

Interpretation Order that Guides our Doctrines and Theological Conclusions

Order of Interpretation

Theological conclusions are built in a particular flow and order. The proper order emphasizes starting with the plain reading of scripture and working outward to theological application and historical reflection. We must not distort this order.

- a. **Hermeneutics**
- b. **Exegesis**
- c. **Biblical Theology**
- d. **Systematic Theology**
- e. **Historical Theology**
- f. **Practical Theology**

Definitions & Significance

- 1) **Hermeneutics** is the method of biblical interpretation. It provides the rules and principles for understanding Scripture correctly according to the author's intent.
 - i) Starting without proper hermeneutics leads to misinterpreting based on personal bias, cultural norms, or tradition etc. Historically, an allegorical hermeneutic has led many people astray from God's intended meaning.
- 2) **Exegesis** of each passage. Exegesis is the application of hermeneutics and the practice of study of the text, "drawing out" the author's intended message. There are many who read summaries, commentaries, and other writings about the meaning of the text without applying themselves to the text.
 - i) Without the practice and foundation of proper exegesis, one will only have a sampling of proof-texts.
- 3) **Biblical Theology** traces the thematic and historical development of doctrines within the Bible itself, book by book focusing on how God's revelation unfolds over time (progressive revelation). This discipline gives attention to individuals authors & sections of scripture. (I.e. How does Paul develop the doctrine of justification in the book of Romans?) Building on the foundation of exegesis (study) of each passage, biblical theology synthesizes them into a larger theological flow of information.
 - i) Example of error: Not understanding biblical theology can lead to a legalistic error like that of Seventh Day Adventist's adherence to Sabbath.
- 4) **Systematic Theology organizes** the teachings of Scripture into categories. It answers the question: "What does the whole Bible teach about this subject?"

- i) A doctrine cannot be considered biblical unless it sums up and includes all that the Scriptures say about it through exegesis of each passage & biblical theology.
 - ii) Sample of Categories of Systematic Theology
 - (1) Pneumatology – study of holy Spirit.
 - (2) Christology – study of Christ
 - (3) Eschatology - study of end times.
 - (4) Ecclesiology - study of the church
 - (5) Soteriology - study of salvation
 - (6) Hamartiology – study of sin
 - (7) Etc.
 - iii) Warning: If systematic theology is raised to the top, the interpreter will either ignore scripture or force it to conform to the system or summary of interpretation.
- 5) **Historical Theology examines** how the church has understood and articulated doctrine throughout history. It answers the question: "How has the church understood this doctrine over time?" It serves as a safeguard against novel or heretical interpretations.
- i) Historical theology should never be raised above the other disciplines.
Otherwise, traditions of men will become the authority instead of the bible.
- 6) **Philosophical or Practical Theology** applies sense and logic to biblical truth so that application can be made in Christian, living, ministry, and church practice. It answers the question: "How should this affect the way we think, live and minister etc.?"
- i) If practical theology is elevated, truth is compromised for the sake of "what works" or "what feels right/ makes sense to me" As an example, the seeker-sensitive movement had many errors, but a primary error was the pragmatism that allowed any method to get an unchurched person into the church.