true perception of God and ourselves, we now consider *three matters* that are crucial to appreciate in rightly interpreting God's Word:

**1. THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE:** Writes Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof, "*By inspiration we understand that supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of which their writings are given divine truthfulness, and constitute an infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice.*"<sup>20</sup> The Spirit's influence included the investigation of documents, collection of facts, arrangement of the material and choice of words, etc., as well as the actual writing of Scripture. Whereas the Holy Spirit *supervised* the compilation and later the preservation of Scripture, he *inspired* the writing of it. This inspiration secured the Bible's infallibility and explains how 66 books, written over 1600 years, by 45+ authors could possess such harmony and coherence.

Inspiration is not a theological invention, nor a philosophical theory, but biblical teaching. If we err here we go awry hermeneutically. Understand, then, *four characteristics* of inspiration:

**A. Inspiration is oral:** Consider the prophets, their state in prophesying and their function. The classic reference, Exodus 7:1— "*And the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall*

<sup>19</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, "How does the Bible Look at Itself?" in Harvie M. Conn (Ed.), *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, second printing (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 41).

*be your prophet.*” —tells us that prophets spoke for God, bringing the Word of God to man (cf. Deut. 18:18; Jer. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:21). The Holy Spirit came upon them, the hand of *Yahweh* was strong on them, they received the Word of God and were constrained to utter it. The prophets knew that God had given them the Word (“*Thus says the Lord*”, etc.). Indeed, so much does God speak through them that sometimes they speak as if they were God (Is. 3:4; 5:3ff.; 10:5ff.; 27:3ff.; Jer. 5:7; 16:21; Hos. 6:4ff.; Joel 2:25; Amos 5:21ff.; Zech. 9:7). On entering the New Testament, we find Christ promising the apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, bringing to remembrance what the Spirit had taught them (John 14:26). Thus, they went on to speak, conscious that God was speaking through them (1 Thess. 2:13), assured that their testimony was the testimony of God.

**B. Inspiration is written:** The writings safeguarded the inspired messages orally given. Although no single passage asserts explicitly the inspiration of the whole Bible, we deduce it from the Hebrew Scriptures: (a) They are referred to as *hē graphe* or *hai graphai* (Rom. 9:17; Lk. 24:27). (b) They are quoted as having divine authority (Rom. 1:2; 2 Tim. 3:15). (c) They are called the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2) and are to be received as divine revelation (2 Tim. 3:16). Indeed, (d), there are Scriptures so identifying God and the Scriptures as they are both said to speak (Heb. 1:5-13). Notice in Rom. 9:17 and Gal. 3:8 how Old Testament quotes are described as Scripture.

**C. Inspiration is verbal:** To believe in inspiration the way the Bible teaches it, we must hold that the inspiration was verbal (down to every word). It is inconsistent, as in neo-orthodoxy, to hold to inspiration but not to verbal inspiration, therefore allowing for error in the Bible. Yet, the Holy Spirit inspires the Word of God not in some vague general sense, it teaches the words to be conveyed. Recall, the promises made to Abraham (Gal. 3:16); the testimonies of the psalmists and Job to hearing the words of God’s mouth or lips (Ps. 17:4; Job 23:12); the Lord’s words to Jeremiah at his call, “*Behold, I have put my words in your mouth*” (Jer. 1:9). Says John Calvin, “*the Scripture has flowed from the mouth of God by the ministry of men*” (Inst. 1:7:5).

**D. Inspiration is original:** In advocating classical Protestant Hermeneutics, we need to be clear about the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Specifically, we refer to the *autographa* (the original manuscripts), for, after all, the copies (*apographa*) have variant readings (copyist errors). While we do not deny this reality we do not thus conclude that the Bible in our hands is other than

the Word of God. Most variant readings impact only spelling, a few change the meaning of particular passages or verses, but no major doctrine relies for its substantiation on a variant reading. Accordingly, we have confidence that the inspired autographs are preserved by the industry of the transcribers.

**2. THE ATTESTATION OF SCRIPTURE:** The case for biblical inspiration rules out confidence in full-blown rationalistic interpretations of Scripture (Liberalism, Bultmannianism) as also attempted compromises (Neo-orthodoxy and some forms of biblical-theological interpretation). As biblical Protestants, we accept the Bible’s testimony to its own inspiration. *This testimony is fourfold:*

**A. The Bible is authoritative:** Without inspiration, the Bible could possess human authority as the chief witness of God’s people to God’s acts in history and as the sourcebook for all Christian traditions. Yet, divine inspiration guarantees the Bible’s uniqueness and the *divine* authority it possesses. It is “*the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4). What Scripture says, God says; hence the force of “*It is written*”. Note, that no one had more confidence in the authority of Scripture than Jesus. Consider his example, notably his use of Scripture before his arrest (Matt. 26:24, 31) and after his resurrection (Lk. 24:44, 46); also his teaching, directing his apostles to teach whatever he had taught. In doing so, they demonstrated the same confidence as Jesus. who not only quoted the Old Testament but fulfilled it. Of the authority of Scripture we may say that it is:

(i) *Total:* “*All Scripture is breathed out by God. . .*” (2 Tim. 3:16). Equally inspired and therefore equally authoritative.

(ii) *Nuanced:* Although Scripture is entirely authoritative, it is not all authoritative in the same way. Biblical authority may be:

(a) Incidental (extending to the accompanying details of the main themes of Scripture) or intentional (to do with the main themes). Or,

(b) Temporarily binding (e.g., the ceremonial and judicial laws) or permanently binding (e.g., the moral law). To discover the nature of the authority in a given passage under review, we must locate it within the overall canon of Scripture, the scope of redemptive history and the progress of revelation.

(iii) *Focused*: Throughout, the Bible keeps front and center the matters necessary for our salvation. The Scriptures are given to make us wise for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). They claim, then, to be authoritative. It matters that they are, for we need confidence in what is revealed of the good news. Our eternity hangs on it. Again, we need to be precise about what this means. The Scriptures don't claim to be an authority on science (although they don't contradict true science), or a self-help book (although its wisdom literature is very helpful). The Scriptures are authoritative in speaking of the revealed truths of God, the way of salvation, and the life of the saved. They are good and sufficient for *"teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness."*

**B. The Bible is reliable:** The inspiration of Scripture explains its authority, and its authority its reliability. Recall Jesus's statement, the Scriptures *"cannot be broken"* (Jn. 10:35); that all prophecy had to be fulfilled (e.g, Matt. 26:24, 31, 54, 56); and that his Word is truth (Jn 17:17). This underlines, then, the importance of treating the reliable Scriptures reliably. Out of respect for that reliability, we must do what we can to interpret Scripture correctly. We cannot undo the reliability of Scripture, but we can bring it into disrepute, obscuring its reliability by interpreting it unreliably.

**C. The Bible is infallible:** Altogether, the inspiration, authority, and reliability of Scripture point to its infallibility. The argument for infallibility is based, however, not simply on a logical deduction but on the character of God, for he can neither err nor lie. Liberals, though, say that this infallibility is undermined by the fact that God speaks through man. Yet, there are two problems with this view. Notice that it:

(i) *Demeans God*: The argument implies that man has more power to undercut God's infallibility than God has to overrule man's fallibility.

(ii) *Demeans Scripture*: Scripture gives no hint that the Word is fallible. While *infallibility* is not a biblical term, it is a theological term that seeks to explain Scripture's freedom from error. This freedom allows for:

(a) The idiosyncracies of individual authors of Scripture. Writes B B Warfield, *"through the medium of the worst Greek a fisherman of Galilee*

*could write and the most startling figures of speech a peasant could invent."*<sup>21</sup>

(b) Human complexities. Such as things, speech, and times. No matter the complexities, infallibility explains that what the biblical authors wrote was truth not error. While we cannot prove this scientifically, we receive the testimony of God's own Word and the assurance of the Holy Spirit that the Holy Scriptures are true. We do not deny difficult passages, but we trust the ultimate author of Scripture, and thus our faith remains unshaken.

**D. The Bible is necessary:** Since Scripture makes us wise unto salvation, we need it not only to be converted—it being relevant to all people in all places—but to become fully-fledged disciples of Christ (Jn. 17:17). Holy Scripture is thus necessary throughout our lives. Recall Jesus' disappointment in Lk 24:25 when his disciples had fallen short of trusting the Scriptures: *"Of foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"*. It is for us, then, to humbly and prayerfully understand and believe what God has revealed.

**3. THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE:** It should be clear by now that our confidence in utilizing Scripture, specifically in preaching it, lies not in our charisma, our character, or our command of language or of people, but in the God-breathed authoritative, and infallible Word of God. Yet, to interpret it aright we bear in mind certain key features of Scripture. These, we outline, zooming in from the broadest to the narrowest considerations, from the general principles to the exposition of particular passages. Consider:

**A. The unity of Scripture:** This is fundamental and needs to underline our whole approach to exposition. The unity is manifold:

(i) *Unity of authorship*: Behind the 66 books and multiplicity of authors lies the one God who sees and knows everything at once, and reveals himself for his glory and our salvation.

(ii) *Unity of message*: All that God says points to his Son Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). Christ is the one of whom the Scriptures speak (Jn. 5:39), the one revealed as the Messiah who was

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in Conn (Ed.), *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, 63.

coming, is come, and will come again. He is our prophet, priest, and king. So, we look for Christ in the Old Testament, demonstrating from the New Testament his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. All roads in Scripture lead to Christ and, through him, to God.

(iii) *Unity of narrative*: Throughout the Scriptures the plan of God is worked out in a singular narration of the salvation of the people of God. That narration forms two parallel lines: the history of salvation and the progression of revelation. At the heart of the narrative lies one God, ordaining one people, through one Messiah, by one means (grace), to constitute one church, spreading one kingdom of heaven, for one ultimate end (God's glory in the consummation of all things).

(iv) *The interconnectedness*: The Bible is not a stream of random visions contra the *Surahs* in the *Quran*. The Holy Scripture contains great inner connectedness:

(a) Between the testaments. New Testament authors draw from the Old Testament and acknowledge the divine authority of Old Testament books. In Romans 3:10-18, Paul quotes Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalms 14:2-3; 5:10; 140:4; 10:7; Isaiah 59:7, 8; and Psalm 36:2. The New Testament authors, under the influence of the Spirit, also adapt Old Testament quotes.

(b) There is also interconnectedness across the New Testament. Note that Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:14-16).

**B. The diversity of Scripture**: The unity is not a uniformity. It accommodates various diversities. Recall ~

(i) *The difference between the Old and New Testament*: They are different in *language* (Hebrew [and Aramaic] and Greek) and in *content* (promise to fulfillment; bud to flower). They are different in *form* (prophetic and apostolic; there are more symbols in the Old Testament; and more anonymous books in the Old Testament).

(ii) *The difference between the multiple forms of God's revelation*: There are not only different Testaments but various genres: historical narratives, didactic writings (Old Testament: law and wisdom literature. New Testament: parables, discourses, and epistles); prophecy; and poetry.

(iii) *The difference between various books of the Bible*: The unity of the message allows for the multiple perspectives of the different authors. Each

author had a different temperament, role, idiosyncrasies, talents, acquired knowledge, and readership. Thus, each book has its stamp or character. They have different settings, vocabularies, and styles. The multiple authors remind us that, even though they were inspired, only God sees all his truth all at once. It is for this reason that, maintaining the unity of Scripture, we preach the specific author under consideration in any particular sermon.

**C. The sense of Scripture**: It is vital to understand that while a text may have many significances, it has but one proper sense. This is what makes the scientific and logical investigation of the text possible. Multiple senses render certainty as to the meaning of Scripture impossible, and open wide the door to arbitrary interpretations. Note:

(i) *The case for the single sense*: It is built on:

(a) The veracity of God: He speaks unequivocally.

(b) The purpose of God: In seeking his glory in the redemption of sinners, it suits God's purpose to speak clearly.

(c) The nature of God: Since God is rational, he must have revealed himself in a reasonable and accessible way, both in nature and in Scripture.

(d) The revelation of God: It would be foreign to the character of God and of human language to inject multiple significations into a single connection. He has a specific intent in each passage of Scripture.

(ii) *The clarifying of the single sense*: The single sense does not preclude:

(a) Many interpretations. We distinguish the real sense from the interpretations.

(b) A distinguishing of the literal and mystical sense. These are subsets of the single sense;

(c) A double fulfillment of prophecy. From the one sense a prophecy may be fulfilled partially or typologically with only the final fulfillment exhausting the sense. We may speak, then, of a *deeper sense* to Scripture but *not a double sense*. The single sense doesn't always lie on the surface of the text.

(d) Many applications. The proper sense can be used to warn, rebuke, encourage, or exhort.

**D. The style of Scripture:** Aspects of style to bear in mind include:

(i) *The simplicity of style:* There is general agreement that the Bible is profound but simple. John deals with the most exalted matters and yet monosyllabically, using profusely notions such as truth, love, life, etc.

(ii) *The liveliness of style:* Abstract truths are conveyed in Scripture not as bare propositions, but rather are clothed in anthropomorphisms, personifications, and figures of speech. History is not just narrated but pictured. In some poetry and prose, there are parallelisms to note. There are:

(a) Synonymous parallelisms: Same idea in different words, either by *similarity* (Ps. 24:2; Job 6:5) or *identity* (Prov. 6:2; Ps. 93:3).

(b) Antithetical parallelisms: Where the second member of a line is the obverse (opposite) of the first, especially in Proverbs. These may be *simple* (Prov. 14:34; Ps. 30:6) or *compound* (Is. 1:3,19, 20).

(d) Synthetic parallelisms: Where the second member adds something to the first. These may be *correspondent*, where the first line corresponds with the third, and the second with the fourth (Ps. 27:1; 35:26,27) or *cumulative of successive ideas*, sometimes leading to a climax (Ps. 1:1,2; Is. 55:6, 7; Heb. 3:17).

(d) *Introverted or chiastic parallelisms:* Parallelisms in reverse order (Prov. 23:15-16; 10:4,5; 13:24).

**E. The wording of Scripture:** Since the Bible has three-quarters of a million words, we need to understand them, especially those that are critical to any text or passage under consideration.

(i) *The etymology of the words:* We gain the meaning not from the translation of the word in view but from the original Hebrew (Aramaic) or Greek word. Even then we have our work cut out. The original word may open to several alternative translations. Or, the original meaning may not be available or possible. Sometimes the original word has a variety of meanings, or the meaning may have shifted over time. A word's etymology, then, does not necessarily determine the meaning.

(ii) *The use of the words:* As important as is the inspired use of the word, we must inquire not only into the original meaning but into how the original word is used in the text or pericope. On many occasions, the meaning will be

clear and we don't have to concern ourselves so much with the etymology: First, an author sometimes gives the definition or explanation (Gen. 24:2; 2 Tim. 3:17; Heb. 5:14). Second, subjects and predicates may explain each other (Matt. 5:13; Rom. 8:19-23). Third, an antithetical or synonymous parallelism may indicate the meaning (Ps. 7:13; Is. 46:11). Fourth, a parallel passage may help determine the meaning, where the *verbs are parallel* (same word used in a similar connection) or *real* (likeness of facts, subjects, sentiments, or doctrines). Both are needed for a true parallel. Five, a Christian author may use a Greek term and yet fill it with Old or New Testament content (e.g., Paul's use of *huiiothesia* [adoption]). Six, words can have substitutes. We can tell their meaning by antonyms (opposite meanings) and synonyms (overlapping meanings). These require special attention when used in the same text or passage.

(iii) *The connectedness of words:* Since words do not stand alone, we must note their use in their sentences. Words in their sentences are more significant than original meanings taken in isolation. Although a word may have multiple meanings (e.g., *nomos* [law], *sarks* [flesh]), in a sentence it has but one meaning. Sometimes, the use of a word can merge specific meanings into a higher meaning (e.g., peace: peace with God and peace of God). On other occasions, words are used synecdochically (i.e., in a pregnant sense, with the part meant for the whole).

**F. The figures of Scripture:** In Scripture, we take things literally unless there is good reason not to. In books of history and law, the figurative is far less likely. Overall, we discern the figures from the context and character of the subject. Figures of speech are commonly called *tropes* and refer to words used in a sense other than their literal meaning). The principle tropes include:

(i) *Similes:* Identifiable by the use of "like" or "as" (e.g., Ps. 2:9; 103:13).

(ii) *Metaphors and models:* These are a direct comparison (no "like" or "as"), as in Ps. 18:2 (23:1). When used in reference to God there are two kinds of metaphors: *anthropopathisms* (Gen. 6:6; Deut. 13:17; Eph. 4:30) and *anthropomorphisms* (Ex. 15:16; Ps. 34:16; Lam. 3:56; Zech. 14:4; Jas. 5:4).

(iii) *Metonymy:* These tend to be mental rather than physical resemblances. In Lk. 16:29, "*Moses and the prophets*" refers to their writings, and "*the keys*" (Is. 22:22 and Rev. 1) refers to control. In Acts 7:8, "*covenant*" refers to circumcision.

(iv) *Synechdoche*: The referencing of the entirety of an entity by reference to a part of it. For example, the conscious element of conversion is made up of both repentance and faith, yet oftentimes our converting is referred to either by repentance or faith. Exceptions include Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21.

As preachers, we must observe figures of speech, discover the principle idea, and the main form of comparison. We are not to drive the comparisons beyond that which was intended but must exercise sensitivity to the Scriptures and to the Spirit.

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QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. How ought reliable hermeneutics to help you preach with greater confidence?
2. How have you been ministering the Word to date, and how do these principles of interpretation help you to minister it better?
3. How do you differentiate a literal from a literalistic interpretation of Scripture?



INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

PART TWO: GETTING INTO THE BIBLE

Session 2. The Use of Hermeneutics

I. Preaching Stories, Psalms, and Prophecy

Instructor: Dr. Tim J. R. Trumper

INTRODUCTION: Standing on the foundation of Scripture, we now turn to the practical use of Hermeneutics. Chiefly, we consider its relevance to preaching. Thus, here and in the next session we consider the preaching of different elements of Scripture, beginning with those especially related to the Old Testament: stories, psalms, and prophecy.

Paying particular attention to the preaching of the Old Testament is important for *three reasons*:

A. The normalcy of Old Testament preaching: God has given us 66 books of Holy Scripture and not just the 27 of the New Testament. Indeed, we would have to dismiss much of New Testament preaching if we ignore the Old Testament, for the preaching of Jesus and the apostles was rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. Indeed, Paul included the Hebrew scriptures when stating that “*All Scripture is God-breathed and . . . profitable*” (2 Tim. 3:16), and that he had preached the whole (revealed) counsel of God (Acts 20:27). If, then, we ignore the Old Testament in our preaching we cut ourselves adrift not only from the Old Testament but from New Testament preaching. To ignore the Old Testament also denies us the ability to say with Paul that we have preached, representatively, all the revealed counsel of God.

B. The neglect of Old Testament Preaching: Despite the preceding, there is a tendency not to preach the Old Testament as much as it should be preached. There are several likely reasons for this:

(i) *A biblical reason:* A slim knowledge of Old Testament history and theology.

(ii) *A hermeneutic reason:* Ignorance of how to interpret the Old Testament for today. What are we to make of polygamy, slavery, etc? What features of the Old Testament were always dubious (polygamy), which had a purpose in God’s economy (slavery), what features were abrogated in the New Testament (ceremonial and judicial law), which were adapted to the New

Covenant era (the Sabbath), and which carry over unchanged (the moral law or Ten Commandments)?

(iii) *A theological reason:* The challenge of explaining why the God of the Old Testament comes across differently from the God of the New Testament. The inability to explain this in terms of God’s response to the immaturity and maturity of the church, respectively, has led to modern-day Marcionism.

(iv) *An ecclesiological reason:* Belief that the church only came into existence on the Day of Pentecost.

(v) *A spiritual reason:* Sometimes the Old Testament is very convicting. In our day, there is considerable embarrassment on account of God’s radical judgment of sin. E.g., the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

C. The need of Old Testament preaching: The neglect of Old Testament preaching diminishes the preaching of the gospel. Worse are the attempts to preach the Old Testament without factoring in the discontinuities between the Old and New Covenant. Examples include:

(i) *Cherry-picking texts for personal use:* Hyper-individualizing favorite texts from the Old Testament. or so de-contextualizing various texts that we end up moralizing the gospel (making it a “gospel” of works).

(ii) *Prosperity Gospel:* An overlooking of God’s conditional dealings with the church during her infancy. In effect, “If you do this, you’ll get that”. The approach was God’s parental mode of operating, which has been modified now that the church has come of age.

(iii) *Theonomy:* An ignoring of the termination of the judicial laws and penalties of Israel. Thus, even when the Old Testament is preached there can be a great dearth of sensitivity to the progress of divine revelation and difficulty in knowing how to handle it.

Let us turn, then, to three major features of the Old Testament:

1. THE PREACHING OF STORIES: The Old Testament is full of stories. We cannot avoid them! Many of them are beloved. Consider:

A. The interpretation of stories: How we approach the stories included in Scripture indicates where we are theologically. Liberals reject the supernatural in the stories. The neo-orthodox claim that they are useful myths. Yet, biblical or confessional Protestants, trusting Scripture to be the inspired and infallible Word of God, regard them as true historical accounts

written by *holy men* (2 Pet. 1:21). Accordingly, unless the stories contain material suggesting that the author intended them to be taken as other than factual, we take them as such. Note, for example, the way the history of David contains the prophet Nathan's tale of the poor man with the one ewe lamb (2 Sam. 12:1-7). Notice in the New Testament how the parables Jesus formulated are found amid the accounts of his actual ministry.

B. The initiation of the stories: We value the stories because they are integral to God's revealed counsel. But how did we come by them?

(i) *By direct revelation:* This explains how Moses could write of the creation.

(ii) *By sagas:* Sagas are primarily oral stories passed down the generations that preserve the wanderings or adventures of God's people and, specifically, of the heroes among them. Sagas include responses to the said events, such as songs of deliverance.

(iii) *By eye-witness accounts:* E.g, Moses' record of how he killed the Egyptian (Ex. 2:11-12); Luke's inclusion of his participation of Paul's missionary journeys (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-8 and 27:1-28:16.).

C. The importance of the stories: However we came by them, we can discern several reasons for their importance:

(i) *Stories are integral to life:* Long before our stories were woven into God's story, there were stories of biblical characters which, more significantly, played a part in the history of salvation and the progress of revelation.

(ii) *Stories—although not solely stories (law, wisdom)—teach us of the importance of grace:* Moses, Jacob, and Paul, for example, all teach us that man cannot get to God by his own merit. Each story either directly or indirectly points us away from personal merit and good works to Christ and to his story. Amid all the details of his earthly life, we hear him announce the good news of God's grace. To skip over the biblical stories is, then, to miss the Bible's visuals of God's undeserved favour.

(iii) *Stories teach us principles of Christian living:* Besides pointing the unregenerate to faith, the stories point the regenerate to the subsequent life of faith. They are not only more instructive than we might imagine, they are also more relevant. Indeed, without their doctrinal and practical implications, the stories are antiquarian and irrelevant. Conversely, doctrine and application without story are sterile. In between these extremes, doctrine clothed in the biblical stories directs and nourishes the life,

worship, and mission of the church. Biblical stories suffused with doctrine lend the lives of the saints their meaning. We are to avoid, then, either getting so bogged down in the story as to miss their saving and/or sanctifying purpose or so rushing through the story as to arrive at some superficial eisegetical points of doctrine or application. When we do justice to the stories, we need not and ought not to blur their clarity by injecting into them modern-day illustrations. We must let the narrative speak for itself.

2. THE PREACHING OF PSALMS: The Hebrew Bible has three sections—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Whereas stories of Israel's history are recorded throughout, the Psalms belong to the Writings. They are the sacred songs of Israel. To preach them well we must—

A. Distinguish the Psalms: Some psalms are didactic and others poetic—

(i) *The didactic psalms:* These are the minority. They are addressed to the understanding and rehearse the history of God's people. They are stories in song and are stated objectively (in the third person). E.g., Ps. 106:6-48.

(ii) *The poetic or lyrical psalms:* These address the emotions and spiritual experience, and therefore arise more from personal circumstances (sin, danger, temptation, etc. [Pss. 3, 6, 7, 18, 30]), Yet, the individual experiences they record have a representative character. Such psalms convey solidarity with the remainder of the race, but especially with the people of God. Indeed, every emotion of the believer is represented in the Psalms. The Psalms are a testimony to our shared relationship to God, to Christ our covenant head, and to each other. The Psalmist's song is, thus, the song of the church.

B. Interpret the Psalms: There are six main rules to bear in mind—

(i) *A known historical context illuminates the Psalm:* See the headings. The contexts, for instance, of Psalms 3, 32, 51, and 63 should be carefully considered.

(ii) *A known composer illuminates the psalm:* In each case—whether of Moses, David, or Asaph—we are to consider the psalmist's character, temperament, and spirituality, for psalms are psychological expressions of the faith.

(iii) *Known emotions in the Psalms should not be assumed to be biblical:* The inspiration of the Scriptures does not require everything a Psalmist feels to accord with God's will (e.g., Ps. 42:3, "My tears have been my meat day and night"), only that what the Psalmist felt has been accurately recorded.

(iv) *The Psalms are rich in expressions of God's will and God's ways.* The Psalms, we keep before us, are written by the regenerate and are representative of the people of God. We can and should draw from them what reflects God's abiding will, as supported by comparisons with other parts of Scripture (*analogia fidei*).

(v) *Messianic Psalms should be interpreted with care to distinguish what directly and indirectly relates to the Messiah.* Clearly, Pss. 2, 22, 45 and 110 directly relate to the Messiah, but Pss. 72 and 89 apply first to the poet and only in the second place to him. There are also "*mystically Messianic Psalms*" such as Pss 16 and 40 which speak of the union between the Messiah and his church. Help in understanding the Messianic Psalms can be gained from their quotation in the New Testament, and how the New Testament realized their predictions.

(vi) *Imprecations (spoken curses) in the Psalms should also be handled carefully.* Understand that:

(a) In the Ancient Near East there was a love of the concrete, therefore sin could be represented by the sinner;

(b) The imprecations express the yearning that God and his righteousness be vindicated;

(c) The imprecations are rooted not in personal vindictiveness but in God's aversion and that of his people to sin as embodied by the sinner;

(d) The imprecations reveal God's attitude to those hostile to him and to his kingdom.

(e) They must be preached out of the spirit and not the flesh; for the sake of God's honor rather than the satisfaction of sinful anger.

3. THE PREACHING OF PROPHECY: Note three main matters—

A. The challenges of prophecy: Preaching the prophets is among the most challenging of homiletical tasks. There are a couple of reasons for this—

(i) *Because of different views of prophecy.* Some view them with certainty as historical events before they occur, but the rationalists as but the fruit of intuition. In their view, what we call prophecies are really but premonitions.

(ii) *Because prophecy includes both forth-telling and foretelling.* Prophecy is the proclamation of what God has revealed. Such revelations came to prophets through dreams (while sleeping), visions (while awake), inward suggestions, or oral communications. Sometimes they explained the past leading to forthtelling, other times they disclosed the future (foretelling). Either way, prophecies are suffused with a central emphasis on the redemption of God's people in Christ and the establishment and growth of the kingdom of God.

B. The special characteristics of prophecy: Louis Berkhof mentions eight of them²²—

(i) *Prophecy has an organic character:* We neither deny its predictive element nor claim that prophecy is merely prediction. Many prophecies put forth general ideas which are gradually realized. As revelation progresses, they gain in definiteness. Consider how prophecies of the Messiah reach a high watermark in Is. 52–53.

(ii) *Prophecy is closely connected with history:* Prophecy is located within the parallel developments of the history of salvation and progress of revelation. Prophecy was directed first at the prophet's contemporaries, guiding and guarding them against apostasy, yet prophecy saw beyond the immediate.

(iii) *Prophecy has its own peculiar perspective:* Distance of time was not a particular focus of the prophets. In prophesying of the future, great events became compressed, comparable to how we view mountain ranges. Successive ranges look as if they are part of the same range and yet to approach them is to discover that there may be many miles between them. Likewise, prophecies may contain what Keil Delitzsch calls "*the foreshortening of the prophet's horizon*."²³ Consider, for example, how Old Testament prophecies relating to the Day of the Lord may refer to both his first and second comings (Mal. 3:1-5). Or, how New Testament prophecies may refer to both the destruction of Jerusalem and the Day of Judgment (e.g., Matt. 24: 3-31).

(iv) *Prophecies are often conditional on the actions of man:* This is the case with near-future prophecies. Their outcome was conditional on the response of the prophet's contemporaries. Sometimes the condition was not

²² Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 148–52.

²³ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 150.

expressed (Jer. 26:17-19; 1 Kgs 21:17-29; Jonah 3:9-10). Prophecies relating to the far future were, by contrast, unconditional.

(v) *Prophecy can be symbolic but is not to be treated symbolically throughout:* The context usually indicates when prophets spoke symbolically. Sometimes symbols are specifically identified as in Daniel 8 and Revelation 17. Otherwise, the language of the prophets should be understood literally. Writes Berkhof, “Exceptions to this rule must be warranted by Scripture”.²⁴

(vi) *Prophecy is clothed in the thought forms of its specific covenantal era:* The prophets expressed themselves in terms of the life, constitution, and history of their own people. Whereas in near-future prophecies the people could expect the prophecies to be fulfilled in the particulars, far-future prophecies, entailing in the meantime radical changes in Israel and the world, were and are realized in terms of their central idea. We err, then, if we think that far-future prophecy remains unfulfilled until every last detail is realized (cf. Is. 11:10-16; Joel 3:18-21; Micah 5:5-8; Zech 12:11-14; Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:15-17).

(vii) *The prophets sometimes transcended their historical and epochal context, speaking in the thought forms of a later more spiritual era.* On occasion, the prophets sensed the passing of their current era, and, from an Old Covenant vantage point, were able to give expression to the blessings of the New Covenant. This feature of prophesy occurred the closer the church of the Old Covenant got to the New Covenant era (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Mal. 1:11).

(viii) *Sometimes the prophetic word was revealed through prophetic actions.* Recall Isaiah walking bare-footed through Jerusalem (Is. 20:1-6); Jeremiah hastening to the Euphrates to hide his girdle (Jer. 13:1-11); Ezekiel lying 390 days on his left side and 40 days on his right, bearing the iniquity of the people (Ezek.4:4-8); and Hosea’s marriage to a promiscuous wife (Hosea 1:2-11).

C. The interpretation of the Prophets: While we cannot address every conundrum of the prophets and their prophecies, the more we familiarise ourselves with Old Testament history and with the feel of Scripture, the more sensitive we become in handling prophecy and the more proficient we

become in preaching it. In the meantime, it will help us to learn Berkhof’s five rules for expounding prophecy:

(i) *The prophet’s words should be taken in their literal sense unless the context or manner of their fulfillment indicate a symbolic meaning.*

(ii) *The prophet’s figurative expressions must be searched for their fundamental idea.*

(iii) *The prophets’ symbolic actions should be assumed to be real, unless the context suggests the contrary:* The plain sense of the text must be safeguarded where warranted.

(iv) *Some prominent prophecies are fulfilled in instalments, with each pledging that which is to come.* While it is mistaken to speak of a double or treble sense of prophecy, it is legitimate to speak of its two- or three-stage fulfilment. Evidently, Joel’s prophecy in 2:28-32, for instance, was not completely fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Likewise the predications of Matt. 24 were not all fulfilled in AD 70.

(v) *Prophecies should be read in the light of their fulfillment, for this will reveal depths in their original context that are otherwise missed:* Not all prophecies are fulfilled by way of an historical event. Some are fulfilled by the realization of a general principle. If we limit our consideration of the fulfillment to an event we may narrow the scope of its fulfillment. The fulfillment may come in a variety of ways, and, indeed, in a different way than it was uttered, depending on whether there is in the meantime a transition from Old to New Covenant, or from New Covenant era to the Consummation.

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<sup>24</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 151.

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What arguments do you use in support of preaching the supernatural elements of the biblical stories?
2. What is your approach to the imprecatory psalms? E.g., Ps. 137:8-9. How do you justify it biblically?
3. For all the challenges of preaching prophecy, what makes it so worthwhile?



## INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

### PART TWO: GETTING INTO THE BIBLE

#### Session 3. The Use of Hermeneutics

#### II. Preaching Symbols, Types, Allegories and Parables.

Instructor: Dr. Tim J. R. Trumper

**INTRODUCTION:** Recall, that to be a faithful minister of the Word, preaching at least representatively the whole revealed counsel of God (Acts 20:27), we preach not only stories, psalms and prophecy, but all other genres of biblical literature, too. Consider:

**1. THE PREACHING OF SYMBOLS:** Symbols are signs of something else. They have no significance in themselves, but they take on significance. The significance comes not from the preacher reading significance into the text of Scripture, but from God speaking in the text through a prophet or angel, declaring some fact, entity, or vision to be symbolic.

**A. Examples of symbols:** Symbols are found in the various eras of redemptive history. Consider—

(i) *The Patriarchs:* Symbolism is deeply rooted in human nature, but the Semitic and oriental mind was much more given to symbols than are the logical, analytical, philosophical minds of the West today. Recall, for example, how Jacob's wrestling with the angel symbolized his wrestling with God (Gen. 32:22-32), and later became symbolic of the wrestling with God of God's people (Hos. 12:2-4).

(ii) *The Prophets:* In Ezekiel 37:15-28 we read of two sticks made to look as one, representing the reunion of the northern and southern kingdoms. Recall also, Hosea's marriage to wayward Gomer (Hosea 1).

(iii) *The miracles:* Recall what was said of the first miracle of Jesus. John 2:11: "This first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." In John 6:1-13, the feeding of the 5,000 symbolized the sufficiency of Jesus to grant heavenly bread to all hungry enough to partake of him. Note v. 14, "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'"

(iv) *Apocalyptic literature:* Just as under the Old Covenant we find much symbolism in Daniel (ch. 7ff.), so in New Covenant we find more in the Book of Revelation (the beasts, horns, bowls, trumpets [Rev. 8ff.]).

**B. Rules of symbolism:** While entities may take on symbolic meaning by dint of a sanctified use of the imagination—indeed, sometimes preachers use this imagination informally, especially in applying messages to the present—general rules prevent us from making up symbols arbitrarily:

(i) *Biblical symbols are not always easy to interpret.* Once a culture has faded into history we cannot always connect the two elements of symbol:

(a) The mental or conceptual idea.

(b) The image which represents the idea. This is where knowledge of the local scene can help. E.g., the presence of the huge rock at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:18); "Satan's throne" (the temple on the hill) at Pergamum (Rev. 2:13).

(ii) *Symbols interpreted by Scripture become the basis of ongoing interpretation.* For example, the interpretation of the stars given in Rev. 1:20 is the key to interpreting the stars in Rev. 2:1. Once we have the interpretation of the lampstands in Rev. 1:20 we know what the seven churches are in Rev. 2 and 3.

(iii) *When symbols have no interpretation in the text:* We are to:

a) Look at the entity itself. Is it self-explanatory, such as the preservative role of salt, or the ferociousness of lions.

b) Check other passages using the same symbol.

c) Look for clues in studies of the relevant Semitic, Greek, or Roman culture.

(iv) *Beware of double imagery:* There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that a symbol has only one meaning. The meaning of an image in one place may differ in another. E.g. in Genesis 49:8-12 the description of Judah as a lion points to Christ, but in 1 Peter 5:8 the devouring lion refers to Satan.

(v) *Numbers may or may not be symbolic in Scripture:* In the ancient Semitic world, the number 3 could symbolize some or a few, 4 completeness and was used with blessings and cursings, 10 perfection, and 40 a generation. Yet, numbers can function as just a regular calculation, especially when used in

historical narratives (e.g., the number of soldiers going into battle or killed in one, or the returning exiles listed in Ezra and Nehemiah).

(vi) *Metals may be symbolic*: Such as gold, silver, and brass in the tabernacle. Some, such as Patrick Fairburn, think the symbolism lay in the value, others that the symbolism was more specific. E.g., that silver represented the universal medium of exchange in Old Testament times and the money for redemption (atonement money); that brass symbolized judgment, as in the case of the brazen altar (Ex. 27:1-8), the blazing feet of Christ (Rev. 1:15); that gold stood for that which is highest and holiest. The acacia wood used in the tabernacle is understood to symbolize human nature (hard, close-grained, orange with a darker heart).

(vii) *Colours may be symbolic*: This is difficult to determine, for not until art was established did colors receive their names. Ancient literature did not have the fine color distinctions that we have today. Blue (*tekeleth*) from the verb “to peel” or “to shell” likely came from the blue purple dye of a shellfish and could mean violet or purple. Purple is seen as the color of royalty. Scarlet is derived from the scarlet worm and is connected to sacrifice. White (*shesh*) is identical to the word “white linen” standing for holiness or purity.

In summary, in matters of symbolism, especially where there are uncertainties, the term(s) used must be considered in the original, from their etymology *and* cultural setting, and by a close examination of their associations.

**2. THE PREACHING OF TYPES:** In preaching types, we take seriously the history found in the Bible. The events narrated and entities described had existence and significance of their own, yet we see in them something greater. J. Stafford Wright defines a type as “*The representation of a permanent and a greater truth by a thing or an event, which also has a real existence and a significance of its own.*”<sup>25</sup> In other words, God, in revealing himself by the use of facts (and not just by words) intended us to see in some persons or events higher and longer-lasting truths about himself and his gospel. To unpack this, consider:

**A. Some differences:** Types are closely related to symbols, yet—

(i) *Whereas symbols refer to something past, present, or future, types prefigure a future reality.*

(ii) *Whereas symbols are timeless, types are a species of prophecy.*

(iii) *Whereas symbols signify, types imagine.*

**B. Some terms:** The New Testament indicates the existence of Old Testament types by the use of several terms.

(i) *“Type” (typos)*: *Typos* is found in Acts 7:44 and Heb. 8:5 (translated “pattern”), Rom. 5:14 (translated “type”), and 1 Cor. 10:6, 11 (translated “example”). *Typos* denotes the mark of a blow, an impression, a figure or an image, as well as an example or pattern.

(ii) *Antitypos*: This term is used in the same sense in Heb. 9:24 (translated “copies”) and 1 Peter 3:21 (translated “corresponds”).

(iii) *“Shadow” (skia)*. In Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1 *skia* is used for the ritual law, and in Colossians 2:16, 17 of ritual meat and drink, of the feast day, new moon, and sabbath.

(iv) *Allegorein*: In Galatians 4:24 Paul employs the verb (literally, to allegorize) when referring to Hagar as a type. Despite the etymology of the verb, Paul refers not to an allegory (to something non-historical), for the story of Abraham and Sarah is historical fact. Paul thus refers to a type.

**C. Some dangers:** The preaching of types has fallen into disrepute. There are several reasons for this:

(i) *The repetition of the excesses of the church fathers.* Some, then, prefer to speak of “correspondences” than “types.”

(ii) *Preaching from the Old Testament only the types, dismissing the remainder of the Old Testament.* This results from a fascination with the spiritual at the expense of the story.

(iii) *Limiting the application of the Old Testament to only those portions possessing a New Testament correspondence.*

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<sup>25</sup> J. Stafford Wright, *Interpreting the Bible*, reprint ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1966), 9.

**D. Some characteristics:** Despite the dangers, we should not shy away from preaching the legitimate types of Scripture. To do so well, we need to avoid both the excessive narrowing and enlarging of the definition of a type. In all types there must be:

(i) *Some real and notable point of resemblance between a type and its anti-type.* There should be a genuine pattern or image, not one that is forced.

(ii) *The type must be designed by God as the pattern or image of the anti-type:* Coincidental similarities don't amount to a type. There must be biblical evidence that the entity was ordained by God to serve as a type.

(iii) *A type always prefigures something future:* Types are a form of predictive prophecy. Although they differ from symbols, there is an overlap between types and symbols in that Old Testament types symbolized to contemporaries something future.

**E. Some examples:** Often types take us back to the Pentateuch and find their greatest exposition in the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews makes much, for example, of the typology of Melchizedek (chs. 5-7; cf. Gen. 14), as also the later sacrificial system. He seeks not to glory in the past but to show how the type was fulfilled in the anti-type. He depicts thereby the nature of God, the sin of covenant-breaking, the grace of God in the gospel of Christ, and warns of punishment for ongoing rebellion. Additionally, New Testament writers draw from types found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Psalms and a few of the minor prophets. Furthermore, Jesus himself preached types (e.g., (Matt. 12:39-40). Generally speaking, the New Testament authors indicate what the Old Testament writers could not see, for the coming of Christ illumines the actions of God in Israel. After all, Christ is the end (*telos*) of the story of God's work on earth for the redemption of his people.

**F. Some rules:** Berkhof lists five rules worth bearing in mind<sup>26</sup>—

(i) *Evil cannot serve as a type of what is good or pure.*

(ii) *Old Testament types, while differing from symbols, could nevertheless be symbolic:* The interpreter must first understand what the entity meant for Old Testament contemporaries, and then consider how the symbolism of the type was realized in the New Testament.

(iii) *Old Testament types are understood from the New Testament:* In the Old Testament the types convey truth in a veiled form, but the New Testament dispels the shadows and causes the truth to stand out.

(iv) *Types have one radical meaning:* The interpreter is to discover the meaning of the type but is not at liberty to force meaning into its every detail.

(v) *We must respect the essential difference between the type and antitype:* The type represents truth on a lower stage, the antitype on a higher stage. Passing from one to the other we ascend from the earthly to the spiritual, from the external to the internal, from the present to the future.

**3. THE PREACHING OF ALLEGORY:** The extremes of the allegorical schools in church history should not blind us to the necessity of preaching verifiable allegories. Biblically speaking, we may define allegory as a story with a hidden truth. In other words, truth is conveyed in the form of tales (differing from the historical stories in Scripture) which either did not occur or did not occur in the form in which it was stated. Going by this understanding, there is very little allegory in Scripture. Examples include Judges 9:7-15 and 2 Kings 14:9. We may include brief sayings. E.g., in Psalm 91:5 we read, "*You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness.*" Psalm 121:6, "*The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.*" Nevertheless, it is good to consider allegory, specifically two main issues:

**A. The perception of allegory:** The dangers of allegorical usage are not inherent to allegory but are found in the way allegory has been historically abused. Specifically, we must guard against:

(i) *Agenda-driven uses of allegory:* For example, the Genesis account is claimed by theological liberals or the neo-orthodox to be allegorical, yet the geographical references in 2:10-14 clearly suggest that Genesis is a historical narrative. Liberals and Neo-orthodox operate, however, with a looser definition of allegory. Ronald Wallace, for example, defines allegory as "*saying something with the intention at the same time of conveying meaning other than its literal one*"<sup>27</sup> On this basis, Wallace claims that Jesus' miracles are a form of allegory. For instance, his walking on the water teaches us the need for the bold and zealous like Peter to keep their eyes on

<sup>26</sup> Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 145–47.

<sup>27</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible: With Reflections on Experience* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press and Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 101.

Jesus. That sounds reasonable until we recall that allegory does not require the story in which it is found to be true. Indeed, Wallace writes, “so many texts in the Bible are open not only to typological comparison but also to allegorical interpretation.”<sup>28</sup> Specifically, he mentions the Old Testament and the Gospel of John. Classic Protestants, however, accept the supernatural in biblical history and therefore see dangers in describing the historical as allegorical.

(ii) *A mistaken use of allegory:* Others claim that the Song of Songs is allegorical, yet it is more likely a human love-song likely based on Abishag the Shunammite (1 Kgs. 1-2; cf. Song of Solomon 6:13). The book is better regarded, then, as typological rather than as allegorical. Indeed, it is the confusion of typology with allegory that explains in part the excesses of allegorisation.

(iii) *An excessive use of allegory:* When allegory becomes the main method of interpretation, the expositor rather than the Scripture becomes the authoritative interpreter. The use of allegory panders to the whims of the interpreter. Oftentimes, the interpretation becomes reckless.

(iv) *A self-serving use of allegory:* Allegorisation can pander to the pleasure of the hearer rather than the pleasure of God. Augustine, it is said, freely admitted that one of the reasons he persisted in preaching allegorically was that it was of more interest to his hearers than was the preaching of doctrine. Whereas Augustine believed preachers should be ready to “teach, delight, and move” their hearers, Luther thought that preachers should stand ready to offend.<sup>29</sup>

**B. The proclamation of allegory:** Preachers are called to steep themselves in the humble but scholarly study of the entire Bible. When we do so, submitting ourselves to Scripture, we are both sensitive to its intent and intent not to read into it what is not there. Accordingly, preachers have:

(i) *A duty:* Our duty is, typically, to find meaning in the normal, grammatical-historical way. We deal with allegory when it genuinely arises in the text but otherwise, we are to avoid the excessive allegorizing.

(ii) *A liberty:* As with symbols, we may create informal allegories as provoked by the passage at hand, such as for sermon illustrations or

application, but uninspired allegories must be consistent with the passage in view. Such allegories, William Tyndale remarked in one place, may be used to open a text or to declare it: “There is not a better, more vehement, or mightier thing to make a man understand than an allegory.”<sup>30</sup> Nowadays, we would call such allegories a type of sermon illustration.

**4. THE PREACHING OF PARABLES:** These are far more common in Scripture, especially in the New Testament. The etymology of the word “parable” means “a placing alongside of”. Thus, parables are a form of comparison or an illustration. Since they are drawn from everyday life and are neither trivial nor fantastic they differ from fables. Since they convey one main point they differ from allegory. They have been described as extended metaphors, similes, or proverbs. Parables come in the form of simple utterances, although some parables are extended parables.

**A. The sources of the parables:** In the Bible, parables are traceable back to the Old Testament, especially to Proverbs. Parables were used by Rabbis (*parabole* coming from *Mashal* which were often used in the Talmud or Midrash). They are later found in the Gospels. Scholars differ as to the number of parables due to their varying definitions. Oftentimes they have introductions, other times not (as in the case of Lazarus [16:19-31]). Works on the Parables of Jesus usually include about thirty of them. Luke has the most and John the least. They are important since they figure prominently in the inspired records of Jesus’ ministry. As regards their content, they tell us of the progress of the gospel in the world, the results of its propagation, the end of the age, the dealings of God with Jews and Gentiles, and the nature of the kingdom of God.

**B. The purpose of the parables:** Jesus tells us their purpose in Matt. 13:11-17, Mark 4:10-12, and Luke 8:8-10. His parables serve to—

(i) *Expose the enemies of the gospel:* They often were, it is said, “A hand grenade lobbed in enemy territory.”

(ii) *Hide truth from unresponsive disciples:* The parables alerted Jesus’ hearers that those remaining hardened would become harder. Cf. Is. 6:11-13 and the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:14-15).

<sup>28</sup> Wallace, *On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible*, 102.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Wallace, *On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible*, 105.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Wallace, *On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible*, 107.

(iii) *To teach responsive disciples:* Note how Jesus ends his first parable, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Lk. 8:8). Some were intended to offset discouragement in the face of the slow growth of the gospel. Others were designed to encourage Jesus’ disciples with the thought that the success of the gospel was ensured.

**C. The study of the parables:** When encountering them, we consider—

(i) *The earthly thing, event, custom, or occurrence:* Parables take up marriage, kings, feasts, relationships, business arrangements, or customs. To interpret them, we need to know something about life among the Jewish people. The parables would be familiar to those of a poor, agricultural background (harvesting, weddings, wine). They were spoken in Aramaic. Especially helpful in this regard is Jeremias’ *The Parables of Jesus*. To preach them effectively we must retrieve as much as we can of the local culture.

(ii) *The analogical relationship between the earthly element and the spiritual element:* The analogy is what gives the parable its illustrative or argumentative force. The analogy is found in the interplay between the main actors, elements, or actions. While finding meaning in every detail is to cross over into contrived allegorizing, the parables are to be understood to be about Christ and the kingdom of God.

(iii) *The spiritual lesson or theological truth conveyed:* The parables are more than the *mashal* teaching of the Rabbis, and are more than apt teachings of moral or spiritual truths. In the Gospels, Christ teaches about himself, the king, and his kingdom. Namely, that his kingdom has come. It is actualized in him and continues throughout this age. The parables are thus prophesies of the kingdom. They are eschatological pointers to the end of the age. Eg., the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14ff.), and the virgins (25:1ff.). In interpreting the parables we bear in mind that the kingdom has come, is continuing, and will come.

**D. The expounding of the parables:** To move from the study of the parables to their exposition, we must—

(i) *Understand the golden rule, that parables have a single point of comparison.* The rest of their details feed into that one main truth. Parables thus differ from allegories (in which most of their elements have meaning).

Writes Ramm, “a parable is a truth carried in a vehicle”.<sup>31</sup> The vehicle has necessary accessories but they are not part of the meaning.

(ii) *Determine how much of the parable is interpreted by the Lord Himself.* Most famously, the Lord interprets the parable of the sower. Cf. Matt. 25:13.

(iii) *Determine whether there are clues in the context to help ascertain the meaning:* Context includes both what precedes and succeeds the parable. Examples of contexts include Lk. 15:1-2; 14:25ff, and v. 33; Lk. 16:14; 18:9.

(iv) *Use the comparative rule:* Are there associations in the Old Testament that shed light on the parable? Figures such as vineyards, Fig Trees, harvests, and feasts have Old Testament references. Are there associations in other Synoptic versions that cast light on the parable at hand?

(v) *Make the doctrinal applications:* While we ought not to read our doctrinal debates back into the parables, we can and should be able to draw out of their main point certain doctrinal implications. In this, we should be impartial and led by the parable and not by the demands of our system of theology. Our system bends to Scripture, not the Scripture to our system. Note that:

(a) Rabbinic interpretations can help, especially relating to controversial matters.

(b) Convictions relating to the kingdom must be built on a broader basis than two or three parables.

(c) Expositions, regardless of our view of the last things, must contain a balance of the optimistic and pessimistic found across the parables. Support for millennial views must have a broader basis than the parables.

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³¹ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 283.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Think of other symbols in Scripture beside salt and the lion. Are any of your examples double images?
2. List ways in Hebrews 10:1-18 how the reality of Christ exceeded the shadow of the law.
3. What practical or pastoral lessons do you learn for ministry today from Jesus' injection of parables into his teaching?



INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS
PART THREE. GETTING INTO THE WORK
Session 1. Preaching Doctrine and Devotion
Instructor: Dr. Tim J. R. Trumper

INTRODUCTION: In Session 1 we considered the importance and history of Hermeneutics, then in Session 2 the use of Hermeneutics in preaching different genres, and now in this third and final session we consider the connection between Hermeneutics and some aspect of life and ministry. We begin with the preaching of doctrine and devotion:

1. PREACHING DOCTRINE: This is unpopular today. The emphasis of much preaching today is very much on what we call the anecdotal. While connected to soundbites taken from Scripture, much of the preaching amounts to story-telling. Accordingly, it largely evades exegesis and exposition to get as quickly as possible to the application (which is largely self-help). Such preaching thus bypasses the mind to get to the emotions and the will. Anecdotal preaching is successful at gaining crowds for it requires little thought or study of the Scriptures, is quiet about the sovereignty of God and Lordship of Christ, plays down sin and Satan, and promotes me-centredness; yet anecdotal preaching is weak in procuring genuine conversions and solid disciples of Christ.

Thus, we need faithful preachers who aim first at the mind, who are serious students of God's Word, who preach for the glory of God, and about the depravity of man, the essentials of the gospel, and the opposition of Satan, along the way faithfully applying the Word through the mind to the heart. Such authentic preaching understands that repentance is fundamentally a change of mind and that penitents are to be transformed in their minds (Rom. 12:2) as well as in their hearts. Indeed, the mind is the fundamental battleground where the Christian life is won or lost.

Against this backdrop, appreciate the importance of Doctrinal Hermeneutics. They refer to the theological interpretation of Scripture. We may highlight several matters:

A. The plausibility of Doctrinal Hermeneutics: The theological interpretation of the Bible finds its premier example in the ministry of Jesus.

His great aim was to teach (Matt. 7:28; Jn 7:16-17). Teaching, also, is at the heart of his Great Commission he left his apostles (Matt. 28:18-20). Paul later wrote of obeying doctrine from the heart (Rom. 6:17). He warned the church that doctrine should be sound and not false (Eph. 4:14). Paul told Timothy that the first fruit of Scripture is doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Doctrine gives the Christian faith its substance and form.

All forms of orthodoxy—Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant—accept that divine revelation forms the basis of a valid theology. This is denied by liberalism and qualified as an internal encounter by the neo-orthodox. Yet, we believe Doctrinal Hermeneutics to be plausible because Scripture reveals the coherent, and objective knowledge of God. This knowledge is intellectual, yet there is more to it than dry intellectualism or an intellectual assent to a dogma or creed. The knowledge is spiritual or experiential as well as intellectual. As with saving faith this knowledge of God calls for conviction (*assensus*) and trust (*fiducia*) as well as knowledge (*notitia*). Knowledge of God, then, is more than an intellectual assent to a dogma or creed.

B. The practice of Doctrinal Hermeneutics: The theological interpretation of Scripture serves two purposes—

(i) *To take us beyond the discovery of the historical and grammatical meaning of a text to its theological significance.*

(ii) *To set the theology of the text within the context of the witness of the entire Bible to the doctrine.*

It goes without saying that the preacher preaches the extent of the doctrine found in the text rather than in the Bible, and yet he cannot preach the doctrine of the text sensitively without awareness of the entirety of the doctrine revealed in Scripture.

C. The place for Doctrinal Hermeneutics: Doctrinal Hermeneutics is very much guided by General Hermeneutics, and commences where the exegetical interpretation of Scripture leaves off. The resultant preaching of doctrine rests on *eleven main principles* for its efficacy:

(i) *Preachers should be regenerate men standing on divine revelation:* Note the two elements of this.

(a) The preacher is regenerated. He has a new nature capable of what the great Scottish churchman Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) called in a sermon title "*The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.*" The Spirit who has

brought the preacher to life is the one who grants him the desire to understand Scripture and the illumination as to the meaning of Scripture.

(b) The preacher, as a regenerate man, relies on divinely inscripturated revelation. Filled with the Spirit, the preacher is taken up with the great themes which the Spirit desires to bring forth from the Word. He regards the Bible, then, not as a text of archaeology, science, or politics, but as a God-given source declaring his glory and gospel. While the preacher may deal with an array of details in the Scriptures, he majors on the main doctrines and is passionate about them. He thus seeks to deal with biblical matters in biblical proportion.

(ii) *Preachers must preach doctrine by means of the literal interpretation of Scripture:* In other words, the preacher looks for the plain meaning of Scripture unless the Scripture itself points to a non-literal interpretation (as in elements of poetry, parables, and allegory). Ministry is governed, then, by the literal (grammatical-historical) interpretation.

(iii) *Preachers must rest the main burden of their theology and preaching and teaching on the New Testament:* While in the Reformed tradition, we stress that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), and that we are to preach the whole revealed counsel of God (Acts 20:27), we differ from Lutherans who so stress the theology of the cross as to diminish the importance of the rest of the Scriptures. Yet, we need to be cautious that in doing due diligence to the Old Testament we do not undermine the New Testament as the capstone of God’s revelation. In disclosing the humiliation and exaltation of Christ the New Testament forms the full, final, and clear revelation of God. Accordingly, the Old Testament revolves around the New Testament and not the New Testament around the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we have the finalized indicatives of the Christian faith (incarnation, atonement, resurrection, Pentecost, Ascension), arising from which are the finalized imperatives of the faith (repentance, faith, worship, holiness, service, fellowship).

(iv) *Preachers must place exegesis prior to their preferred system of theology:* Our system of theology arises from our exegesis of Scripture. We are not to impose our system on the exegesis of Scripture. Our theology arises from

revelation and not from extra-biblical philosophy. As Ramm observes, our “theology is no better than the exegesis that underlies it.”³² So, it is from Scripture that we get our system of theology, not from our system that we get our exegesis. In preaching, then, the system remains in the back of our minds, all the while the text is to the fore. The system is not the sermon, but it helps us to know in preaching where the doctrine in view is located within the scope of theology.

(v) *Preachers must not extend our doctrine beyond biblical evidence:* Certainly, the preacher has both the liberty and the duty to investigate biblical truth. He is to do so up to the borders of divine revelation, without venturing further entering into speculation. He must be governed by the evidence of Scripture, no less and no more. He may be fascinated by the mysteries of the Christian faith—the Trinity, the incarnation, the natures of the persons of the Lord Jesus, etc.—but he is not to try and eliminate the element of mystery. That should always be present. First, because of the enormity of God and his ways. As Augustine says in one place, “If you can understand it, it is not God.” Second, because of the smallness of man. God has said, that “the secret things belong unto the Lord our God” even though the things he has revealed belong unto us and our children (Deut. 29:29). Third, because of the nature of the Christian faith. We adhere to the Christian *faith* not to the Christian *sight*. Said Thomas Watson, “Where reason cannot wade there faith must swim.” Our joy, says Watson repeatedly, is to “Adore where we cannot fathom.”³³ We limit ourselves, then, to what is explicitly stated, reasonably implied, or comparatively deduced from other supporting texts.

(vi) *Preachers strive for a theological system:* Although it is exegesis and not the system of theology which shapes the sermon (sermons are to be doctrinal not doctrinaire), a preaching ministry should aim to demonstrate over the course of time the system of theology contained in Holy Scripture. The system is implicitly taught from the pulpit in worship but may be taught explicitly in other outlets of church life. In short, the system’s collection of biblical and historical facts better suits the educational programmes of the church than the worship services.³⁴ In the sermon, which is the high point of worship in which we hear from God through his Word, doctrine comes

³² Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 169.

³³ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, reprint ed., 1890 (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 54, 112.

³⁴ For more on the specific drawbacks of catechetical preaching, see my article, “Catechetical Preaching: A Reform Too Far” (<https://fromhisfullness.com/articles>, accessed September 25, 2024).

through Scripture not Scripture through doctrine. It is the inspired Word of God which has unrivalled authority, not the humanly constructed system of theology. What, though, makes up a system of theology?

(a) A systematic formulation of individual doctrines. The formulation is based on data gathered responsibly from across the Scriptures and is arranged into doctrinal *loci*: doctrines of God, man, Covenant, Christ, Salvation, Holy Spirit, Church, Last Things, etc.

(b) Together, these loci form the system of theology. The way we understand one doctrine will impact how we understand another. Our doctrine of man will determine how we understand the doctrine of salvation, for Christian theology is one grand edifice of inter-related doctrines.

Today, traditional systematic theology is undergoing some reform, with the injection of a greater consideration of the history of salvation/progression of revelation, and the authorial diversity of the various authors of New Testament (especially). Nevertheless, the systematic teaching of Scripture remains the final intention of Theological or Doctrinal Hermeneutics and of doctrinal preachers.

(vii) *Preachers must use proof texts properly*: Liberals and the neo-orthodox castigate the orthodox citation of Scripture, since it supports neither defection from biblical Protestantism. Liberals and Neo-orthodox will quote Scripture, or texts selectively or in isolation, but extra-biblical authorities profusely. Nevertheless, the conservative practice of quoting texts must be carefully adopted, for otherwise the proofs can be unclear (as is the case with some of those belatedly added to the Westminster Confession of Faith), contradictory of their actual meaning, and misleading. States Ramm, “*the use of proof-texts is only as good as the exegesis undergirding their citation.*”³⁵ We must, then, be able expositors to become theologians (as was the trajectory of John Calvin, for instance). When citing texts we must bear in mind their context, authorship and place in Scripture.

(viii) *Preachers must recall that what is not a matter of revelation cannot be a matter of creed or faith*: Only what is demonstrably biblical can be binding on the conscience. As Protestants we differ from Roman Catholicism which places tradition (*ex cathedra* statements of the Pope, and ecumenical

councils) *en par* with Scripture, We differ from sects and cults, too, which add to Scripture the voice or writings of a leader claiming revelational status. We also object to extra-biblical speculations being placed *en par* with Scripture. These are not matters of the faith. The theologically orthodox must stand out, then, by carefully understanding and applying the Scripture, aware of the danger of giving equal weight to opinions that may be narrower or broader than biblical teaching.

(ix) *Preachers and teachers must bear in mind the practical*: The Bible is not a sum of all human knowledge. It is a rescue manual. All knowledge in the Bible is subservient to the aim of receiving salvation, knowing God, living a holy life, and entering into God’s presence. We focus not on the unanswered questions but on the matters the Bible is concerned to answer.

(x) *Preachers in interpreting theologically must recognize their responsibility to the church*. Neither preaching nor theologizing is to be undertaken in isolation from the church. We proclaim God’s Word conscious of our duty to get to our hearers the truth of God, the warnings of remaining under condemnation, and the offer of a full and free (not cheap) salvation. Woe to us, if we shake our hearers’ confidence in the Word of God. We preachers should bring forth God’s Word in the light of James 3:1: “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*”

(xi) *Preachers should construct no doctrine solely on an uncertain textual reading*. While variant readings undermine no biblical doctrine, in constructing our doctrines from Scripture we major on those texts without variant readings. For example, to rest the case of the continuance of sign miracles for today on Mark 16:17-18 would be unconvincing (note, in this regard, the consistency of B. B. Warfield in his treatment of Mark 16 in his study *Counterfeit Miracles*).

2. PREACHING DEVOTION: While preachers aim first at the mind, we don’t stop there. The Word we preach to the mind, has in view the impacting of the heart. The preached Word is not a well-aimed lecture, but, to quote Ecclesiastes 12:11, it is “*like nails firmly fixed*”. We drive home the Word in the power of the Spirit (not the flesh), so that it sinks down from the head to the heart. God thus uses his Word not only for the conversion of his people

³⁵ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 178.

but to teach, reprove, correct, and instruct them in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16,17). *Three elements of Scripture* are useful to the preacher—

A. The preacher uses the Bible's Principles: Ramm lists five of them³⁶—

(i) *Correct hermeneutical principles are essential to the proper interpretation of Scripture.* The desire to benefit devotionally from Scripture does not negate the necessity of proper interpretation. Rather, the devotional benefit arises from mature interpretation. It is important, then, as preachers that we fill our hearers' minds aright. Before touching their hearts or directing their wills, our preaching must impact the way our hearers think. That is why we offer them biblical interpretation that is theological or doctrinal before it is devotional or practical (although devotion must run through our theological considerations [cf., Paul's doxologies]).

(ii) *The Bible is more a book of principles than a catalogue of spiritual directions.* The principles must precede the spiritual direction. Historically, we factor in the difference between the Old Testament (a narration of the church under age) and the New Testament (a narration of the church come of age). Spiritually, we factor in grace before faith, and faith in Christ before obedience. Thus, the spiritual and moral principles of Christian living are not so much a list of rules of conduct as a response to God's grace in history and in our hearts.

Thus, without a solid hermeneutical foundation, the directives of Scripture are:

(a) Neglected. The directives are written off as culture-bound. A reliable hermeneutics helps us to understand the directives in their historical context and to draw spiritual guidance from them in a legitimate way. Underlying the alien cultural elements are abiding spiritual and moral principles. There is a universal relevance to God, grace, and sin, even though the contexts in which the directives are discussed are foreign to us.

(b) Distorted. Without the right use of hermeneutics the spiritual directives more likely become but a legal code of rules fostering an artificial spirituality or hypocrisy. The directives need to be rooted in the accomplishment and application of the gospel of Christ if our hearers are to be spared legalism or at least the legalistic spirit. The directives either

call a person to be united to Christ in his death and resurrection through repentance and faith, or they are for those already so united.

(iii) *The Bible emphasizes the inner spirit rather than the outer religiosity.* When the church was under age there was an emphasis on rules so as to instill in God's people the knowledge of God's character. Yet, when the church came of age, the emphasis shifted to the inner transformation of man. It is not that the moral law has now been abolished, but that the commands of God, under the Spirit of God, become automatic and delightful (1 Jn 5:3). According to the biblical logic, if we take care of the inner person our outer obedience takes care of itself. Writes Ramm, "*If man is born a legalist in soteriology, he is born an asceticist in sanctification*"³⁷ but if he is born of grace in soteriology, he will be born of love in sanctification. Spirituality has to do with correct attitudes, grace, and fruit, but rules solely with external behaviour.

(iv) *In some spiritual directives we follow the spirit of the statement rather than the letter.* We must note the manner of the statement in view. The directive to cut off our hands and to pluck out our eyes is not to be taken literally (Matt. 5:29, 30). What is to be taken as literal is the directive to resist radically all occasions for sin. Our Lord's direction to forgive 70x7 (Matt. 18:21ff.) is not an exercise in counting but a call to possess the spirit of forgiveness. And so forth.

(v) *Commands issued in one culture are to be translated into the readers' culture.* This must already be evident, but we need to be aware in our day of the abuse of this cross-culturalization. We must distinguish between what is rooted in the created order (e.g., the equal but distinct roles of men and women [1 Cor. 11:2-16]) from what was just rooted in local culture (e.g., the holy kiss [Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; cf., 1 Pet. 5:14]).

B. The Bible's examples: Although the Bible is first and foremost made up of history and principles, it also contains many examples of both events and people which help to guide the Lord's people. Reflecting on the history of Israel, Paul wrote: "*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written down for our instruction*" (1 Cor. 10:11). Understand, then, the main principles of handling biblical examples:

³⁶ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 185–90.

³⁷ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 188.

(i) *We distinguish between what the Bible records and what it approves:* Just because the Bible records something does not mean that the example narrated is a good one. The fact of inspiration does not mean that all that is in the Bible is God's will. Writes Ramm, "*The Bible no more morally approves of all that it records than an editor approves of all that he prints in his newspaper*".³⁸ Evil acts are recorded (e.g., lying, adultery, cruelty, deceit) as also erroneous notions (voices of the devil; Judas; demons; enemies of the prophets, Christ, and the apostles). Inspiration only extends to the fidelity of the recording.

(ii) *We draw direct application from all incidents the Bible either censures or approves:* Consider the rebellion of Saul, the immorality of David, the denials of Peter, the treachery of Judas, the lying of Ananias and Sapphira. Positively, from the hall of faith (Heb. 11), the love of John the apostle, etc.

(iii) *We distinguish between the direct commands given to individuals and what is God's will for us:* For example, the command to Abraham to offer up his son has no bearing on us and our children. The directive to Jeremiah not to take a wife (Jer. 16:1-2) has no bearing on our life choices. We should not, then, apply uncritically specific directives given to particular people. Rather, we must factor in the biblical context of such directives.

(iv) *We must determine from the lives in Scripture what is the outstanding Scriptural principle:* Notice how repeatedly in the narration of the Kings of Judah and Israel (in Kings and Chronicles), the writer refers to the kings as serving but not as their father David, despite all his sins. Likewise, the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 11 picks out the element of faith from lives which were otherwise quite messy (e.g., Abraham, Samson, etc.). Likewise, we look for the outstanding principle in the lives of God's people, committing the rest to the shed blood of the covenant.

(v) *In the application of examples to our lives, we do not need a literal reproduction of the Biblical situation:* Baptism need not be done in the river Jordan, nor do we need to go to an upper room in Jerusalem to have the Lord's Supper. The principles are abiding, the surrounding circumstances are passing.

C. The Bible's promises: Not every biblical promise is universal (i.e., for us). We appropriate biblical promises with care. Failure to do so may lead to hard thoughts of God and severe disappointment. Thus, we probe whether:

(i) *The promise in view is universal in scope:* These are generally salvation promises. "*Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Acts 2:21). Other promises are restricted to the saved (e.g., Deut. 31:6, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" [Heb. 13:5]).

(ii) *The promise is personal:* Promises made to specific individuals may be hoped for but not demanded of God. For example, in outreach we may hope that many of the elect are in a given context and will come to faith, but we cannot claim in any specific context the assurance given to Paul that God has many people he is going to save (Acts 18:9-10).

(iii) *The promise is conditional:* Some promises require a response in order for it to be fulfilled. E.g., James 4:8: "*Draw nigh unto God and he will draw nigh unto you.*" The promise of God's felt presence is conditional on us seeking God.

(iv) *The promise is for our time:* Some promises were just for the Old Covenant and have been fulfilled. Some look forward to the end of the age. Some promises, such as those in Revelation 2 and 3, were just for the churches addressed.

In short, we don't appropriate biblical promises randomly, putting our finger in the Bible and hoping for the best. This practice of young Christians contradicts sound, tried and tested principles of exegesis and hermeneutics. The practice is superstitious and misleads, but most know that instinctively. The will of God is determined from the Bible only in terms of what it says in its grammatical sense or from what can be gleaned from its general principles. Writes Ramm, "*If God speaks to us in a given situation, it must be in terms of the sound exegesis of the passage.*"³⁹

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<sup>38</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 190.

<sup>39</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 195.

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Why do you think there is a lack of doctrinal preaching today and what results do you see from the preference for anecdotal (story-telling) “preaching”?
2. Our sermons are to be doctrinal but not doctrinaire. How would you describe the difference, and how can we avoid sliding from the doctrinal into the doctrinaire?
3. What are some of the characteristics of preaching that is “like nails firmly fixed” (Eccles. 12:11)? How can we preach like this without abusing the idea?



**INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS**  
**PART THREE: GETTING INTO THE WORK**  
**Session 2. Preaching Ethics and for the**  
**Defence of the Faith**  
**Instructor: Dr. Tim J. R. Trumper**

**INTRODUCTION:** Having considered the role of hermeneutics in preaching doctrine (the mind) and devotion (the heart), we close our Introduction to Hermeneutics by considering its role in the preaching of ethics and the defense of the faith.

**1. PREACHING ETHICS:** Ethics has to do with moral principles, and thus we speak here of the Bible's function in guiding life. This function indicates that the Bible is sufficient for the Christian life ("*God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness*" [2 Pet. 1:3]), and also that it is relevant. While the world derides the ethics of the Bible, the ethics of the Holy Scriptures always prove to be wise and for our good. To state the matter simply, it is always best to follow the Maker's manual.

**A. The background of Ethics:** Ethics are rooted in the teaching of Scripture and not in the current beliefs or fads of the day nor in the theological distortions of legalism or antinomianism (license). Specifically, ethics are rooted in:

(i) *The character of God:* In expounding Scripture, we become very conscious of the transcendent righteousness, holiness, and truthfulness of God. God is righteous in that he has personified eternally the law of God he has since revealed. He is ever and only upright, and thus he wills that we should be upright (law-keepers), too.

Yet, God is also holy. He is morally pure, without the sin that so mars our purity. This holiness becomes the basis from which we are called to be holy: "*You shall be holy, for I the Lord Your God am holy*" (Lev. 19:2, *passim*). Said Jesus, "*You shall be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" To this end, God has told us the truth about himself, ourselves, and the way to be holy.

We rightly interpret Scripture, then, when we realize that ethics are not about self-help, although keeping God's law is the safe and wise thing to do.

Nor are ethics about self-realization, although we only truly realize our true identity when living in harmony with God. Furthermore, ethics are not about self-gratification, although the more we please God the more we sense his delight.

(ii) *The depravity of man:* An ethical life doesn't come to us naturally. We have neither the desire nor the ability to be ethical, and what ethics we display by nature fall short of true ethics which are lived for the glory of God and in the name of Jesus Christ. An accurate interpretation of biblical ethics must, then, be consistent with the gospel of God's grace. Ethics cannot, then, be about "doing your best". Rather, it recognizes that "*There is none that does good, no, not even one*" (Rom. 3:10, 12), and that the mind of man "*is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be*" (Rom. 8:7). Only the grace of God can grant us the desire and ability in Christ to fulfill God's moral principles.

(iii) *Union with Christ:* Whereas Christ died and rose *for us*, the Spirit works faith *in us* to unite us to Christ in the virtue of his death and resurrection. Union with Christ in his death explains our radical breach from sin, and in his resurrection our power and ability to pursue righteousness and holiness (Rom. 6:1-14). As Christians, we have died to self and are alive unto God. We have, accordingly, but one nature—a new one enabling us to live in freedom from sin's dominion.

(iv) *The commands of God:* Our freedom in Christ is not a freedom *to* sin but a freedom *from* sin. Our freedom in Christ is thus not a lawlessness or personal anarchy but a structured freedom. It is regulated by the law of God. Whereas the ceremonial law is fulfilled in Christ, the judicial law of the nation of Israel is no longer relevant. Yet, there is still a role for the moral law and those spiritual directives in Scripture arising from or consistent with it. The chief command given to God's people is to love the Lord our God with all of our beings and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-38). Other commands arise from this "great" and next greatest command.

**B. The battleground of Ethics:** Some oppose the role of the law in Christian ethics. Three supporting claims are typical:

*Claim one: We are not under law but under grace:* The Protestant reformers taught us in their fight against medieval legalism that we are free from the ceremonial law, from the law as a way of salvation, and from the condemnation of the law. Yet, they never said that the law was irrelevant to the Christian life. The moral law in its abiding relevance shows sinners their

daily need of Christ, it aids civic righteousness in society, and guides the Christian in living out the Christian life. We do not and dare not write off the moral law, declaring it a threat to our freedom in Christ. Rather, we may and must uphold it for the law grants us a structure whereby we may remain clear from sin. In keeping the moral law, we are nevertheless able to evade legalism by distinguishing the imputation of righteousness from its impartation:

*(a) The imputation of righteousness:* We emphasize to ourselves that the righteousness God requires of us is what God gives us in Christ. We keep our eyes, then, on Christ, for he procured in our flesh the righteousness we need to be able to live and die boldly before God. This righteousness is imputed or reckoned to our account through faith in Christ.

*(b) The impartation of righteousness:* Whereas Christ's righteousness is imputed to us through faith, those of faith enter into a life pursuant of righteousness by the power of the Spirit conforming us to Christ. Accordingly, The imputation refers to our justification, the impartation to our sanctification. In justification, the law condemns us, in sanctification it guides us to a life of uprightness. Yet, to grow in Christlikeness, we look not so much at the law as at Christ who kept the law out of delight to his Father. When we keep our eyes on Christ, we not only keep God's law (for that is what he did) but keep it for the same reason (out of delight for the Father). Accordingly, we can live legally without being legalistic (duty without love).

**Claim two: The Letter kills the Spirit gives life:** Whereas liberals claim Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:6 (*"the letter kills, but the spirit gives life"*) to loosen theological constraints, many evangelicals claim the same text to loosen the restraints of Christian duty (e.g., re co-habitation before marriage, grounds for divorce, neglect of the Lord's Day). They claim that we are guided in Christian living by the Spirit and not the law. Yet, to have the Spirit is to have the law of God written on our hearts. First, because God personifies the law, and second, because even the Holy Spirit needs a yardstick by which to guide God's people into all holiness.

**Claim three: New times call for new rules:** The liberal mindset, seen notably in Bultmannianism, adapts the Scriptures to the times, rather than the times to the abiding moral law of God. After all, God does not change nor does man. God has addressed in his moral law the abiding sinful tendencies of man—lust of the flesh, the pride of life, the deceitfulness of riches. What about the progressive moral revelation within the Scriptures (from Old to New Covenant). Note in this regard:

*(i) The shift in emphasis from the external rule under the infancy of the church to the inner state of the heart once the church has come of age.*

*(ii) The fading away of certain elements of life among God's people once the church no longer constituted a single nation (no more holy wars, judicial law, etc.).*

*(iii) The long-term approach to moral revolution.* Certain ethical advances could only be achieved over the long haul. Paul, for example, could not call for the immediate ending of slavery but nevertheless sought to undercut it by promoting gospel behaviour among masters and slaves (1 Cor. 7:21-33; Eph. 6:5-9). Writes David Clowney, *"The gospel works gradually, like leaven"*<sup>40</sup>. At the time they had to pursue transformation within existing structures.

The progress of moral revelation within Scripture does not warrant, however, the extension of moral adaptations beyond Scripture. There are several reasons for this:

*(i) Post-biblical moral extensions do not have the authority of Scripture.*

*(ii) Post-biblical moral extensions are often in contradiction with the moral law of God revealed in Scripture.* By contrast, the ethics of Jesus are based on the Old Covenant, and while they go beyond what Moses and the prophets taught, they do not break with the Old Covenant moral code.

*(iii) Post-biblical moral extensions tend to turn on its head the gospel.* Frequently, these extensions mean that gospel liberty is no longer freedom from sin. Indeed, the liberal progressivist ethics of our day insist that Christian liberty is an affirmation of liberty in sin.

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<sup>40</sup> David Clowney, "The Use of the Bible in Ethics", in Conn (Ed.). *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, 229.

**C. The blessing of Ethics:** Ethics is not just interested in moral law and ethical principle but in love. If we miss this, we capture the meaning of ethics but not the spirit of Scripture. Recall the great commandment (Jn 13:34)! God's Word needs to be applied not only as truth, but in grace. Our application of Scripture must reflect Christ who was full of both (Jn. 1:14). Notice how important this is to Christ. Recall, from the end of the first century, his appeal to the church in Ephesus. They got all their doctrine right but lost their first love (Rev. 2:1-7). Moreover, his appeal to the church in Laodicea which had become lukewarm and shut out Christ. Yet, he knocks on the door to reenter for fellowship with his people (Rev. 3:20). From this we learn that ethics are not ultimately about obedience but about communion with God. Ethics are about Christ being formed in us. We desire this and thus follow God's directives, knowing that unethical living grieves God's Spirit.

**2. PREACHING FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE FAITH:** Hermeneutics has in view not only the call to faith and to holiness within the church, but also her witness to society. To do so:

**A. We must model a high use of the Word:** Essentially preachers are ministers of the Word of God. God's Word is our only authority for preaching, and we use that authority to declare the truth of God. We are not priests, but declare the priesthood of Christ and of his people. We are not entertainers, although our sermons should captivate attention. We are not orators fundamentally, although we do orate. We are not counselors, although sermons should contain biblical wisdom. Fundamentally, it is in the proclamation of the written and living truth of God that we defend the faith.

By proclaiming the Word, we model the truth that:

(i) *We are servants of God bound to the Word of God:* We privately study God's Word so that we may publicly declare it. Paul directed Timothy "to devote [himself] to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Tim. 4:13 [ESV]). We read it as those "apt to teach" it (1 Tim. 3:2).

(ii) *We are servants of God bound to the rules of Hermeneutics:* This is perhaps the greatest weakness of preaching today—the haphazard use of the Scriptures; preaching based on superficial or shoddy hermeneutics; and preaching that takes liberty with the Scriptures. If we do not preach the

Word of God as God intended it to be understood, then we are not preaching at all, strictly speaking. Accordingly, we must resist the temptation to—

(a) Take words or phrases out of context (*eisegesis*): Be warned, it is possible to preach the words of Scripture without actually preaching the word of God.

(b) Choose texts without explaining them: When we select a text from which to preach we must neither ignore it nor distort it. To do so, is to treat Scripture no differently than Roman Catholics, Universalists, and Mormons, et al.

(c) Needlessly, spiritualize a text: Some Scripture is plain historical narrative, but when we read into it what is not there, we revert to patristic allegorisation. What present-day preaching needs is not *allegorizing* but what Ramm calls *principlizing* (drawing out the principles from the plain meaning of the text).<sup>41</sup>

**B. We must model a high confidence in the Word:** At the time of the Reformation, the Bible was burned along with those who translated it (e.g., William Tyndale, 1536). By the eighteenth-century Age of Reason, the Enlightenment *philosophes* (rationalists) opted to undercut the Word rather than to burn it. Ever since then, classic Protestants have been conscious of the need to defend the Bible as the Word of God and to sustain the confidence of their hearers in it. To this day, effective ministry requires us to stand on the Word of God and to preach it with confidence. As the theological and moral mayhem in church and society becomes more visible, we have further incentive to do so, for rejecting God's Word is not only rebellion against God it is evidently disastrous for the soul and society.

Essential to our confidence in the Bible as the Word of God is its inerrancy. As we turn to this matter, note—

(i) *What inerrancy does not mean:* It doesn't mean that—

(a) That the Bible is uniformly clear: Certainly, the message of salvation is clear (which is why we speak of the perspicuity of Scripture) but this does not oblige us to say that all of Scripture is clear. Peter notes that the prophets were puzzled by some things they wrote (1 Pet. 1:10ff.). He also said that Paul wrote some things hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16). The

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<sup>41</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 198–200.

Bible can be obscure on account of the ancient languages in which it was written, the cultures spoken of, and the distant geography, people, and events. Yet, archaeological findings continue to resolve elements of obscurity and to corroborate the veracity of Scripture, even in those matters in which, at first sight, appear to be wrong.

(b) That the Bible is exhaustive in any one place: It is the Bible in its totality which exhausts what God has revealed to us. Neither individual texts, passages, books, genres nor Testaments do that. Thus, we need not nor should we pit the Testaments against each other (*contra* Islam's perception of them), nor specific authors of Scripture. When we take Scripture as a whole we glean the total picture of what God has revealed to us, a coherent statement of the one God, the one Bible, the one gospel.

(ii) *What inerrancy does mean:* It means that the Bible is without contradictions. It was precisely because the Islamic apologist Ahmed Deedat lacked any sense of Biblical Hermeneutics (notably, the analogy of faith and the internal witness of the Spirit) that he could claim that the Bible has 50,000 errors. Yet, when we read the Bible we are struck by how few matters of discussion there are about apparent contradictions in Scripture. The burden of proof is on the one claiming that there is error in Scripture. Writes Ramm, "*A contradiction to be valid must be unequivocal, and as long as the proposed contradiction is alleged on ambiguous grounds no charge of errancy is valid.*"<sup>42</sup> Claims must consider—

(a) Whether the original text has been consulted: Some contradictions arise from variant readings. There are four kinds of textual variants. About 70% of all variants are differences of spelling and do not count as contradictions for they are minor copyist errors. Others make no meaningful change to the text (such as different name spellings). Other variants are so rare that they could not have belonged to the *autographa*. A very small group of variants (less than 1%) change the text, but no cardinal doctrine is impacted by them. Ramm remarks, "There is no question that the most faithfully transmitted manuscripts from antiquity are the Old and New Testaments".<sup>43</sup> All to say, that copyist errors cannot count as biblical contradictions. Nor can issues arising from the translations of the Bible into other languages.

(b) Whether we have misinterpreted two apparently contradictory passages: For example, different Gospel accounts look at the same events from different angles. Contradictions can be apparent but are found on closer inspection not to hold up.

(c) Two similar events may be separate events: Note, for example, the plausibility of two separate cleansings of the Temple (Jn 2, Matt. 21). It is feasible that the Sermon on the Mount was told repeatedly (Matt. 5-7 and Lk. 6).

(d) Fuller accounts explain shorter accounts: No account is to be considered contradictory that is a compressed version of a longer account. Acts 9 is the full account of Paul's conversion, but Acts 22 an abbreviated account.

(e) One narrator of an event may couch the dialogue in direct speech and another in indirect speech: This is common in the synoptic Gospels and is a standard and accepted methodology of prose.

(f) Inerrancy does not mean literalness of detail: The speeches in Acts, for instance, are not verbatim, the very words (*ipsissima verba*) of Peter or Paul, but are inspired summaries of what was spoken.

**C. We must model courage in the use of the Word:** The church faces a great challenge not so much from science but from the religion of scientism. How do we proclaim the Scriptures in an age wherein the scientific community has created so many alternative narratives?

(i) *We must be unashamed of the Bible's popularist language:* The Bible is not opposed to science, for it upholds the book of nature as a matter of wonder and investigation. Yet, we are not to read scientific terminology into Scripture in an endeavor to make it acceptable to this age of scientism. The Bible is a revelation adapted for all ages of the human race (pre-scientific and scientific) and therefore must not be deemed invalid simply because its passing remarks about science are in non-scientific language.

(ii) *We must be unashamed of the Bible's phenomenal language:* Phenomenal language describes what appears to the human eye. It is restricted to terms of description and observation. The language is true in what it describes. Had the peers of Christopher Columbus known and believed the Bible when

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<sup>42</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 205.

<sup>43</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 208.

it speaks of the “circle of the earth” (Is. 40:22), they would not have feared falling off a flat earth. Yet, the Bible does not theorize astronomically, botanically, zoologically, and geologically. That is not its focus. The language of Scripture is true but non-exhaustive.

(iii) *We must be unashamed of the Bible’s culturally-conditioned revelation:* The terms and expressions are those of the times of the writers. This cultural conditioning does not belie their infallible use according to their use by the original author, for divine revelation came through modes of expression relevant to the time and culture of the day. The infallible truth thus shines through those expressions.

(iv) *We must be unashamed to tackle apparent contradictions between Scripture and science:* Obviously, where the religion of scientism dominates—where there is hatred of God, his Word, and his people, and where theories and hypotheses are promoted as fact, and where biblical accounts are ruled out automatically—preachers of God’s Word must stand on the Word in direct contradiction and opposition to scientism. We do so, believing that there is no contradiction between the Bible and true science. After all, God who created his book of nature also inspired his book of salvation. There is and can be, then, no contradiction between the two, although there may be apparent contradictions. There are a couple of main reasons for this:

(a) Because scientists are fallible: Even their well-meant hypotheses and theories may not last the test of time. Before the Copernican revolution, scientists thought the sun revolved around the earth. When the scientific community developed a consensus that the earth revolves around the sun, there was a coming together of scientists and churchmen.

(b) Because theologians are fallible: Although Scripture is inerrant, theologians may err in expounding it. This may put them needlessly at variance from the scientific community. Specifically, theologians may claim Scripture to say more than it does. We believe the Genesis account of creation to be historical, yet it remains but an outline of the actual creation. Cosmogony textbooks run to hundreds of pages, but the creation accounts amount to just two chapters. We shouldn’t claim, then, biblical authority for that about which Scripture is silent. We stand solid on the biblical revelation *that* God created the heavens and the earth, and thus we are accountable to our Maker, but we ought to be careful in claiming *how* God created the universe. For myself, I believe Scripture is clearer on

the “how” than theologians have implied with their various interpretations (alternate theories to the 24-hour/6-day position include instantaneous creation, the day-age theory, big-bang theory, and the literary framework hypothesis), nevertheless I need to hold that position humbly where other faithful theologians beg to differ. Interestingly, when Paul ministered to the intelligentsia in Athens, he majored not on the “how” of creation but on the “that”. On the scale of what is most significant for reaching men and women today, the “how”, although an important matter in its own sphere, is not as important as the “that”. The denial of the “that” is a denial of Scripture, the denial of a “how” may be but the denial of a particular interpretation of Scripture. The Word of God is inerrant, but the word of the interpreter must be checked by the Word.

**CONCLUSION:** Here ends our introduction to Biblical or Sacred Hermeneutics. So much more could be said, and so much more has been said to apply the study of Hermeneutics to our present postmodern era. Evangelicals such as Anthony Thiselton (*New Horizons in Hermeneutics*), Kevin Vanhoozer (*Is there a Meaning in This Text?*), and others, have produced sizable texts addressing how, in an age in which truth is said to be but a social construct, we are to read, understand, and proclaim God’s Word. Still, over these eight lectures, we have done what we can to offer tried and tested guidelines about “*rightly handling the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). May God bless our endeavours to do that, granting us much fruit for our labours, and all for his glory, the strengthening of his church and the spread of the kingdom of heaven.

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QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Consider Romans 6:1-14. What do you glean about Christian Ethics?
2. What are the greatest challenges you have in modeling the use of the Word?
3. Encouragement means, literally, to be “in courage”. How can we encourage one another to be faithful and bold today in the ministry of the Word?
4. What are the greatest indications in your experience of the need of servants of God who rightly divide the Word of truth?

GLOSSARY⁴⁴

Allegorical (1:2)	Allegorical interpretation is shaped by the conviction that beneath the letter or the obvious is the real meaning of the text or passage.
Anagogical (1:2)	Medieval exegesis of the Bible reinterpreted many episodes of Hebrew scripture in terms of four levels of meaning: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical. The anagogical interpretation reveals a higher spiritual meaning behind the literal meaning and is therefore a specialized form of allegorical interpretation.
Analogy of faith (1:2)	<i>Analogia fidei</i> is a key principle of interpretation taught by the Protestant reformers which teaches that Scripture interprets Scripture (cf., Westminster Confession of Faith 1:9).
Antonyms (2:1)	A word opposite in meaning to another (e.g., good/bad).
<i>Apographa</i> (2:1)	The subsequent copies of the <i>autographa</i> .
<i>Autographa</i> (2:1)	The original writings/manuscripts of the biblical books.
<i>Eisegesis</i> (1:2)	The erroneous interpretation of a passage wherein ideas are read into rather than out of the passage. Cf., Exegesis.
<i>Epigenesis</i> (1:2)	A notion originating with Aristotle about the development of animals and applied to Christian theology by John Henry Newman, to refer to the growth, development, and change of ideas while yet remaining true to the original idea.
<i>Exegesis</i> (1:2)	A rightful approach to interpretation wherein the interpreter, from the Greek,

Formgeschichte (1:3)

Heilsgeschichte (1:3)

Hermeneutics (1:1)

Inspiration (1:1)

Ipsissima verba (3:2)

Letterism (1:2)

Literal interpretation (1:2)

“leads out” the truth of the passage in view. Cf., *Eisegesis*.

German term meaning “form history” (English transl., form criticism), referring to the analysis of oral materials (or written materials transmitted orally) to identify their literary form(s) and to reconstruct their original versions.

A German term meaning “the history of salvation”, which refers to the biblical-theological unfolding of the salvation of God’s people.

A label for the interpretation of Scripture which originated in the extra-biblical Greek noun *Hermeneutike* and verb *Hermeneuein* (to interpret). Hermeneutics is said to be general (the interpretation of language, literary composition, matters of common experience, and history) or special (the interpretation of specific types of literature such as law, history, prophecy, poetry, etc.). Biblical or Sacred Hermeneutics is a type of Special Hermeneutics.

The “supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of which their writings are given divine truthfulness, and constitute an infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice”.⁴⁵

A Latin phrase meaning “the very words”.

A hyper-literal form of Jewish literalism.

An acceptance of the literal rendering of the sentences unless the nature of the sentence or phrase or clause within the sentence renders impossible the literal interpretation

⁴⁴ The numbers in the brackets refer to the first mention of each term, to the Part and the session in which the term is found.

⁴⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 41.

	[such as is the case with the use of figures of speech, allegories, etc.].	Saga (2:2)	An oral story passed down the generations preserving the wanderings or adventures of God's people and, specifically, of the heroes among them. Saga includes responses such as songs of deliverance.
Manichaeans (1:2)	Followers of the third-century Persian Mani, who sought a universal religion via a syncretizing of Christianity with other local religions. Manichaeism died out in the fifth-century A.D.	<i>Sola fidei regula</i> (1:2)	A Latin reference to the Holy Scriptures meaning, literally, "the sole rule of faith."
Marcionism (2:2)	A second-century sect led by the Marcion of Sinope, primarily known for the belief that the Old Testament has no authority over Christians.	Synechdoche(s) (2:1)	References to the whole of a matter in terms of a part of it, or <i>vice versa</i> .
Metaphor(s) (2:1)	A strong but fleeting figure of speech describing the indescribable in a way not literally true, but which gets to the truth. A robust metaphor, is one used frequently and in a way capable of conveying substantive information.	Synonyms (1:1)	A word or phrase meaning exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language.
Metonymy/ies (2:1)	Figurative language used as an associate of a close idea (e.g., the use of "heart" for "love"; "the White House" for the "U.S. Presidency").	Thomism (1:2)	A philosophical school of thought following Thomas Aquinas, especially his <i>Summa Theologica</i> (second only to the Bible in the estimate of the Roman Catholic church), which sought to integrate Christian theology and the philosophy of Aristotle.
Pantheism (1:3)	A doctrine identifying God with the universe, thus making the universe a manifestation of God. All forms of reality are either modes of God or identical with God.	Tropes (1:1)	A word or expression used in a figure of speech.
Parallelism(s) (2:1)	A parallelism repeats grammatical elements in writing and speech, creating an harmonious flow and rhythm.	Tropological (1:2)	The moral sense of a passage.
Principlizing (3:2)	The devotional application of a passage.	Types (2:3)	"The representation of a permanent and a greater truth by a thing or an event, which also has a real existence and a significance of its own". ⁴⁶
<i>Providentissimus Deus</i> (1:2)	The name of the Leo XIII's 1893 Encyclical translated "The God of all Providence".		~~~~~
Rationalism (1:1)	The resting of opinions and actions on reason rather than on religious belief or emotion. Thus, Rationalism subjects the claims of Scripture to the verdict of the human mind.		

⁴⁶ Wright, *Interpreting the Bible*, 9.

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