



Lesson 51

Problems Faced When Studying

- **What do we use to study?**
 - Hermeneutics and Exegesis
- **Seven reasons we need hermeneutics**
 - Reason one
 - Reason two
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In this lesson we are going to be looking at hermeneutics. Hermeneutics are a method of interpreting the Bible or other texts. We'll be looking at seven reasons that we need hermeneutics- so that we can correctly interpret the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.

What do we use to study?

Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Let's say one Sabbath you sit down to study the Bible. You turn to the beatitudes in Matthew and you want to understand what they mean- you want an exegesis of that passage. Exegesis means a "critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of scripture"- Oxford Languages. So, how do you make an exegesis of the Bible or Spirit of Prophecy? You need hermeneutics. Hermeneutics are a "method or theory of interpretation"- Oxford Languages. Correct hermeneutics (for the bible) is parable methodology, they are the opposite of a plain reading. We need parables, hermeneutics, to derive a correct exegesis. If we don't use correct hermeneutics, we'll be reading the Bible incorrectly and make mistakes. We'll look at seven problems we would run into if we are reading the Bible plainly, hermeneutics get us out of those problems. The seven problems are seven reasons we need hermeneutics, and once we know what they are, we can apply hermeneutics and make correct exegesis.

Seven Reasons We Need Hermeneutics

Reason one

The first reason we need hermeneutics is that we need to understand what a passage says. Just because you might understand the words doesn't mean you actually know what they mean for our time. The meaning for our time is hidden treasure and you need hermeneutics to find it. Without hermeneutics you can only understand the surface meaning. An example is Acts 27:37, "And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls." We can understand that there are 276 people on the ship, but that is not truth for our time. Through line upon line (a hermeneutic) we can combine the line of the Levites with the history of the literal tribe of Levi (Numbers 3) and the story of Acts 27 to understand that God is trying to teach us about the harvest of the Levites. That is hidden treasure and it is also an example of why we need hermeneutics to help us understand the deeper meaning of God's word.

Reason two

The second reason we need hermeneutics is because the part doesn't always equal the whole. Say you have two halves. If you put them together, do they make a whole? You would say yes. But then make one of those halves Satan and the other Christ. Satan would be negative 1/2 and Christ would be positive 1/2. Put them together; do they make a whole? No, they equal nothing. But you could also think that a half could equal the whole. That issue is the problem with WYSIATI, the acronym for "What you see is all there is". "What you see" is only a part of the whole, so to think that's "all there is" means you think the part equals the whole- which in most cases it does not. For example, medicine. People read Sister White's quotes saying medicine is bad and think they know all there is to it- that medicine is bad and should not be taken, despite the fact that they're on their death bed with a sickness that could be cured with medicine. They read the "part" and think it equals the whole. The whole is all the scientific proof that some medicine is good and should be used when you need it! The point is, the part does not always equal the whole- what you see is not all there is.

A Synecdoche

We know that the second reason we need hermeneutics is because without them, we'd fall into the problem of thinking the part equals the whole. Our brains naturally think that what we see is all there is, and if we read the Bible plainly, with that mindset, we'll make incorrect exegesis. The official name for this is synecdoche. The definition of synecdoche is "a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent a whole or vice versa". We must be weary of making synecdoche of what we read, and we can avoid making these using parables- hermeneutics. "What you see is all there is" that's a synecdoche. So, the second reason we need hermeneutics is because we'd think that what we read on a subject is all there is on that subject, and a way to stop studying things as a synecdoche is to overlay one statement with another (line upon line) and consider context- which is using hermeneutics.

Reason three

The third reason we need hermeneutics is because words don't mean now what they did in the past. We could think a word means something (and it could mean that today) but to Ellen White or a prophet in the Bible that word could mean something else. We need to use rules (hermeneutics) when studying inspiration to avoid making mistakes in these cases. An example is the word "nicest"- today that means the best. But in the time of Ellen White "nicest" also meant "hardest". "This work is the nicest, the most difficult, ever committed to human beings.' *Ed* 292.1. "Nicest" means "the most difficult" in this quote, we can see that through repeat and enlarge. If we don't recognize that words can change their meaning over time we can make mistakes at times when it is not as obvious as the quote from Education. Hermeneutics, like repeat and enlarge, can help us not make mistakes because of words whose meaning changed over time, when studying inspiration.

Reason four

The fourth reason we need hermeneutics is because cultural differences can change the meaning of a word or phrase. Look at Exodus 3:5, "And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Moses is told to take his shoes off as a sign of reverence because where he stood was holy ground. That was repeated by Stephen in Acts 7:33, "Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground." That was how they showed respect in middle eastern culture. Shoe removal is still practiced today. But come to the West and start taking off your shoes to show respect and...well...you'll look crazy. In western culture, we show respect in other ways such as removing coats in church. I mean, how would a church look if everyone was bundled in their winter coats and scarfs and gloves and hats? Not too comfortable or respectful. So culture changed the meaning of respect. In the Middle East, it means take off your shoes. In the West, it means take off your coat. That's just one reason we need hermeneutics- so we don't go to the Middle East and take off our coats (which, if it had a hood and you took it off, would be considered disrespectful).

Prophets and their culture

Culture changes the meaning. We have seen that culture changes things, such as how we show respect. So when we are studying the Bible, we have to be aware of these changes. Even when we think a passage makes sense, we could be misreading a word. The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy can't be brought directly into our time. God directed the writing of those books, but they were written by prophets who were in a specific culture and time. When we are studying, we have to be aware that since prophets were in a type of culture and time, that mindset bled into their writings. This is why we say pants are a symbol of equality even though EGW speaks against them. Her words on pants were part of the culture EGW was in. So, this Movement never rejects inspiration, we reject the statements that are part of that culture, the existence of cultural influence is a reason we need hermeneutics such as context.

Reason five

The fifth reason we need hermeneutics is because circumstances can alter the meaning of words. That means that a phrase can mean something different depending on what is happening at that time, or a question can have a different answer depending on the context. The question, “What must I do to be saved?” or to inherit eternal life has more than one answer depending on who asked it. The rich young ruler had to sell all that he had and follow Jesus (Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18). The jailer had to just believe on Jesus (Acts 16). Another example of this problem that hermeneutics can fix is the phrase “mine hour is not yet come” or “my time is not yet come”. Two of the times that Jesus says that is John 2:1-4 and 7:1-10. In John 2, Jesus was saying that the time to show His power was not yet come (that time came at the 1st Temple Cleansing); in John 7, Jesus was saying that it was not yet time for Him to go to Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles. Hermeneutics, like context, can help us solve this kind of problem.

Reason six

The sixth reason why we need hermeneutics is because a word can have multiple meanings in the exact same book, written by the exact same author. Take the *Desire of Ages*, for example. Ellen White says on page 780.3 that, “Christ came forth from the tomb glorified, and the Roman guard beheld Him. Their eyes were riveted upon the face of Him whom they had so recently mocked and derided. In this glorified Being they beheld the prisoner whom they had seen in the judgment hall, the one for whom they had plaited a crown of thorns.” Then on page 805.2 she says, “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. The Holy Spirit was not yet fully manifested; for Christ had not yet been glorified.” There’s a seeming discrepancy. She says at first that Christ came from the tomb glorified, but then she says He had not been glorified yet. That means “glorified” has to have at least two different definitions, just in those pages alone. She wrote both of those paragraphs so we can see that an author can mean two different things yet use the same exact word.

Reason seven

The seventh reason why we need hermeneutics is because of different perspectives. If you have a cylinder, someone looking at it from the front says it looks like a circle. Someone looking at it from the side says it looks like a rectangle. Neither of those people are wrong, they just have different perspectives. The people are prophets and the cylinder is a subject. Two prophets might have different perspectives on a subject. Even the same prophet might have two different perspectives on a subject. An example of this is snacking. Ellen White says, in RH July 29, 1884 “...and eat but two meals a day, and nothing between meals, not even an apple, a nut, or any kind of fruit, the result would be seen in a good appetite and greatly improved health.” But when Jesus was on earth, Matthew 12:1 says, “At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.” When the disciples were hungry, they filled themselves with whole corn on the cobs, and the only thing Jesus said about it was that they could pluck corn on the Sabbath. This is a reason why we need hermeneutics, parables help us determine if what we are reading is two different perspectives, otherwise, if we read plainly we’ll think

there is a contradiction. This problem is eliminated by understanding that there can be two perspectives, which is understanding hermeneutics.

Noise and truth

We consider the seventh reason that we need hermeneutics often in this Movement. We use the word “noise”. We recognize that all of the information on a subject might not have anything to do with the study we are doing. We call those non-important details “noise”- and we just ignore them. An example of “noise” is the role of Japan in World War II. We can call the parts of a subject that we do use “truth”. But depending on the study “noise” and “truth” can change. An example of this is Jacob. In Jacob’s life you can look at him as a true Christian, and call how he treated Laban “noise”. Or you can look at him as someone who held on to his sins; in that perspective his mistreatment of Laban is “truth”. So there is “noise” and “truth” in Jacob’s life- different things can be “noise” or “truth” depending on the study. “Noise” and “truth” is another way of explaining the seventh reason we need hermeneutics: different perspectives can change the meaning of things.

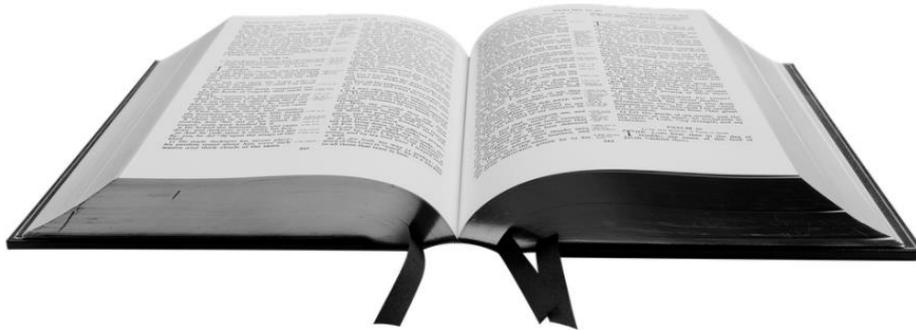
The seven reasons

We looked at seven reasons we need hermeneutics. We saw that in order to make correct exegesis, we need correct hermeneutics. The first reason we need hermeneutics is the fact that just because you think you know what a passage says, you might not understand the deeper meaning of that passage that applies to our time. We looked at Acts 27 and saw that with hermeneutics (parables), we can dig up the deeper meaning of a passage. The second reason we need hermeneutics is because we think “what you see is all there is.” We think that a part of a subject represents the whole truth on that subject. We looked at medicine and saw that when EGW says it is bad, she is just saying a part of the subject of medicine; the whole is that most medicine can be taken if necessary. With the hermeneutics such as line upon line and context, we can overlay parts and make the whole. The third reason we need hermeneutics is because words in Biblical and EGW’s time don’t have the same meaning today. We saw that EGW said that reproof is the nicest work. When we look at the passage, using hermeneutics like repeat and enlarge, we see that nicest in her time meant hardest. So, when we use hermeneutics, we can avoid thinking words mean something they don’t. The fourth reason we need hermeneutics is because of cultural differences. In the Middle East, God told Moses to take off his shoes, in the West, taking your shoes off on holy ground is strange. When we look at the context, we see that God told Moses to do that to show respect, He wasn’t creating a rule for us to follow. So, when we use hermeneutics like context, we won’t make the mistake of doing things that were cultural, not rules. The fifth reason we need hermeneutics is because circumstances change the meaning. The Bible says that in order for the rich young ruler to be saved, he had to sell everything he had; in order for the jailer to be saved, he just had to believe in Jesus. The only difference between them was their circumstances, and the reason we know that the circumstances are different is because we look at the context. So, in order to not confuse different meanings, we have to consider a hermeneutic like context, and it tells us the different circumstances. The sixth reason we need hermeneutics is because words can have different meanings, even in the same book. In the *Desire of Ages*, EGW says Jesus was glorified at the tomb, then after the tomb she says he wasn’t glorified yet. We need parables (hermeneutics) to help us find the meaning of words, because they change. The final reason we need hermeneutics we looked at was different perspectives. When we look at Jacob, we can say he was good, but

we have to ignore his evil deeds. We can say Jacob is bad, but then we have to ignore his good deeds. Noise and truth changes for different perspectives. To keep from getting confused over making applications one way or another, we have to remember that noise and truth changes, and that there isn't always one application- that is hermeneutics. So at last, we have to consider these seven reasons we need hermeneutics, and if we use hermeneutics, we will make correct exegesis.

In Summary:

Hermeneutics are parables,
they are the opposite of a plain reading.



The seven reasons we need hermeneutics:

- 1) Without hermeneutics we wouldn't know what the hidden treasure in a passage in the Bible or Spirit of Prophecy is.
- 2) Without hermeneutics we'd think a text in inspiration on a subject represents the whole truth of that subject, that's believing "what you see is all there is".
- 3) Without hermeneutics, we wouldn't recognize that words change over time, therefore we'd make mistakes.
- 4) Without hermeneutics we wouldn't consider that cultural differences change the meaning of words.
- 5) Without hermeneutics, we wouldn't understand that circumstances alter the meaning of words.
- 6) Without hermeneutics we would think that one word means the same thing all the time, but even in the same book, words can have different meanings.
- 7) Without hermeneutics, we would be confused over different perspectives.

With hermeneutics we:

- 1) When we use hermeneutics we will find hidden treasure that you can't find reading a passage from the Bible or SoP plainly.
- 2) To avoid thinking the part is the whole we have to lay part upon part (line upon line) and look at the context, which is using hermeneutics.
- 3) To avoid making false application by using a wrong meaning of a word, we must use hermeneutics, such as repeat and enlarge.
- 4) We have to consider the different culture the prophets were in, and to do that we have to look at the context- which is using hermeneutics.
- 5) Different circumstances change the meaning of phrases, so we have to understand the context of the statement- which is using hermeneutics.
- 6) The meaning of a word can change, even in the same book, so we must use hermeneutics to find its meaning.
- 7) To avoid getting confused over different perspectives, we must remember that noise and truth changes, that is a hermeneutic.

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