HERMENEUTICS: THE SCIENCE OF INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Objectives
• To be convinced of the value and scope of hermeneutics.
• To master the basic principles of Biblical hermeneutics.

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Course Assignments
1. Weekly reading reports and word studies, due every Monday. 100 / 500 points.
2. Homework assignments, due every Wednesday. 200 / 500 points.
3. Mid-term and Final examinations. Each test is 100 / 500 points.

Reading Assignments
• Critiques must be at least 200 words including a summary of the author’s main point, a critique of points of disagreement, and a statement of points of agreement.
1. Pages 119-129 Rediscovering Expository Preaching (Introduction) Due:
2. Pages 129-136 Rediscovering Expository Preaching (Introduction) Due:
3. Pages 209-215 Rediscovering Expository Preaching (Observation) Due:
4. Chapter 1 Preaching with Purpose (Purpose) Due:
5. Chapter 5 Preaching with Purpose (The preaching portion) Due:
6. Chapter 6 Preaching with Purpose (Determining the purpose) Due:
7. “Brothers, Let us Query the Text” Due:
8. Word study #1 Due:
9. Word study #2 Due:
10. Word study #3 Due:
WHAT IS HERMENEUTICS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

I. Six categories of Bible passages that are hard to interpret
A. The grammar and syntax are unfamiliar or unclear.
   • Revelation 13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Does the phrase “from the foundation of the world” describe the names or the Lamb?
   • 2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died. Is Christ’s love toward us, or our love toward Christ?
   • Romans 3:23-26 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is the subject of this sentence? The verb?
B. The vocabulary and terms are difficult to define.
   • 1 Corinthians 15:15 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? What in the world is this?
   • 1 Timothy 2:15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. Are women saved by having babies?
   • John 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. What is the drawing here? Who are the peoples?
C. The topic is complex.
   • Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. How is the New Testament related to the Old?
   • John 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God. Do people have to choose to be saved?
   • Romans 3:21-26 (see above) What is his main point, and what are his supporting reasons?
   • Galatians 5:16 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. What does it mean to be out from under the law?
   • Matthew 24:34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Was Jesus wrong? Did He return before the disciples died? Who is the "generation"? What does the "these things" refer to?
D. Certain verses seem to contradict.
   • Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. Was Ab
   • James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Was Abraham justified by faith, works, or both?
   • Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.
   • John 10:30 I and my Father are one. If Jesus is God, how can He not know all things?
E. Cultural uncertainties are present.
   • 1 Corinthians 11:4 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. What is the head covering?
   • Luke 5:37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. What is happening here?
   • John 13:26 Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Why did Jesus give wet bread to Judas?
F. The plain meaning seems to go against "common sense" or experience.
   • Luke 9:59-60 Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."
   • Mark 10:21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." Do we have to sell all our goods to become Christians?

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1 Many times one verse will fit several categories. For example, Matthew 10:22 contains a difficult term, seems to contradict other passages, and seems to go against the experience of some people.

- Acts 2:16, 19-20 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; ... And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come. Where was the blood and fire on the day of Pentecost?
- Other examples: Hebrews 8:8-10, Matthew 11:14

H. Some Old Testament prophecies contain a blend of details referring to God’s Kingdom, Israel, other nations, and the Messiah’s mission.

- Daniel 11:15-45 Is this describing the antichrist, someone else, or both?
- Jeremiah 31:31-33 Is this describing Israel, the church, or both?
- Psalm 110 Does this psalm describe the Day of Pentecost, the Millennium, or both?

II. Misconceptions about hermeneutics

A. Hermeneutics is only for professors.
Answer: Everyone is a theologian, and everyone does hermeneutics, but some people are better than others.

B. Hermeneutics is a manmade system that quenches the Spirit.
Answer: The Spirit always works with the Word. To fully value the Holy Spirit we must search out the one meaning of every verse He inspired. To skip hermeneutics is to quench the Spirit.

C. Hermeneutics is part of worldly philosophy and high intellectualism that distracts from evangelism. We should spend our time evangelizing, not talking about words that aren’t even in the Bible.
Answer: With an attitude like that, your children won’t be able to evangelize, because the Gospel will be lost in a sea of mushy, subjective, hasty conclusions by men and women who twist Scriptures more often than they correctly understand them.

III. Foundational definitions of hermeneutics

A. “Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation.” Bernard Ramm²
B. Hermeneutics is “a set of guidelines by which a person may interpret Scripture.” Robertson McQuilkin³
C. Hermeneutics is “rules of interpretation or key interpretive principles.” James Rosscup⁴
D. “Control or guidance is necessary to overcome the subjective influences each person brings to the reading of the Bible. ... This control is the business of hermeneutics.” Elliott Johnson⁵

E. Hermeneutics is the art of discovering what God actually meant in a passage of the Bible through observation, reason, and valid applications.
1. “Art” Is it art or science? Art is a better word than science because art emphasizes skill whereas science emphasizes following the rules. Art does follow rules, but science does not necessarily employ skill.
2. “Discovering” Hermeneutics does not invent meanings. Rather it accurately uncovers what the author had put in the words.
3. “What God actually meant” There is one purpose in any portion of the Bible, and that purpose came from the mind of God. Hermeneutics seeks that one purpose.
4. “Observation, reason, and valid applications” Observation gathers the facts, reason organizes them to discover what God meant, and application presses them on real life.

IV. Fields of study included or connected to hermeneutics

- The science of hermeneutics touches other major fields of research and thought.
  A. Philosophy: Presuppositions about life, values, and methods for determining truth make up a philosophy or worldview and are vital to hermeneutics.
  B. Linguistics: The study of language laws, word histories, and vocabulary usage is part of hermeneutics.
  C. Logic: When searching for truth the reasoning processes must be sharpened so that they can accurately judge truth and falsehood, absolutes and degrees.
  D. Epistemology: The science of certainty answers the question, “How do we know that we know?”
  E. Archeology: Certain discoveries add certainty or cast doubt on interpretations of prophecy.

³ Robertson McQuilkin, Understanding and Applying the Bible, Moody Press, page 59.
⁴ James Rosscup, Rediscovering Expository Preaching, W Publishing Group, 1992, pages 120-121.
F. Cultural and historical anthropology: The culture of those nations living in and near Israel immediately affects many passages.

V. Exegesis vs. eisegesis
A. Exegesis means to draw the meaning out of the words.
- Exegesis can be used to refer to the entire task of hermeneutics up to the application of Scripture. There is some similarity among the terms: exegesis, observation, research, and exposition.

B. Eisegetics means to take the meaning to the words.
1. Eisegetics is wrong because it changes God's Word into man's presuppositions.
2. Eisegetics is wrong because it ignores inspiration.
3. Eisegetics is wrong because it does not protect the Gospel.
4. Eisegetics is wrong because it is lazy.
5. Eisegetics is wrong because it implies that our thoughts are just as good as God's thoughts.
   - When you are preaching from eisegetical "God's listening. And He is saying, 'I didn't say that.' [The preacher] just said I said that, but I know what I said. I wrote the book, and I didn't say that."[6]

C. Examples of eisegetical conclusions
   John 10:28-29 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."
   Proposition #1: I believe you can lose your salvation.
   Proposition #2: John 10 says that no man can take away your salvation.
   Eisegetical conclusion: Men may choose to take themselves out of the hand of God.

   John 10:30 "I and My Father are one."
   Proposition #1: I believe Jesus is not God.
   Proposition #2: John 10 says that Jesus is God.
   Eisegetical conclusion: Jesus has the same mindset as the Father, but He is not God.

   John 10:31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.
   Proposition #1: I believe that men are basically good.
   Proposition #2: John 10 says that the Jews tried to kill a good man.
   Eisegetical conclusion: The Jews were basically bad, but other men are not basically bad.

   John 10:34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'?"
   Proposition #1: I believe that men are little gods.
   Proposition #2: John 10 references Jesus who references Psalm 82 which references God referencing human kings.
   Eisegetical conclusion: All humans are little gods who can speak money and health into existence.

VI. Value of hermeneutics
A. Hermeneutics brings the message of the Bible to the minds and the hearts of God's people.
B. Hermeneutics answers the difficult questions of culture, church life, and eternity.
C. Hermeneutics protects the Gospel so that future generations will have it. Nearly all false doctrines were birthed by a bad hermeneutic.[7]
D. Hermeneutics provides the differences between denominations and theology.
   1. Presbyterians sprinkle their babies and Baptists dip believers because of their hermeneutic.
   2. Dispensationalists believe in a secret rapture and Covenant Theologians mock it because of their hermeneutic.
   3. Evangelicals believe that miracles happened in the Bible, and liberals believe the miracles of the Bible are mere pictures of normal events because of their hermeneutic.
   - "Hardly any study in the whole vast realm of intellectual life could be more important than the science of hermeneutics as applied to the Word of God, ... When [hermeneutics] is absent not only have men misinterpreted the word, but they have taken falsehood out of truth, and thus have deceived many when they should have led them out of darkness into light."[8]

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[7] "Hermeneutics" refers to the individual rules, "hermeneutic" refers to a set of rules for interpretation.
Homework

Due: __________

List the 6 categories of difficulties that can be found in the Scriptures.

1. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________
4. ______________________________________
5. ______________________________________
6. ______________________________________

Write the definition of hermeneutics.

7. ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________

8. Is hermeneutics an art or a science, and why? _____________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________

9. What are the three overlapping disciplines that form the basis of accurate Bible interpretation?
   ____________________________________________________________________________

Which is correct, exegesis or eisegesis, and why?

10. ____________________________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________________________

Find 10 more passages with hermeneutical difficulties, and state the difficulty.

11. ____________________________________________________________________________
12. ____________________________________________________________________________
13. ____________________________________________________________________________
14. ____________________________________________________________________________
15. ____________________________________________________________________________
16. ____________________________________________________________________________
17. ____________________________________________________________________________
18. ____________________________________________________________________________
19. ____________________________________________________________________________
20. ____________________________________________________________________________