

Exegesis & Hermeneutics

The Need to Interpret

- The main purpose of good interpretation: “To get at the plain meaning of the text”
 - The author’s intended meaning

The Dual Nature of Scripture

- Since the Holy Spirit inspired the original authors of the Bible (see 2 Peter 1:21)
 - And since God does not change (see 1 Sam. 15:29)
 - “The Bible *can’t* mean something now that it didn’t mean then!”
 - Our “hearing” from the Holy Spirit should not be in contradiction to the original audience receiving of the Word
- Because the Bible is *God’s* word
 - It has eternal relevance
 - It must be listened to and obeyed
- Because the Bible is also *human words in history*
 - Every biblical book has a historical particularity
 - Language, circumstances, culture
- We must first understand the text in its original setting to understand it in our current one

Humans as Interpreters

- We all interpret
- The meanings of words and phrases can change
 - by context and usage
 - Ex. “Bank”
 - And by tone
 - Example: “No one cares.”
 - Over time
 - Ex. “Suffer” in KJV (see Mark 10:14)
- We all bring presuppositions to the text
 - Our experiences
 - Our culture
 - Our prior understanding of words and ideas
 - Examples:
 - “God is our Father.”
 - Slavery
 - The goal is to recognize & limit them
- We cannot avoid interpretation

- So, we must learn to do it well
- How can we interpret well?

Interpretation is **NOT**...

- Uniqueness: Finding something no one has ever found before
- Hidden Meaning: Finding some secret message in the text
- Proof-Texting: Finding verses that support our *predisposed* theological viewpoint

Step 1: Exegesis

- “The careful, systematic study of Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning.” (Fee, p. 23)
- About learning “to read the text carefully and to ask the right questions of the text.” (Fee, p. 26)

Exegetical Cautions

1. We must not be selective with the task of exegesis
 - Not employing it only when it is a ‘tough’ text
 - But with *every* text
 - Lest we read our own foreign, often wrong, concepts into the text
 - Isogesis
2. We must use true ‘experts’
 - Scholars who study ancient culture, language, etc.
 - This includes tools such as:
 - Concordances
 - Bible Dictionaries
 - Bible Atlas
 - Commentaries
 - We never *start* with a commentary
 - We go to it *after* we have done our own work
 - Make sure your sources are trustworthy and accurate
 - Examples:
 - “Eye of the Needle” (Mark 10:24): 11th century AD
 - “Gehenna” (Matt. 5:22, 5:29-30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33; Mark 9:43, 9:45, 9:47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6): 12th century AD
 - Wikipedia is not a valid source!

Doing Good Exegesis

- Learn to read the text carefully
- Learn to ask the right questions of the text
- Involves looking at 2 things: Context & Content
- **Context**
 - Historical
 - Involves learning about the setting of origin of the text.
 - Culture, Geography, Events, Language
 - This differs somewhat depending on the text
 - 1500 year time-span
 - Written in a minimum of 5 different cultural and geographical settings
 - Outside resources are often helpful
 - Involves understanding the occasion & purpose of the writing
 - What circumstances prompted the biblical author to write what he wrote?
 - What goal does the author have in writing?
 - Instruction, warning, correction, encouragement
 - The text itself gives us this information
 - Ex. Revelation
 - Literary
 - Deriving meaning from the sentence, paragraph, book, and genre in which a text is written
 - Asking the question: “What’s the point?”
 - Tracing the author’s train of thought
 - This is accomplished, in part, by following the flow of paragraphs and units of thought
 - A downfall of the KJV, NASB, etc. which make every verse a new paragraph
 - Simply requires careful reading
- **Content**
 - Has to do with:
 - Word meaning
 - Grammatical location
 - Translational choices (at times)
 - Ex. 2 Cor. 5:16, NASB vs. NIV
 - Also see example in Fee, pg. 36
 - May require outside assistance
 - But only as the last step!

Step 2: Hermeneutics

- Finding the contemporary relevance of a text based on its original meaning
 - “What does it mean for us today?”
- Helps reduce our *subjective* reading of the text
 - Not making the text mean whatever we want it to
 - *The Bible cannot mean now what it didn't mean then*
 - What about a text having a hidden or deeper meaning? (NT's use of OT at times)
- Helps inform our devotional reading of Scripture

Exercise

- Matthew 21:28-31
 - What is the greater context?
 - What is Jesus' answer to His own question?
 - What is the point of the parable?