

# Hermeneutics (principles of biblical interpretation)

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[0:00] Now, tonight, my intention is to talk about hermeneutics. Hermeneutics. It's a bit of an unusual word, not a common word,!

It's ironic that the word is derived from a Greek mythical god, Hermes, who was the messenger and herald of the gods, small g, and the interpreter of Jupiter.

Of course, as Bible believers, we do not believe in such false gods, in such mythical gods that are not gods at all. But for some reason, this Hermes is where we get hermeneutics from, which is a biblical system of principles for studying the Bible.

It's kind of ironic that our careful and diligent study of interpreting God's holy word of truth is named after a false god of the Greeks.

But nevertheless, that's where it comes from. That's where we get the word. And so it's a system for studying the Bible, for interpreting the Bible. Now, people might have heard of the saying, God said it, I believe it, that settles it.

[1:42] Of course, we know God said it, whether we believe it or not is kind of irrelevant, because if God said it, that's it. That settles it.

But it's the saying goes, God said it, I believe it, which I do, we do, and that settles it. It's God's, it's assured. But here's how someone else has put it. Now, I'm not sure you can read this that well, but it says, God said it, I interpreted it.

That doesn't exactly settle it. So this is the problem with interpreting in a wrong way. God said it, I interpreted it as best as I could in the light of all the filters imposed by my upbringing and culture, which I try to control for, but can never do a perfect job.

Well, that doesn't exactly settle it, but it does give me enough of a platform to base my values and decisions on. Of course, that's a danger, isn't it?

It's pretty iffy. It's pretty risky. It's pretty kind of, you know, shaky kind of interpreting. It's interpreting that's based on my upbringing and culture and what I impose on what I read.

[2:54] My interpretation can be always suspect. We've got to be careful. And we want to engage in Bible study methods that are reliable ways of studying the Bible and in understanding the Bible.

Bible study methods that we can have some confidence in, that are principles we can wisely use to understand, to determine the meaning of the Word of God.

Because, of course, the Bible says about interpreting that we're not to use private interpretation. So we see here in 2 Peter 1 from verse 19.

Peter writes, he says, We have also a more sure word of prophecy.

Where unto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts.

[3:58] Peter's saying we have a more sure word of prophecy this word is sure, it's certain, it's reliable and we do well to take heed of it pay attention to it and he says knowing this first that no prophecy of the Bible of the scripture is of any private interpretation no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation so it's not about interpreting it in a flaky personal private way why? because for the scripture the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost this prophecy did not come by the will of man but holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost by the scriptures, to pen the scriptures the holy men of God were moved by God to pen the word of God and the Bible says we're not to use any private interpretation so when you talk about something in the Bible some people can react with you know you give them some Bible

teaching as faithfully as you can when you're giving someone some Bible truth and they can often say something like that's just your interpretation that's just your interpretation that's how you read it

I read it like this that's how I understand it and you know people get into that kind of argy bargy and some people read into the Bible some strange ideas and they will say this is what the Bible means to me that's flaky too isn't it thin ice, dangerous ground a danger it's a dangerous way of approaching the word of God that's what what does the Bible mean to you what does the Bible mean to me and some fall into this trap of what can you read that okay I'm not sure that's clear but there's basically these two schools of thought two ways of approaching the Bible on the one side you've got eisegesis where the interpreter makes the scripture say what he wants it to say then on the other side you've got exegesis where the interpreter makes the scripture say what God has to say obviously eisegesis is when people read into the text what really is not there it's a danger isn't it that's how we can end up with cults and with wacko teachings when people read into the text what really isn't there you know we've got people like you know Jonathan Kahn at the moment seeing the twin towers in the Old Testament somewhere and all this kind of reading into the text things that really it's not there it's not there at all and it's thin eyes it's dangerous thinking and people end up going left field when they use eisegesis they read into the text what really isn't there rather we should use exegesis which means we we draw out from the scriptures we draw out what the text is saying and what it is itself communicating strange ideas happen when we just end up with this kind of reading into how we interpret the Bible and twisting and shaping and making it say something that it's not actually saying why do people not study the Bible today it's a big problem today that people are not interested in studying the Bible some people say oh the Bible is not relevant or they think oh look

I don't have the proper technique it's just too hard for me or look I'm not qualified I'm not qualified to understand the Bible so I'm not even going to try to study it or some then think well the Bible is not reliable they say because of their conditioning from churches that don't uphold the authority of the scriptures but Bible study it's essential for us as Christians Bible study is essential it's essential for our growth for our spiritual maturity for our spiritual effectiveness studying the Bible is so important for us as God's people an accurate Bible interpretation is a critical need all false teaching all heresies all cults start with inaccurate false biblical interpretation this eisegesis where they might come with their own bias with their own cultural conditioning and they read into the Bible they make the Bible say something that it really does not say and so it's really important that we get that very strongly right and true when we come to the Bible we come firstly with that truth that it is the inspired holy word of

God that it is truly God's word God's word without error infallible inerrant we can rely on its authority someone has said the correct interpretation of the Bible must begin with the basic truth that God has given a revelation of himself and of his will and without this man would be at sea without stars or a compass and all his thoughts of what is God's will would be nothing but the imagination of his own depraved heart and mind by nature no one understands divine truth for it is in a realm that is foreign to man's thinking I know there was reference to it this morning in what someone said that he says my thoughts are higher than your thoughts he is far and above what we can reckon with our own intellect and the Bible says of itself that the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned we come to this book with a love for this book and of the author of this book and this book is spiritually discerned we need to have that spiritual heart and mind that approach that this is the authoritative word of God and when we read the Bible

God is speaking to us directly the Bible is sufficient it's sufficient now sadly there's groups today for example Ellen White and the Seventh Day Adventists they've got other books that they revere the writings of Ellen White and they uphold them like scripture and then you've got the Mormons they have changed the King James they've put all kinds of extra bits and pieces in their so called inspired version where Joseph Smith has written in Genesis that there's a prophet going to come whose name is Joseph that's quite amazing isn't it you read the Mormon Genesis version and he's written in himself as the prophet to come in his Bible that he has twisted and perverted in such a gross way and that's what happens when people add to when they say the Bible is not sufficient they've got to add something to it and you see these ideas today where people are somehow following extra biblical revelation where they've got to have something that someone is uttering

today that is adding to the Bible and you know

[12:18] Julie and I have moved in some circles where there's been supposed prophecies and the people in the meetings writing it down as if this is the very word of God that is being added to the Bible and should be revered as God's revered word what someone utters in the present day thus saith the Lord that's dangerous ground we don't believe in extra biblical revelation the Bible is sufficient it is sufficient for us and this is the final authority we are not to sit and judge God or what God says instead we are to understand that God and his word will judge us when we come to read or study this book we come with humility we come wanting our lives to come into conformity with God and his word not the other way around and we come with love and reverence as Isaiah tells how we ought to approach the word of God as the context is of God making heaven and the earth being his footstool and it says for all all those things have made and all those things have been saith the

Lord but to this man will I look even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word when we handle this book we shall handle it reverently as it is the very treasure of God these are the very words of God and we should tremble at his word so how are we to interpret this word how are we to interpret the Bible accurately not with some private interpretation but with a biblical a sound biblical approach to interpretation I put to you we should approach this book as it says reverently and tremble at his word come to the Bible when you want to study the Bible when you take the Bible into your hands and you want to take it into your mind come reverently before God come prayerfully come with love for the scriptures start and continue with prayer because this book is spiritually discerned some have put it in this fashion and I was just looking through the various resources about hermeneutics that I could get my hands on and there's numbers and numbers of principles and some say there's five some say there's seven ten twenty

I found some powerpoint slide show about hermeneutics and it had 312 powerpoint slides so I can assure you I don't have 312 powerpoint slides this is really just scratching the surface here but the point is that there's different schools of thought about how many principles there are that you can apply there's different writings that have many different principles and some that boil it down to about five or six someone has put it like this I'll just describe these into four I don't have this on the screen here but four ways you can interpret the Bible observation number one observe the text what does it say observation secondly correlation how does it fit into the entire Bible so you use cross references you know some people you might have a Bible that has those cross references where you can find various references to a word or a theme there's chain reference Bibles there's Bible helps that have particular subjects there's good concordances and there's Bible study tools that you can use on your computer these days but observation observe the text what does it say correlation how does it fit into the entire Bible cross reference the subjects go across the Bible then interpretation what does it mean you can use a dictionary encyclopedia there's biblical cultural books I know that Kevin Currell's written one just lately that's very good value and it might be something to inquire about I can tell you more about later and then lastly number four application how does it apply I'll just say that again just to repeat observation correlation interpretation application that's just how someone has described it here's how another person has also described these principles of hermeneutics this one's got four little tips on how to interpret how to understand the Bible and I'll read through them number one scripture interprets scripture so in other words other scriptures often scriptures interpret itself in some instances the biblical writer interprets another biblical passage so we see if we don't understand one particular reference we look for the correlation scripture interprets scripture scripture one biblical writer will help us understand what another biblical writer can be saying secondly context interprets scripture so you look at the surrounding verse the chapter the book you look at the immediate context of the Bible verse and you look at the historical cultural linguistic context context the third one intent intent interprets scripture all scripture has an intended meaning it's therefore true that a scripture has one correct interpretation while it has many correct applications and then the fourth one the clear interprets the obscure no verse of scripture should be interpreted to contradict the overall message of scripture when we face with an obscure verse we find a clear verse to help interpret it some people get in all kinds of trouble when they take one obscure verse and they make a teaching out of

it when it's actually not a wise thing to do we look for where the clear message is through the bible so first a key question is what does a text mean so when we come to the bible when we come to study a passage a text what does it mean and the simple answer is a text means what the author intended it to mean this is the principle of intent

[18:53] I'll just go through I think there's five or six here that we'll just touch on tonight that seem to boil it down to me some tools some tips some principles some rules of interpreting the bible that can help us when we're searching the scriptures and trying to make sense trying to understand what it's saying the first principle!

here is intent what did the author intend it to mean for example if you were to write a personal letter it means what you meant it to mean I know Julie and I when I was courting her as an 18 year old I went away to study the Bible I went to a Bible school it was only a short 8 month Bible school but she was the love of my life my one and only to suffer on the Gold Coast in Queensland and just had to make that sacrifice I left my beloved behind my girlfriend who was then to become my fiance when I returned and we corresponded with love letters and I used to get told off really by the principal of the Bible college would pick up the envelope and C on the back S W A L K!

Who knows what that means sealed with a loving kiss and Julie's going to get embarrassed now and Julie would put perfume on the letter and my beloved Andrew they brought these sappy looking letters to me in the Bible school and I would write sappy letters back to Julie but when you write a personal letter it means what you mean it to me and it's the same with the Bible isn't it this is God's love letter and the authors of the Bible the writers wrote what they meant it to mean they intended it to mean something so when we interpret the Bible we want to discern what are the writers intentions what was the writers intended meaning we look at the writers context the historic context the grammar the culture the literary forms a good study Bible can help us with that of course the danger with study Bibles is sometimes Bible but there's good study

Bibles out there that can help us as little tips and helps in the margins also good Bible commentaries and again you've got to be discerning of such things to find ones that are by Bible believers not those who want to be critical of the Bible the intent seek the plain meaning of the text nowadays we've got people who think there's some secret code in here maybe there is but the point is it's not anything about secret codes it's about the plain meaning the plain meaning what does it actually tell us not looking for some hidden meanings or some secret codes and then people go off in total left field go off in tangents trying to make some kind of code out of it and they can go off in all kinds of it's a distraction because we should really look at the intent what did the author mean look for the plain meaning intent a second one is context context context context is king and someone has said this the top three rules of hermeneutics are context context and context so before we tell modern day

Christians how the Bible applies to them we must come to the best possible understanding of what the Bible meant to its original audience context what's the context consider the context now here we see a bit of a picture to illustrate that what is the context here we see where we should start with the context of the verse the immediate context then we move to the paragraph the context of the paragraph then we move to the context of the larger section then the context of the book then the context of what the author wrote what other Bible books did this author write and then the context of the Bible as a whole someone has said that context determines meaning someone has put it like this no text is to be interpreted out of its immediate context a text without a context is a pretext for a proof text some people use proof text to push a particular doctrine a particular view where they abuse that single verse or that particular phrase to prove their view out of this isolated little reference of something every word that we read must be understood in the light of the words around it and come before it and after it that's how we understand the

[24:08] Bible by looking at the context looking at the bird's eye view looking at the whole picture and then we can understand it truthfully a good example of not using context is the Mormon practice of 1 Corinthians 8 5 where it talks about gods that are many lords that are many and they use this as a proof text of their doctrine of polytheism because Mormons believe in many gods and they say 1 Corinthians 8 5 talks about many gods and lords but then you look in the context Paul is talking about so called he says gods that are called gods they are so called gods so if

the Mormons were to read not just a simple reading of the verse but the context of the whole chapter they would see that Paul does not teach many gods and so we see these circles of context to check the sentence the paragraph the section the book the author the setting of the time frame the scriptures cannot be broken they come together they hang together you can't take an isolated little verse out of context and try to make a doctrine out of it we must consider the whole book and the context so we've seen the intent we've seen is that we should take the

Bible literally there's a sense of taking interpreting the Bible literally or normally for the normal use of the language in other words take the plain meaning of the text at face value what's the plain and obvious meaning the message of the Bible must be understood literally unless it is obviously figurative of course we can see things that are obviously figurative where it says the trees of the field will clap their hands of course that is figurative it's a picture it's a symbolic reference that is not to be taken literally because trees do not have hands so it's a common sense approach when the plain sense of the scripture makes common sense seek no other sense we take it literally the common sense in other words we take every word at its primary meaning we don't somehow spiritualize it and make some fanciful ideas about it some people take scripture verses and make them say things that are totally not evident not intrinsic they're just a fanciful interpretation and they can get right off track another principle is that the

Bible interprets itself the Bible interprets itself so when we come across a difficult passage that we're just grappling with we're trying to fathom what it means we interpret that with clear ones this is sometimes called the law of non contradiction so again let scripture explain scripture let the clear help you understand the less clear use that cross references study parallel passages you know in the gospels you can see different references to the same accounts and you study those parallel passages to get more understanding learn the main themes of scripture use the new testament to help to understand and interpret the old testament and there's a progressive nature of revelation too so that the bible is giving more revelation on topics over time so we see an early mention a first reference a first mention and then more revelation over time a progressive revelation so that the word of god is understood from the old testament to the new testament as an unfolding revelation as there's a well known statement the old testament is the new testament concealed and the new testament is the old testament revealed in the old testament christ is prefigured he's he's typified he's he's seen in signs and symbols and types and then in the new testament we see the unveiling we see the revelation that scripture interprets scripture the new testament helps us understand what the old testament was foreshadowing scripture interprets scripture so all essential doctrines are fully and clearly explained either in the immediate context or somewhere else in the bible god did not reveal an important doctrine in a single ambiguous passage now thinking of the mormons again you know they talk about baptism for the dead they've got a whole industry that's based on this one bible verse of the in one corinthians i believe it is where it talks about baptisms for the dead paul didn't define what he meant by that and yet the mormons have taken this to mean that they are to baptise for people who have passed away and it's a whole crazy idea that they've got by basing it on one verse taken out of context without really any substantiation another principle and there's numbers of them i'll just touch on them just briefly because we really don't have time to do this justice tonight here are some principles again you might want to do further study yourself on these things the harmony of scripture principle what that means is no part of the bible may be interpreted so as to contradict another part of the bible there's a harmony here there's a unity here despite the many authors and the extensive time period of its compilation the one author of course is god he is the one the perfect god it's his book from beginning to end and it's a revelation of himself to man and there's a harmony through the scripture where there's not a contradiction another one is the law of first mention where as someone has described it the first occurrence of a word expression or utterance is the key to its subsequent meaning or it will be a guide to ascertaining the essential truth connected with it so through the scriptures when you look at a doctrine a teaching a principle and instruction from god go back to the first time it's mentioned in the scripture and that first mention will carry with it a meaning all through the word of god it's an interesting principle because there is only one speaker throughout all scripture there's only one providing governing guiding controlling mind behind it all and that one of course is god himself so that law of first mention the harmony principle another principle is the historical background being

mindful there's a historical setting here there's a cultural setting in a particular point in time while it's universal in application the truths in the bible are set in a surrounding culture and history we've got to be mindful of that and there's also the distinctions between israel and the church we can't apply scriptures that are specific to israel to apply to ourselves as the church there's a different covenant a different requirement a different dispensation principle here so promises made to israel in the old testament cannot automatically be transferred to the church for example the promises given to abraham and his descendants about land it does not include us as gentile christians that was for the children of israel abraham!

and his descendants and likewise the requirements of the mosaic law romans 6:14 tells us we're not under that now for example in leuiticus 19:19 it says you must not wear a garment made of two different kinds of fabric of course that's not a law that applies to us today that was specific to that time and to the people of israel and so while certain old testament commands have some application when they're repeated in the new testament they are still binding and that's how we can discern that another fact is the type of literature it is because the bible contains many different types of literature we have law we have narrative wisdom poetry the gospel parable epistle and apocalyptic the end times and so you need to be mindful of that as we study the bible to understand the type of literature it is and in all of this these are just tips and kind of principles tonight

[33:52] I'm really just scratching the surface and it's just something that can help us have an eye to these things as we open the scriptures and it can help us to put things in the place and help them understand what God is saying but above all and essentially in all of this is to have a God-centered perspective to understand what it is that God is revealing about himself and his dealings with his creation with man it tells us that all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine for reproof for correction for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works this is the theological interpretation that God has inspired this book and this book is practical there's an application here as the bible says don't just be hearers of it be doers of it be doers of it and interpretation must be distinguished from application so it's trying to grapple and grasp the essential truth to understand the principles that God is teaching us but then it's the bridge to put it into action it's this timeless principle where we kind of tie interpretation with application a timeless principle so we might have all kinds of knowledge and understanding and be able to spout it and teach it and know it and rattle it off and know it back to front and inside out but the point is the application we go from interpretation to application it's putting it into action it's putting it into our lives and how can we make application here are some helpful tips to ask yourself when you're studying your bible when you're looking at the scriptures and you're trying to understand what it's saying you've had maybe some thoughts to some of those little tips principles we talked about tonight but it boils down to really how can I make this real in my life how can I put this into practice in other words how can I make application as you study the bible as you look at some verses and sections and books ask yourself questions like is there a command for me to obey in this reading here is there an error for me to avoid does this passage point out some sinful behaviour or attitudes that may be present in my life is there an example to follow that I can see from this reading is there a promise to claim here there's something that

God can quicken to me and it's a promise that I can claim does this passage highlight an aspect of God's character and his nature that I can learn from more about him so it's kind of building this application bridge from interpretation of that timeless principle it was true then and it's true for now it's true for the 21st century it's true here and now for me in my life for my application in the here and now for example we could look at John 12 where Mary anoints the Lord Jesus with very expensive oil that's the historical context it records a historical event the interpretation relates only

to what Mary did to Jesus now we cross that bridge of that timeless truth to application what does it mean how can I make some application of that what about me today an application might be are we willing to give sacrificially like Mary to give the Lord

Jesus that worship that is due unto him as Mary did as that application bridge from interpretation to application and another example for example might be Matthew chapter 7 where the Lord Jesus says love your enemies it was a general command it had an application an interpretation as it were it was something it was telling the people that were present at the sermon on the mount love your enemies it was a command to them and it's got an application for us today hasn't it how can I apply that scripture there could be someone in my workplace that's getting under my skin and it's pretty hard to manage it's pretty hard to work with the Bible says love them or it could be a neighbour who offends us the Bible says to love them love your enemies so

I trust these principles might be a help as we study the word of God dig deep into the word the Bible says search the scriptures search the scriptures and things were more noble that they search the scriptures daily to see if these things were so and the Bible commends us to that he commands us to study to show yourself approved unto God a workman that needeth not be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth so I urge you to that to come to the scriptures to treasure it to tremble at it and to put it into practical life into application let us pray Lord we thank you Lord we love your word we love you our Lord our master and we pray help us Lord to understand these things to be wise and as we study the scriptures to understand the meaning as you guide us to as we prayerfully study as we seek your spiritual discernment as your spirit will lead us as we open the scriptures to open it to our understanding

Lord that we have a mind to the context we have a mind to the intent we have a mind to that timelessness the application of it Lord help us to make it something we we consider important in our lives that we search the scriptures daily we search the scriptures with a regular love and longing a desire to find your truth and to put it into action we pray in Jesus name Amen