

# Summary of Hermeneutical Principles

## General Principles

1. **Individual Responsibility.** Every believer is expected to read, meditate and hang on every word of God, seeking to accurately understand God's word, and believe in clarity of scripture.
2. **Remove as many preconceptions and interpretive lenses as possible.**
3. **Goal of Authorial Intent:** Seek to discover the author's intended meaning of the text. There is one meaning to a text that is controlled by the Author, not the reader.
  - a. Seek to discover the author's intended meaning by observing the Genre of the text.
  - b. Seek to discover the author's intended meaning by observing the larger flow of thought.
  - c. Seek to discover the author's intended meaning by considering how original audience would have understood it.
  - d. Do not come to interpretive conclusions by consensus or appeal to authority.
4. **Culture:** Interpret culture in light of scripture and not scripture in light of culture. (Context determines the meaning, not culture). Consider culture to enhance understanding.
5. **Authority:** Accept the entirety of scripture as divinely authoritative, even if it is difficult to apply today.
6. **Be careful to draw biblical principles where there are no direct commands:**
  - a. Understand author's teaching/description in situation and to the intended audience.
  - b. What is the difference between original audience and us?
  - c. What is the theological principle in the text? (Primary? Secondary?)
  - d. How does the theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
  - e. How should individual Christians today live out the theological principle?
7. **Applicational Principles should be:**
  - a. Biblically tied to the text
  - b. Universal to all
  - c. Timeless truths
8. **Cross reference:** Scripture must be interpreted by scripture. For all genres, cross reference to confirm direct commands, derived principles and applications etc.
9. **Be safe interpreters by studying broadly, then closely and repeating the process.**

## Genre-Specific

10. **Epistles:** Consider the context and occasion for letters to arrive at author's intent (i.e. rebuke, doctrine correction etc.). Always follow the flow of thought of the author by outlining paragraphs, sentences and clauses.
  - a. In paragraphs, identify topic proposition.
  - b. Practice word study.
11. **Gospels:** Are "good news" accounts about Christ. We should not bring court room expectations to the gospel texts. Understand narrative context of gospel account. Understand that gospel contain a variety of genres within dialogue, narrative, prophecy, parable.
12. **Parables:** Are "cast along" comparisons to spiritual realities. Still take a Literal Approach to interpret parables & look for objective observation of the Author's Intent in the analogy or story.
  - a. **Principle Part of Parable:** The principal parts and figures of a parable represent certain main realities. Consider only these principal parts and figures when drawing conclusions.
  - b. Parables often use exaggerations, hyperboles, to accentuate the point.
13. **Narratives:** View narrative as essential theological history. True accounts of historical events that teach about God, His Kingdom, His people etc.
  - a. Consider the different range and scope of narrative: Meta-Narrative "Big History," Mid-level movements, Specific Events and Characters.
  - b. Narratives have literary elements: Setting, Character, Plot, Conflict/Resolution, Descriptive Commentary. Pay attention to each element for emphasis or principle of narratives: God's Character, view of man's sin etc.
  - c. Rules:
    - i. Unlike didactic texts (e.g., the Epistles), narratives are descriptive rather than prescriptive — they show what happened, not necessarily what should happen. Therefore, do not jump to permission by precedent or examples to follow.
    - ii. Asking the question, "what is the moral of the story" typical results in a man-centered encouragement vs seeing God's glory in history. Ask, what is the storyline & development of the narrative?
14. **OT Law:** We first interpret the OT Law by its original author's intent to the original audience. Only after, we understand the progress nature of revelation and understand the NT fulfillment/ application / renewal of the OT Law.
  - a. Helpful to know categories of Ceremonial, Moral, Civil but not necessary to make strong division.
  - b. Look for Law Elements: **Structure**, **Purpose** and **Bone** of the Law.
  - c. Within Law, we can still apply inductive observation and study habits.
  - d. Important to cross-reference with New Testament.

15. **Prophets:** Prophecy should be interpreted as a literal proclamation with a clear intended message; typically, of rebuke, call to repentance, warning, hope etc. – with elements of foretelling of future events.
- a. **Common Mistakes** Do not cherry pick the “good parts.” Do not read primarily consistently of future predictions.
  - b. Must consider **historical context** and events surrounding God’s word to the people.
  - c. Consider the **covenant context**, which covenant the text addresses. Often God rebuking the nation for unfaithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant.
  - d. Identify details of God’s judgment / promises. Use Literal Hermeneutic to consider and deduce what is possible from **figures of speech**.
  - e. Pay special **attention to character, emotion, thoughts of God** in prophecy.
16. **Psalms & Poetry:** Whereas Prophecy is typically proclamation *from* GOD *to* people. Psalms are praises & prayers *from* people *to/about* God. Therefore, NOT primary precision of doctrine/moral behavior. Rather the emphasis is on Heart Attitude, God-Oriented Experiences, Affections, Emotional Expression
- a. Make sure you are studying poetry phrases by phrase.
  - b. Label basic outline & movement of thought.
  - c. Identify the literary devices of poetry: Parallelisms, Metaphors, Hyperbole etc.
  - d. *Visualize the painting & Meditate on the emotional experience of the author.*
  - e. *Summarize & meditate on the principles that the author, David, emphasizes.*
17. **Proverbs: Proverbs** of wisdom from one generation to the next. Proverbs are Truisms & not universal (absolute) truths. Proverbs are Norms & not exacting law or rule of life. Proverbs are Way of God & not His unconditional promises.
- a. Identify the proverb’s themes
  - b. Observe parallels & other literary devices for emphasis. (i.e. repeat commands, metaphors)
  - c. Meditate on patterns of life & application.
  - d. Harmonize with rest of scripture for application.

#### Helpful Books:

- a. **How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.** Fee & Stuart
- b. **Grasping God’s Word.** Duvall & Hays
- c. **Basic Bible Interpretation.** Roy B. Zuck
- d. **From Exegesis to Exposition.** Robert B. Chisholm Jr.
- e. **Talk Thru the Bible.** Wilkinson & Boa