

# HERMENEUTICS: GETTING THE POINT:

## AN OUTLINE

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### INTRODUCTION: Nature of Language Communication

- A. Parallels between working a puzzle and interpreting the Bible
- B. Nature of language

1. Language is always from the subjective viewpoint.
  - a. Literal language can occur even though language comes from the subjective side.
  - b. Figurative language is a possibility because language comes from the subjective side.
  - c. Phenomenological language arises from the fact that language comes from the subjective side.
  - d. Poetic language is possible because language comes from the subjective side.
2. Words do not always mean the same thing.
  - a. Bases for determining the meaning of words
    - (1) not particularly by derivational connection (word picture)
    - (2) not particularly by combining constituent elements in compound words
    - (3) not particularly by comparing cognate words within a language
    - (4) not particularly by related words across languages
    - (5) not particularly by usages elsewhere on other subjects or in other contexts
    - (6) not particularly by majority usage
    - (7) by general conventional usage
    - (8) most particularly by the present intent of the author
  - b. the multiple meanings of a word
3. Languages change over time.
4. Language is arbitrary.
5. Language is characterized by specialization.
6. Meaning is not carried wholly by words.
7. Languages differ as to how they categorize reality.

8. Between languages there is a difference in the conventional usages of even those mechanisms they have in common.
9. the flexibility of language
10. the ambiguity of language

### C. Nature of communication

## I. The Bible: God and Man

### A. Relation of divine and human in inscripturation (inspiration)

1. distinction between theological and philosophical method
2. range of possible human-divine interaction
  - a. dictation of words
  - b. implantation of ideas
  - c. given abilities
  - d. granted experiences
  - e. bestowed offices
3. sources of ambiguity in scripture interpretation
  - a. language deficiencies
    - (1) the lack of punctuation in the ancient Greek manuscripts
    - (2) Greek's love for participles
    - (3) Greek's prominent use of the genitive-case noun
    - (4) the lack of vowel pointing in the ancient Hebrew manuscripts
    - (5) the brevity of biblical accounts
  - b. written language deficiencies
  - c. textual-transmission errors
  - d. translation difficulties
  - e. cross-cultural differences
  - f. time factor
  - g. interpretation problems

### B. Resultant nature of scripture (bibliology)

1. is, contains, becomes the Word of God, etc.
  - a. The Bible is the word of God.
  - b. The Bible contains the word of God.
  - c. The Bible becomes the word of God.
2. inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, authority

### 3. the Bible and other books

- a. The Bible uses human language according to normal language rules (similarity).
- b. Biblical interpreters first assume the Bible's harmoniousness (difference).

## C. Consequent nature of appropriating scripture (illumination)

### 1. meaning of "interpret"

- a. exegesis
- b. interpretation
- c. hermeneutics
- d. theological method
- e. translation

### 2. effect of the view of scripture on interpretation

- a. the accuracy of scripture
- b. the role of scripture
- c. scripture as common use of human language

### 3. biblical-systematic hermeneutic

- a. Interpretation is more complex than following through an ordered doctrinal presentation.
- b. Interpretation is more complex than working out individual items one by one and then adding them together to form a complete picture.
- c. Interpretation involves reciprocity between individual texts and general concepts.

### 4. the idea of peculiar principles for interpreting the Bible

- a. double fulfillment/reference
- b. law of first mention
- c. fourfold interpretation
- d. the necessity of supernatural enablement
- e. literal taking precedence over figurative interpretation as a questioned principle

- (1) the cultural tendency in the use of language
- (2) the literary genre being interpreted
- (3) the personal tendencies of a writer
- (4) the nature of the immediate and distant context
- (5) the intent of the author at a given point

5. place of the Holy Spirit in illumination
6. authority, license, and private judgment
  - a. Authority means submitting one's interpretation to someone other than the original author.
  - b. Private judgment means submitting one's interpretation only to the author.
  - c. License means not submitting one's interpretation even to the original author.
7. intelligibility of the Bible
  - a. what it means
  - b. what it does not mean
  - c. what it stands against
8. hindrances to interpretation
  - a. pride
  - b. presuppositions
    - (1) conscious presuppositions
      - (a) getting the dogmatic question ahead of the exegetical one
      - (b) getting the practical question ahead of the exegetical one
      - (c) allowing the existential circumstance to shape the interpretation
    - (2) unconscious presuppositions
    - (3) how presuppositions affect the work of interpretation
      - (a) cause people to try to find other than the obvious meaning
      - (b) cause people not to take enough time
      - (c) cause people not to listen
      - (d) cause people to close their minds
      - (e) cause people to color the terms of discussion
    - (4) examples of eisegesis
    - (5) sources of presuppositions
      - (a) the existential situation
      - (b) the personality bent
  - c. irrationalism
    - (1) occurs when feelings become the ultimate frame of reference
    - (2) occurs when the laws of thought are misapplied

- (a) confusion between validity and truth
  - (b) confusion between primary proof and confirmatory evidence
  - (c) confusion between describing and proving
  - (d) confusion between consistency and circular reasoning
  - (e) all examples of formal and informal fallacies
- (3) occurs when people espouse mistaken notions about the nature of language
- (c) confusing reality and words
  - (d) confusing words and ideas
- (4) occurs when people invoke divine sovereignty against the need for logical consistency

#### 9. distinction between understanding and belief

### II. Selected Linguistic Phenomena

#### A. Streamlining causal distinctions

- 1. prescriptive-permissive will
- 2. direct-indirect operation
- 3. purpose-result conflation
- 4. logical-chronological order
  - a. made possible by divine omniscience
  - b. made possible by interpersonal trust

#### B. Interchange of nature, state, and action terms

- 1. nature-state substitution
- 2. state-action substitution
- 3. nature-action correlation

#### C. General rule and absolute uniformity

- 1. limited universals
- 2. limited negatives
- 3. characteristic action

#### D. Category vs. continuum

- 1. degree matters
- 2. exaggeration for emphasis

- E. Semitic tendency to use the concrete for the non-concrete (abstract and spiritual)
- F. Amount and number for degree
- G. Effect for process

### III. General Mechanics Behind Interpretation

#### A. Law of harmony

- 1. analogy of scripture
- 2. Gestalt
- 3. examples of decontextualization and recontextualization

#### B. Law of negation

- 1. English examples of the law of contrast
- 2. biblical examples of the law of contrast
- 3. the contrast between positive and restrictive
- 4. relative/limited/restrictive negative
- 5. technicalizing terminology
- 6. note negative, neutral, positive
- 7. note opposing compatibles

#### C. Nature of the case

### IV. Interpretation of Classes of Literature

#### A. Prime concerns

- 1. the degree of figurativeness
- 2. the amount of material to be believed

#### B. Prophecy

- 1. Assume the nearest adequate.
- 2. Assume one adequate fulfillment.
  - a. class prediction
  - b. specific but recurring event
  - c. conflated prediction
  - d. type-antitype
  - e. application
  - f. vs. two unrelated events
  - g. vs. accommodation
- 3. Remember the telescoping tendency of predictive prophecy.

4. Keep in mind the analogy of scripture.
5. Allow prediction to have the full range of literary genres.
6. Allow prophecy and fulfill to have their full range of biblical usage.
7. Remember the possibility of conditional prophecy.
8. comments on dispensational interpretation of prophecy
9. type-antitype as a form of prophecy

#### C. Parable

1. Parables are generally true to life.
2. Parables teach general spiritual lessons.
  - a. Look for cues within the parable itself.
  - b. stylistic repetition as a mark of parable
  - c. Look for statements of purpose in the context of the parable.

#### D. History

#### E. Exposition

#### F. Law

#### G. Poetry

### V. Pitfalls in Interpretation

#### A. Allegorizing the comparison

#### B. Misconstruing the genre

1. Jonah
2. Job
3. Genesis 1-11
4. accounts of miracles

#### C. Confusing example and precedent

1. distinguishing the types of things
  - a. precedent vs. example
  - b. apostolic precedent vs. church tradition
2. examples of issues involved
3. principles used to distinguish precedent and example
  - a. sufficient examples to establish a pattern
  - b. uniformity of the examples
  - c. presence of accompanying propositions
  - d. consistency in the argument pattern
  - e. nature of the case

- f. persons giving the examples
- g. dispensational distinctions
- h. cultural practice outside the church
- i. motives for seeking an alternative to the New Testament practice

4. application of principles to selected issues

- D. Adopting an inappropriate model
- E. Misidentifying the intended reference
- F. Confusing grammar and reality

1. Inherent importance does not necessarily correlate with grammatical independence.
2. The aspect of the verb does not indicate the aspect of the action indicated.
3. The amount of attention given to a subject does not necessarily correspond with its inherent importance or theoretical centrality.
4. The same word does not always have the same meaning.
5. Different words referring to the same thing do not necessarily mean the same thing.
6. Different words do not necessarily have different referents.
7. Lists need to be handled carefully in relation to their referents.

- a. Lists are not necessarily parallel.
- b. Lists are not necessarily sequential.

- (1) Lists are not necessarily in logical order.
- (2) Lists are not necessarily in chronological order.
- (3) Lists are not necessarily in ascending or descending order of importance.
- (4) Lists are not necessarily in a directional order.

- c. Lists are not necessarily exhaustive.
- d. Lists are not necessarily homogeneous.
- e. Lists probably do involve parts of some larger common category.

8. The form of a statement must be distinguished from the reality of the referent.
9. the need for the language-referent distinction

- G. Assuming peculiar principles for biblical interpretation
- H. "Technicalizing" terminology
- I. Setting the conclusion and then working toward it

1. ways of referring to the problem
2. pattern of the procedure
3. examples of situations where this problem arises



J. Equating advice and commandment

VI. Procedures of Interpretation

- A. The synthetic method
- B. The critical method
- C. The topical method
- D. The rhetorical method
- E. The theological method
- F. The analytical method
- G. The comparative method
- H. The devotional method

For examples of how these methods can be applied to given books and texts, see Merrill C. Tenney's Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957),

VII. Testing the Interpretation of Other People

- A. The burden of proof rests on the affirmative.
  - 1. Show that another legitimate way exists for understanding the passage.
  - 2. Show from context that the idea is foreign to the flow of thought.
  - 3. Show that the interpretation is contradictory to near, distant, cultural, natural context.
- B. Illustrations do not prove.
- C. Check to see whether the right model is being used.
- D. Do not decide the correctness of an interpretation by whether it fits with what you already believe
- E. Check to see about the intended reference.
- F. Do not feel that you have to accept someone else's explanation simply because you cannot think of another one.
- G. Just because you cannot explain a difficulty between scriptures does not mean they contradict.
  - 1. Contradictions are resolved by appealing to first principles.
    - a. Words have multiple meanings.
    - b. Words may be used in figurative ways.
  - 2. Contradictions can be resolved by putting disparate items in a larger frame of reference.
  - 3. Contradictions are resolved by using sanctified imagination.
  - 4. "contradictions" between scripture and experience

- H. Understanding another person does not mean agreeing with him.
- I. Evaluating an interpretation is largely the same process as coming to your own conclusion.

- 1. validity
- 2. consistency
- 3. practicality

- J. Do not try to refute an idea as you are trying to understand it.
- K. Distinguish between truth and getting it from this passage.
- L. Distinguish between what makes sense and what scripture teaches.
- M. Do not over-adjust your own interpretation in order to eliminate another person's unacceptable view.
- N. Do not get the practical problem ahead of the exegetical one.
- O. Do not accept a view simply because of the persons that hold it.
- P. Make a certain amount of allowance for people mis-expressing themselves in doctrinal matters.
- Q. Be willing to listen to people who have previously been wrong on other points.
- R. Do not demand a specific verse for every item of Christian understanding.

#### VIII. Hermeneutics and Life

- A. The total process of hermeneutics and life
- B. The structure of the Bible and the nature of Christianity
- C. The structure of truth

#### IX. Aids to Interpretation

- A. History of the English Bible
- B. Translations/versions
- C. Concordances
- D. Geographies
- E. Cross-referencing systems
- F. Texts on interpretation, hermeneutics, theological method
- G. Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, geographies, atlases
- H. Introductions
- I. Commentaries
- J. Topical, doctrinal, and theological studies
- K. Grammars, word studies, lexicons, analyticals