

# **Arbor Foundations**

## 3 – The Bible II: Hermeneutics

### **Read-Ahead**

- Read a specific Bible passage and summarize what you think it means, how to apply it and why.

### **Key Ideas / Biblical Basis**

- Biblical hermeneutics is the art and science of interpreting the Bible which involves “exegesis,” – the actual practice of interpreting Scripture
- Everyone interprets the Bible in some fashion, and the Christian is called to understand, explain and apply the Scriptures as best as they are able (2 Tim. 2:15)
- There is a correct way to interpret the Bible – even the “hard” passages (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- Essentials: Key Points to Realize (Presuppositions to Embrace)
  - Nature & Purpose of the Bible
    - **All Scripture Points to Christ** – God’s Revelation of Himself – the Redemption of His People, and the Coming of His Kingdom (Luke 24:32)
  - The Authority, Inerrancy, Clarity, Necessity, and Sufficiency of Scripture
  - The Need for the God’s Help – the illumination of the Holy Spirit
    - Psalm 119:34; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10
  - God Promises to Help Us
    - John 16:13; Eph. 4:11-16; I John 2:20-27; 2 Tim. 2:7

### **Different Hermeneutical Approaches throughout Church History (Summary)**

- Early Church Fathers (200-400s) varied approaches: literal/historical, moral, allegorical, mystical.
- Augustine (354-430) championed a literal, historical approach to reading the Bible.
  - He insisted that a proper understanding must begin with the mind of the writer, which required knowing the biblical languages and paying attention to context.
- Middle Ages Church’s Four-Fold Hermeneutic (Not a good approach)
  - 1). *the literal*, showing what God did 2). *the allegorical*, showing what at surface level God hid 3). *the moral*, revealing what believers should do 4). *the mystical*, or *anagogical*, showing the heavenly life in which, for Christians, things will end.
- **Reformation: “Grammatical-Historical” Hermeneutic** (A Very Good approach)
  - Each bible passage had one basic meaning, which was firmly rooted in historical truth.
  - It is “historical,” relating real, interconnected historical events, that must be acknowledged and understood before the various teachings of the bible could make sense or have application.
  - It is “grammatical,” using language the way any normal person would.
  - *This hermeneutical approach is absolutely vital, for it tethers the truth of the scriptures to real, historical events, that have a real impact on our life; and it gives us a way to study the scriptures with confidence, according to well-established dictates of human language.*

### **Basic Principles for Proper Biblical Interpretation**

Three Questions to Approach Every Passage: What does it say? Mean? How do I apply it?

- **1). What does it say? (Observation)**
  - Grammar / English Words: Importance of good translation
  - **Literary Context:** author, audience, immediate context of passage, book context, other books by same author, books in same time period (Gospels), NT or OT, Storyline of the Bible
  - **Historical Context:** culture, customs, language, beliefs, history of author and original audience
  - **Genre of Scripture:** Genres are categories of literature that have distinctive characteristics and, as a result, require some particularized reading strategies.
    - Historical Narrative, Law, Prophetic Literature, Wisdom Literature, Apocalyptic Literature, Gospels and Acts, and Epistles
    - **Text Types:** Refer to the form of the passage, they appear in the different genres narrative (or stories), discourse (or speeches), poetry, parables, legal, letters

- **2). What does it mean? (Interpretation)**

- *The Harmony Principle* – Because God is the author of all Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16), it is all in harmony with itself and contains no real contradictions
    - Implication #1: Everything Scripture says about God must be accepted and held together
      - (Ezek. 33:11 & Deut. 28:63) Which is true? Does God delight in destroying Israel for their sins, or does He take no pleasure in it?
    - Implication #2: The correct interpretation of any given Scripture passage will not contradict the total teaching of Scripture at any point.
      - (Rom. 3:28 & James 2:24) Is there a contradiction between Paul and James on justification?
  - Applying the Harmony Principle
    - *Scripture should be interpreted by Scripture* (Matt. 11:14; John 1:22)
    - *Scripture should not be set against Scripture* (Romans 3:28; James 2:24)
    - *What appears to be secondary and obscure in the Scripture should be studied in the light of what appears primary and plain* (1 Corinthians 15:29)
  - *Read & Interpret a Passage in view of its genre & text type*
    - How you understand an OT Proverb will be different than applying an imperative in an Epistle.
    - How you read apocalyptic literature will be different than how you interpret Gospel parables.
- **3). How do I apply it? (Application)**
- From all that I have come to understand this passage meaning, what does it teach me about God and His Kingdom, and what does it teach me about me and how I should live?

**So What?**

*Why Does It Matter that we work towards using correct principles and methods for interpreting the Bible?*

- Misunderstanding, teaching and applying God’s Word in error can lead to:
  - God’s judgement, wrath, and/or discipline
  - Embracing of outright heresy, erroneous doctrines, worldly philosophies & spirituality
  - Confusion and lack of wisdom, apathy and ignorance
  - Inability to better know the fullness of Christ love and the filling of the Spirit
- Striving to search, know and apply the Scriptures properly will help you:
  - Know God better; know the love & forgiveness of Christ; experience the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
  - To *correctly* apply the Scriptures to your daily life.
  - Evangelize and disciple others, pointing them to Christ.
  - To Glorify God and enjoy Him *now* with the ever-longing hope of Christ return.

**Resources for Further Study**

Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Macmillan/Library of Liberty Arts (1997).

J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, Zondervan (2012) Online Course

<https://courses.zondervanacademic.com/biblical-interpretation>

Andreas Köstenberger, Online Course TGC Learn, “[An Invitation to Biblical Interpretation](#)”

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/invitation-biblical-interpretation>

Andreas Köstenberger, Video: “Is the Bible Full of Contradictions?” <https://youtu.be/DqknrDzX96Q>

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Zondervan (2017) Online Course: <https://courses.zondervanacademic.com/introduction-biblical-interpretation>

J.I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* Inter-Varsity Press (1958)

<http://www.bible-researcher.com/packer1.html>

John Piper, Brian Tabb, Online Course: “Principles of Biblical Interpretation”

<https://courses.biblemesh.com/principles-biblical-interpretation>

Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation*, Crossway (2016)

Monergism (Biblical Interpretation Resources):

<https://www.monergism.com/search?keywords=biblical+interpretation&format=All>