Hermeneutics Notes

Session 1 Introduction to Terms

HERMENEUTICS
- Greek: *hermeneuo* - to explain in words
- John 1:42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated [*hermeneuo*] Peter).

HERMENEUTICS
- The art and science of interpretation
- Science: based on an orderly system of rules
- Art: communication is flexible
- "Hermeneutics is not the interpretation itself, but the theory, the principles used in determining the interpretation" (Dr. Kenneth Shoemaker)

EXEGESIS
- Exegesis is the application of the principles of hermeneutics to arrive at a correct meaning of the text
- "ex" means "out of"
- Exegesis draws meaning out of a text

EISEGESIS
- "eis" means "into"
- Eisegesis reads meaning into a text
- 2Tim 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Session 2 The Need for Hermeneutics
- We use hermeneutics on an unconscious level in every day communication
- We only think about hermeneutics when misunderstanding occurs
- The more barriers there are to clear communication, the greater the need for hermeneutics

John 21:22 Jesus said to him [Peter], "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" 23 Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Four Barriers to Spontaneous Understanding of Scripture
1. Historical gap
2. Cultural gap
3. Linguistic gap
4. Philosophical/worldview gap

Varieties of Contemporary Preaching
- Sermonizing – presenting a human idea to which Scriptures are added for support
- Topical Preaching – organizing & explaining a set of biblical passages on a single topic
- Expository Preaching – using exegetical principles to explain the original meaning and proper application of a single passage

Session 3 Issues in Hermeneutics: Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Infallibility

"The Bible is an inspired text."
View 1: The biblical writers were inspired in somewhat the same sense as Shakespeare and other great writers.
View 2: God reveals himself in acts, not words. The words of the Bible are a human attempt to express an encounter with God in human, culturally meaningful words. The Bible *becomes* the Word of God when individuals read it and the words acquire personal, existential significance for them.
View 3: God worked through the personalities of the biblical writers in such a way that, without suspending their personal styles or expression or freedom, what they produced was literally "God-breathed." Scripture itself, not only its writers, was inspired.

Limited Inerrancy: Scripture is without error in matters of faith and practice. The biblical writings may include errors on other matters such as history, geography, science, and so forth.

Full Inerrancy: The original manuscripts of Scripture are without error in ALL those things that they assert.

Full Inerrancy
It is important to distinguish levels of intended precision.
Full inerrancy maintains that statements in Scripture are understood within the parameters of precision intended by their authors.
1. Numbers are often given approximately, a frequent practice in popular communication (Acts 2:41).
2. Speeches and quotations may be paraphrased rather than reproduced verbatim, a usual practice when summarizing someone's words (Acts 7:2f).
3. The world may be described as it appears to human viewers (Judges 19:14).
4. Speeches are recorded or paraphrased accurately without implying that what these persons communicated was correct (Job 11:1f).
5. Words can be used in a literal, figurative or symbolic sense
   - Literal: A crown was placed on the king's head
   - Figurative: (Angry father to his son) "If you do that again, I'll crown you!"
   - Symbolic: "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun… and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev 12:1)

Session 4 Issues in Hermeneutics: The Role of the Holy Spirit

"An unbeliever can understand Scripture just as well as a believer."
The Bible is a book. Any literate person can read and understand a book by looking at the meaning of the words, the rules of grammar, and so on. One's religious convictions have no effect on the ability to read and understand.

"An unbeliever cannot understand Scripture."
"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor 2:14).

Can an unbeliever understand Scripture?
Yes and no; it depends on what you mean
- The influence of sin (Rom 8:7)
- Matching our presuppositions to those of the text's author
- Understanding is not merely cognitive but experiential

I can expect the Holy Spirit to. . .
Bring understanding of the things of God.
Eph 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...

I can expect the Holy Spirit to. . .
Apply and convict
John 16:8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment

I cannot expect the Spirit to. . .
- do my hermeneutics homework for me
- take the place of my mind or guarantee accurate intellectual understanding
- create new meaning in the text

Session 5 History of Hermeneutics: The Old Testament through the New Testament

Why Study the History of Hermeneutics?
- To realize that our method is not the only one
- To identify (and hopefully avoid) mistakes of the past
- As a caution that good theory and good practice do not always go hand in hand

Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics
Hermeneutics begins following the Babylonian Captivity
"They [Ezra and the Levites] read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they [the people] understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8).

Hermeneutics Notes

Four Strands of Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics
- Literal (*Peshat*)
- Midrash
- Pesher
- Allegorical

Literal (*Peshat*)
Often not recorded in written form
Rules of Hillel:
- Inference from lesser to greater
- Analogy of expression
- Application from specific to general
- Inference from general to specific
- Reading in light of context

An example of Literal (*Peshat*): Inference from lesser to greater
"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matt 7:11)

Midrash
- "Exposition"
- Focus on making texts relevant or applicable to the contemporary situation
- Pharisees, Mishnah, Talmuds
- Led to fanciful and imaginative interpretation
- Letterism

An example of Midrashic Letterism
- The Hebrew letters in the name "Eliezer" (Abraham's servant) add up to 318
- This is also the total number of Abraham's trained men (Gen 14:14)
- Therefore, Eliezer alone was as valuable as an army of men

Pesher
- Eschatological midrash
- The Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran
- Every prophecy had a hidden meaning that was uniquely understood and fulfilled by their community
- Often expressed as "*this* present event is a fulfillment of *that* ancient prophecy"

Allegorical
- Details in the text are thought to be symbolic of deeper spiritual truth
- Philo (following Greek philosophy)
- Abraham's journey to Canaan is the story of a Stoic philosopher who marries Sarah (i.e., abstract wisdom) and leaves Chaldea (i.e., sensual understanding)

New Testament Hermeneutics
- New Testament authors usually interpret an Old Testament text in a literal sense
- A few examples seem unusual until we understand the interpretive methods of biblical times
- The New Testament lays the basis for the grammatical-historical method of modern evangelical hermeneutics

Session 6 History of Hermeneutics: Patristics through Reformation

Patristic Period (AD 100–600)
Three broad categories
- Alexandrian School
- School of Antioch
- Western School

Alexandrian School
- Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215)
- Origen (AD 185–253)
- Threefold sense of Scripture: Literal, moral, and allegorical
- Allegorical method dominated

School of Antioch
- John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)
- Theodore of Mopsuestia (AD 350–428)
- A text should be interpreted according to the rules of grammar and the facts of history
- The spiritual sense is in no way separate from the literal sense

Western School
- Augustine (AD 354–430)
- Fourfold sense of Scripture
1. Literal
2. Allegorical
3. Tropological (moral and ethical)
4. Anagogical (mystical or eschatological)

Middle Ages (AD 600–1500)
- Continuation of fourfold sense of Scripture
1. "The *letter* (literal) shows us what God and our fathers did (historical).
2. The *allegory* shows us where our faith is hid.
3. The *moral* meaning gives us rules for daily life.
4. The *anagogy* shows us where we end our strife (eschatological)."

Middle Ages (AD 600–1500)
Acceptance of the "Rule of Faith"
"Learn first what you should believe, and then go to the Bible and find it there."
– Hugo of St. Victor

Middle Ages (AD 600–1500)
- Few advocates of peshat
- Spanish Jews of twelfth - fifteenth centuries
- Victorines at the Abbey of St. Victor
- Nicholas of Lyra

Reformation (1500s)
- The Renaissance brought renewed interest in the classics and ancient languages
- Erasmus published the first critical edition of the Greek New Testament
- Reuchlin translated a Hebrew grammar and lexicon

Martin Luther
- Translated the Bible into the vernacular
- Rejected allegorical interpretation
- Advocated literal interpretation
- Perspicuity of Scripture

Perspicuity of Scripture
"It is not denied that the Scriptures contain many things hard to be understood; that they require diligent study; that all men need the guidance of the Holy Spirit… But it is maintained that in all things necessary to salvation they are sufficiently plain to be understood even by the unlearned."
– Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*,1:183

Perspicuity of Scripture
"and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2Tim 3:15)

John Calvin (1509–1564)
- *Sola Scriptura* replaced the "rule of faith"
- "Scripture interprets Scripture"
- "It is the first business of an interpreter to let the author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say."

Sola Scriptura
- "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20 NKJV)
- "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" (Gal 1:8)

William Tyndale
"Thou shalt understand, therefore, that the Scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way."

Session 7 History of Hermeneutics: Reformation through Twentieth-Century Developments

Post-Reformation (1550–1800s)
Three trends
- Confessionalism
- Pietism
- Rationalism/Liberalism

Confessionalism
- Bitter theological controversies prevailed
- Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics
- Often degenerated into mere proof-texting (i.e., lifting verses out of context)

Pietism
- Arose as a reaction to bitter fighting of the Reformation
- Used Scripture for mutual Christian concern
- Early Pietists used grammatical-historical methods for interpretation
- Later Pietists used subjective impressions, pious reflections (inner light)

Rationalism/Liberalism
- Rationalism upheld human reason as the highest authority for determining truth
- Empiricism is the belief that truth only comes through the five senses
- Reason was used to judge which parts of revelation would be considered acceptable
- The application of rationalistic principles to theology results in theological liberalism
- Focus on human authorship rather than divine authorship
- Concept of inspiration was downgraded to a mere religious experience
- Limited inerrancy
- Rejection of the supernatural
- Source criticism

Session 8 History of Hermeneutics: Twentieth-Century Developments

Trends of Twentieth-Century
- Dominance of Historical-Critical Method
- Neo-orthodoxy
- "New Hermeneutic"
- Reader-Response

Historical-Critical Method
- Emphasis on the human author
- Naturalism
- Evolutionary models
- What sources does this text incorporate?
- What does the text tell me about the developing religious consciousness of this primitive Hebrew cult?

Hermeneutics Notes

Historical-Critical Method
- Source Criticism
- Pentateuch: Documentary Hypothesis
- Gospels: Two-Source Theory and "Q"
- Form Criticism
- Classify a passage by its form
- Historical development of that passage

Neo-orthodoxy
- Rudolf Bultmann
- Bible viewed as religious myth
- Demythologize to an existential core

"New Hermeneutic"
- Not a method per se
- Asks how understanding occurs
- Texts are distanced from their authors
- The reader contributes to the interpretive process

Reader-Response
- Two kinds of reader-response:
1. Moderate reader-response
2. Radical reader-response

Moderate Reader-Response
- Reader contributes to the meaning
- Multiple, but limited, interpretations possible
- See "New Hermeneutic"

Radical Reader-Response
- Reader produces the meaning
- Unlimited possible meanings

Radical Reader-Response
- Reader = "reading community"
- Communities have shared pre-understandings because of similar social locations and experiences.
- Communities establish localized rather than normative meanings.

Radical Reader-Response
- Socio-Critical Theologies
1. Liberation
2. Feminist
3. Black

Session 9 An Overview of the Process

Overview
- The goal of all Bible study should be life-changing spiritual transformation
- This involves three crucial steps that are carried out in a particular order:
1. Observation
2. Interpretation
3. Application

Observation
- An act or instance of
- Noticing or perceiving
- Regarding attentively or watching
- Viewing or noting a fact of occurrence

Interpretation
- To set forth the meaning of; explain; explicate; elucidate
- To construe or understand in a particular way

Observations vs. Interpretations
- Observations generally answer: Who? What? When? Where?
- If someone can disagree with you, you have probably made an interpretation.

Why Observe?
- The same facts can be open to multiple interpretations.
- Observations can be asserted; interpretations must be supported.
- It is not wrong to interpret; we just need to know when we're doing it.

Why Observe?
- We often miss details that could limit the number of possible interpretation
- Story of Agassiz and the fish

Session 10 Steps in the Exegetical Process

The Exegetical Process
1. Historical-Cultural Analysis
2. Literary (Genre) Analysis
3. Contextual Analysis
4. Lexical-Syntactical Analysis
5. Theological Analysis
6. Application

Broad Historical-Cultural Analysis
What significant philosophical, geographical, historical, or cultural influences do I need to know to understand this text?

Hermeneutics Notes

Narrow Historical-Cultural Analysis
- Author
- Audience
- Dating
- Situation for Writing

Historical-Cultural Analysis
Questions about large-scale historical developments
- Old/New Testament History
- Old/New Testament Introduction
- Old/New Testament Survey

Questions about specific cultural practices
- Bible Handbooks
- Bible Dictionaries
- Old/New Testament Introduction
- Commentaries

Questions about geography
- Bible Atlas

Literary (Genre) Analysis
- What literary genre is my text?
- What reading strategy does the author expect a reader of that genre to use?
- What pitfalls do I need to avoid in interpreting this genre?

Contextual Analysis
- Broad Contextual
- How does my passage fit into the larger literary context in which it is found?
- Outlining

Contextual Analysis
- Narrow Contextual
- What is the flow or logic within my passage?
1. Logical relationships
2. Sentence diagramming

Lexical-Syntactical Analysis
- What do the words in my text mean?
1. Unclear words
2. Repeated words
3. "Technical" words

Hermeneutics Notes

Lexical-Syntactical Analysis
- When grammatical/syntactical issues are apparent
1. Hebrew or Greek Interlinear
2. Hebrew or Greek Grammar
3. Commentary

Lexical-Syntactical Analysis
- When words are translated in significantly different ways
1. Concordance
2. Hebrew or Greek Lexicon
3. Expository Dictionary

Theological Analysis
- How does the rest of biblical teaching relate to my passage (Analogy of Scripture)?
- What other passages speak of similar issues?
- To what systematic categories does my text contribute (e.g., Christology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology)?

Theological Analysis
- Compare and contrast the passage with other texts that address the same issues.
- Interpret less clear texts in light of clearer ones.

Finding other texts
- Concordance: Look up a particular word
- Chain reference Bible: Consult the verse references provided
- Bible dictionary: Look up a given topic
- Systematic theology textbook: Consult the chapter on your topic for discussions of major texts

Theological Analysis
- What have other students of this text understood it to be saying (Analogy of Faith)?
- What issues have I missed?

Theological Frameworks
- Stress discontinuity
1. "Theologies but no theology"
2. Dispensationalism – several distinct eras
- Stress continuity
1. Lutheran – Law & Gospel always present
2. Covenantal - two successive covenants (works & grace)
3. Epigenetic – progressive revelation

Cautions
- Beware of using commentaries or theological dictionaries prior to theological analysis
- Beware of obsolete resources

Application
- How does this text apply today?
- What principles does the text convey?
- Are there any culturally comparable situations to the situation of the text?
- Are the commands of the text culturally limited or unlimited?

Resources
More info at: www.DidacticMinistries.org
- Hermeneutics seminar handout
- Living by the Book (MP3 download)
- Theology Overview (MP3 download)
- Sermon Preparation (study paper)
- Recommended Reading List

References
1. Hermeneutics, Karelynne Ayayo
2. Hermeneutics, Kenneth Shoemaker
3. Hermeneutics, Henry Virkler
4. Living by the Book, Howard Hendricks

Appendix: adapted from Hermeneutics, by Henry Virkler

I. Historical-Cultural and Contextual Analysis

    a. Determine the general historical and cultural milieu of the writer and his audience.

        i. Determine the general historical circumstances.

        ii. Be aware of cultural circumstances and norms that add meaning to given actions.

        iii. Discern the level of spiritual commitment of the audience.

    b. Determine the purpose(s) the author had in writing a book.

        i. Noting explicit statements or repeated phrases.

        ii. Observing parenetical or hortatory sections.

        iii. Observing issues that are omitted or highlighted.

    c. Understand how the passage fits into its immediate context.

        i. Identify the major blocks of material in the book and show how they fit into a coherent whole.

        ii. Show how the passage under consideration fits into the flow of the author's argument.

        iii. Determine the perspective which the author intends to communicate—noumenological (the way things really are) or phenomenological (the way things appear).

      iv. Distinguish between descriptive and prescriptive truth.

      v. Distinguish between incidental details and the teaching focus of a passage.

      vi. Identify the person or category of persons for whom the particular passage is intended.

II. Literary Analysis

    a. Look for explicit references which indicate the author's intent regarding the method he was using.

    b. If the text does not explicitly identify the literary form of the passage, study the characteristics of the passage deductively to ascertain its form.

    c. Apply the principles of literary devices carefully but not rigidly.

      i. Simile

        1. Characteristic: an expressed comparison.

        2. Interpretation: usually a single point of similarity or contrast.

      ii. Metaphor

        1. Characteristic: an unexpressed comparison.

        2. Interpretation: usually a single point of similarity.

      iii. Proverb

        1. Characteristic: comparison expressed or unexpressed.

        2. Interpretation: usually a single point of similarity or contrast.

      iv. Parables

        1. Characteristics: an extended simile—comparisons are expressed and kept separate; the story and its meaning are consciously separated.

        2. Interpretation: determine the focal meaning of the story and show how the details fit naturally into that focal teaching.

      v. Allegories

        1. Characteristics: an extended metaphor—comparisons are unexpressed and intermingled; story and its meaning are carried along together.

        2. Interpretation: determine the multiple points of comparison intended by the author.

      vi. Types

        1. Characteristics:

          a. There must be some notable resemblance or analogy between the type and its antitype.

          b. There must be some evidence that the type was appointed by God to represent the thing typified.

        c.   A type must prefigure something in the future.

        d.   Classes of the type and its antitype: persons, events, institutions, offices, and actions.

2.   Interpretation:

        a.   Determine the significance within the time and culture of both the type and its antitype.

        b.   Search the text for the point(s) of correspondence between the type and its antitype as they relate to salvation history.

        c.   Note the important points of difference between the type and its antitype.

vii.   Prophecy

1.   Characteristics:

        a.   Be aware that the style is generally figurative and symbolic.

        b.   Watch for supernatural elements such as information conveyed by the announcement of angels, by visions, or by other supernatural means.

        c.   Notice the emphasis on the unseen world that lies behind the action of the visible world.

        d.   Follow the action to its usual conclusion by a sovereign intervention of God.

2.   Interpretation:

        a.   Determine the specific historical situation surrounding the composition of the writing. Study intervening history to see whether or not the prophecy has been fulfilled.

        b.   Study parallel passages or other cycles within the same prophecy for further information.

        c.   Analyze whether this passage is part of a progressive prediction, is capable of developmental fulfillment, or includes prophetic telescoping.

III.   Lexical-Syntactical Analysis

a.   Identify the general literary form.

b.   Trace the development of the author's theme and show how the passage under consideration fits into the context.

c.   Identify the natural divisions (paragraphs and sentences) of the text.

d.   Identify the connecting words within the paragraphs and sentences and show how they aid in understanding the author's progression of thought.

e.   Determine what the individual words mean.

        i.   Identify the multiple meanings a word possessed in its time and culture.

       ii.   Determine the single meaning intended by the author in a given context.

   f.   Analyze the syntax to show how it contributes to the understanding of a passage.

   g.   Put the results of your analysis into non-technical, easily understood words that clearly convey the author's intended meaning to the English reader.

IV.   Theological Analysis

   a.   Determine your own view of the nature of God's relationship to man.

   b.   Identify the implications of this view for the passage you are studying.

   c.   Assess the extent of theological knowledge available to the people of that time (the "analogy of Scripture").

   d.   Determine the meaning the passage possessed for its original recipients in the light of their knowledge.

   e.   Identify the additional knowledge about this topic which is available to us now because of later revelation (the "analogy of faith").

   f.   Compare your analysis with that of other interpreters.

   g.   Modify, correct, or expand your interpretation as appropriate.

V.   Application

   a.   Principlizing: Based on a historical-cultural, contextual, lexical-syntactical, and theological analysis of the narrative portion, ascertain by deductive study (1) the principle(s) that passage was intended to teach, or (2) the principles (descriptive truths) illustrated within the passage that remain relevant for the contemporary believer.

   b.   Trans-cultural transmission of biblical commands

       i.   Discern as accurately as possible the principle behind the command.

      ii.   Discern whether the principle is trans-cultural or culture-bound by examining the reason given for the principle.

     iii.   If a principle is trans-cultural, determine whether or not the same behavioral application in our culture will express the principle as adequately and accurately as the biblical one.

     iv.   If the behavioral expression of a principle should be changed, suggest a cultural equivalent that will express the God-given principle behind the original command.