



# Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 7 – HERMENEUTICS: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION  
LESSON 123 – INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

*PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION* – LOUIS BERKHOF  
*KNOWING SCRIPTURE* – RC SPROUL

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# Introduction to Hermeneutics

- ▶ Primary Sources for this Study:
- ▶ *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* – Louis Berkhof
- ▶ *Knowing Scripture* – RC Sproul
- ▶ Recommended Resources:
- ▶ *Gospel Centered Hermeneutics* – Graeme Goldsworthy
- ▶ *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* – Walter Kaiser and Moises Silva
- ▶ *Exegetical Fallacies* – DA Carson
- ▶ *Expository Preaching* – John MacArthur

# Introduction to Hermeneutics

- ▶ Hermeneutics, from the Greek word “hermeneuo”, refers to the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation.
- ▶ Interpretation is defined as “the act of explaining the meaning of something.”
- ▶ General hermeneutics applies to the interpretation of all kinds of writings.
- ▶ Special hermeneutics focuses on interpreting specific kinds of literature: law, history, poetry, etc.
- ▶ *Hermeneutica Sacra* deals with a book that is unique on the realm of literature, the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

# Introduction to Hermeneutics

- ▶ Hermeneutics is usually studied with a view to the interpretation of literary works from the past in order to point out the ways in which differences and distance between the author and his readers may be removed.
- ▶ In interpreting Scripture we attempt to transport ourselves into the time and spirit of the author. It is not sufficient that we understand the meaning of the secondary authors (Moses, Isaiah, Paul, etc.); we must learn to know the mind of the Spirit of God!
- ▶ 1 Corinthians 2:10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

# Introduction to Hermeneutics

- ▶ The necessity of the study of hermeneutics follows from several considerations:
- ▶ Sin darkened the understanding of man, and still exercises a pernicious influence of his conscious mental life. Therefore, special effort must be made to guard against error.
- ▶ Men differ from one another in many ways that naturally cause them to drift apart mentally.
- ▶ They differ, for instance, in intellectual capacity, aesthetic taste, and moral quality resulting in a lack of true spiritual affinity.
- ▶ They differ in intellectual attainment, some being educated, and others uneducated.
- ▶ They differ in nationality, with a corresponding difference in language, forms of thought, customs, and moral foundation.

# Introduction to Hermeneutics

- ▶ The study of hermeneutics is very important for future ministers of the gospel, because:
- ▶ The intelligent study of the Bible only will furnish them with the material which they need for the construction of their theology.
- ▶ Every sermon they preach ought to rest on a solid exegetical foundation. This is one of the greatest needs of the present day.
- ▶ In instructing young people in the church, and in family visitation, they are often called upon unexpectedly to interpret passages of Scripture. On such occasions, a fair understanding of the laws of interpretation will aid them materially.
- ▶ It will be part of their duty to defend the truth over against the assaults of higher criticism, but in order to do this effectively, they must know how to handle it.

# Introduction to Hermeneutics

- ▶ JI Packer wrote, “If I were the devil (please, no comment), one of my first aims would be to stop folks from digging into the Bible. Knowing that it is the Word of God, teaching people to know and love and serve the God of the Word, I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges and traps, to frighten people off. How? Well I should try to distract all clergy from preaching and teaching the Bible, and spread the feeling that to study this ancient book directly is a burdensome extra that modern Christians can forgo without loss. I should broadcast doubts about the truth and relevance and good sense and straightforwardness of the Bible, and if any still insisted on reading it I should lure them into assuming that the benefit of the practice lies in the noble and tranquil feelings evoked by it rather than in noting what Scripture actually says. At all cost I should want to keep them from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of its message.”

# Introduction to Hermeneutics

- ▶ RC Sproul wrote, “Because our faith depends on specific content – the content of Scripture – it’s vitally important that the Christian be immersed in the study of sacred Scripture. Reading the Bible is important, but we also must do more than read it. We must study it. We must make a concerted effort to understand what we’re reading. For if our faith is grounded in the content of Scripture, we must understand the meaning of its content – its teaching – if we are going to have an informed faith in what God has actually said. We’re saved by Jesus, but not by just any Jesus. It’s not the Muslim Jesus or the Mormon Jesus. It’s the Biblical Jesus. And we can’t know or trust in the Biblical Jesus if we don’t understand what Scripture says about Him, from Genesis to Revelation.”

# Why Study the Bible?

- ▶ Two Myths –
- ▶ The Bible is so difficult to understand that only highly skilled theologians with technical training can deal with the Scripture.
- ▶ The Bible is boring.
- ▶ The Clarity of Scripture –
- ▶ The Reformers declared their total confidence in the perspicuity of Scripture. This refers to the clarity of Scripture. The Bible is simple enough for any literate person to understand its basic meaning. This is not to say all parts of the Bible are equally clear or that there are no difficult passages. The essential content of Scripture is clear enough to be understood easily (with the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit).

# Why Study the Bible?

- ▶ The content of Biblical Christianity is not concealed in vague symbols that require some sort of special insight to grasp. There is no special intellectual prowess or spiritual gift that is necessary to understand the basic message of Scripture.
- ▶ The Biblical Basis for Bible Study: God sovereignly commands that His Word be taught so diligently that it penetrates the heart.
- ▶ Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

# Why Study the Bible?

- ▶ 2 Timothy 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 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. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- ▶ Continue in the things you have learned – continuity and consistency.
- ▶ Sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation – wisdom is a skill of learning how to live a life that is pleasing to God.
- ▶ Knowing from whom you have learned them – the ultimate source of the knowledge we have from Scripture is its Author.

# Why Study the Bible?

- ▶ Scripture is inspired by God – “God-breathed” – this is not a matter of the method whereby God transmitted His Word through human authors, but rather a statement of the origin or source of Scripture. The Bible comes from God.
- ▶ Scripture is profitable for doctrine – teaching.
- ▶ Scripture is profitable for reproof, correction, and instruction (training) in righteousness – rebuke for sin, correction for error, and the know how for being righteous.
- ▶ That the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- ▶ Biblically illiterate Christians are not only inadequate but unequipped. In fact, they are inadequate because they are not equipped.

# Next Week

- ▶ The Bible as Revelation: Personal Bible Study and Private Interpretations.