

**Intro:**

A few years ago — 4 to be exact — we did a whole series of lessons on our next subject.

Recently, we have done:

- Inspiration
- Inerrancy
- The Canon [the list of books recognized to be Holy Scripture]

What would be next in a series related to *the Bible*?

- Biblical interpretation, or *Hermeneutics*.

What I want to do in this lesson is to survey the topic once again.

Let's start with a definition:

“Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation. Exegesis consists of the actual interpretation of the Bible, the bringing out of its meaning, whereas hermeneutics establishes the principles by which exegesis is practiced.”<sup>1</sup>

- Everyone has a system of interpretation, conscious or not.
- Your hermeneutic is your way of interpreting the Bible.

**I. Some hermeneutical systems [can you name some]****A. Allegorical hermeneutics**

1. Symbolical interpretation
2. Usually resorted to when literal sense seems unacceptable
3. Actual words used not in normal sense, but in symbolic sense
4. Not usually used consistently, but most often in prophecy
5. Origen an extreme example from early church
  - a. Wanted to defeat ‘chiliasm’ [belief in millennial kingdom], ‘superstitious literalism’ and Gnosticism
  - b. But opened the door to other, greater evils

**B. Literal interpretation**

1. Might be better described as ‘plain’ or ‘normal’ interpretation, since it does allow for legitimate use of symbolical language

<sup>1</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology : A Popular Systemic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1999). 125.

2. Takes language in normal sense [more later]
- C. Semi-allegorical or semi-literal
1. An attempt to combine ‘allegorical’ and literal methods, especially in prophecy
  2. Problem is where to does literal stop and allegorical begin
- D. Theological (or systematical)

One theological idea dominates interpretation and makes all passages conform to its idea

Amillennialism could be an example

- In amillennialism, “the theological system does not permit an actual kingdom on this earth over which Christ reigns; therefore, certain passages cannot be interpreted literally.”<sup>2</sup>

Covenant theology demands no distinction between Israel and the Church – thus demands no millennial kingdom on earth.

## II. The rationale for literal [normal, plain] hermeneutics

- A. The purpose of language
1. Language is intended to communicate
  2. God created man in his image, gave gift of speech, reveals himself to man, expects worship in accordance with the revelation given in human language
  3. Two ramifications
    - a. God designed language to be sufficient to fulfill his purpose in revelation
    - b. God would expect men to use language in the normal sense

There are no hidden keys or codes to the Bible.

- B. The need for objectivity
1. Abandonment of normal methods increases subjectivity

<sup>2</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 128.

2. Interpretation becomes more and more just someone's opinion the less a literal method is followed

A friend once said to me, "Oh, there's so many interpretations." Are there?

### C. The example of the Bible

1. The prophecies of the Lord's first coming provide the pattern

- a. More than 300 of these

- b. A few examples

- 1) Micah 5.2
- 2) Mal 3.1
- 3) Isa 7.14, 9.1-2
- 4) Ps 16.9-10

2. Some prophecies are fulfilled typically

- a. Typical = not exactly literally or not completely

- b. Only 24 such prophecies cited in NT (out of hundreds)

- c. A few examples

- 1) Mt 2.15 compare Hos 11.1
- 2) Mt 2.18 compare Jer 31.15
- 3) Ac 2.17-21 compare Joel 2.28-32

- d. But note

- 1) Some of these examples may yet be fulfilled completely but were fulfilled in a preliminary way in the NT (the Joel passage for example).
- 2) The authors of the NT were operating under inspiration.
- 3) The overall and overwhelming NT pattern is for literal interpretation

## III. Principles of normal hermeneutics

A. Interpret grammatically

B. Interpret contextually

1. In light of surrounding passages

- a. Author's theme and purpose

- b. Immediate context of passages, etc
- 2. In light of context of whole Bible, ultimately
- C. Compare Scripture with Scripture
  - 1. Not just human author's meaning but God's – one author, ultimately
  - 2. "God's meaning may not be fully revealed in the original human author's writing but is revealed when Scripture is compared with Scripture."<sup>3</sup>
  - 3. Human authors did not always understand everything they wrote completely.
- D. Recognize progressiveness of Scripture
  - 1. Revelation 'unfolds' through long periods of time
  - 2. Some aspects of revelation hidden until apostolic age ('mystery of the church' for example)
  - 3. Some parts of revelation are rescinded later [such as dietary laws]
  - 4. Note some examples that necessitate progression in revelation
    - a. Mt 10.5-7 compare Mt 28.18-20
    - b. Lk 9.3 compare Lk 22.36
    - c. Gen 17.10 compare Gal 5.2
    - d. Ex 20.8 compare Ac 20.7
  - 5. Note these passages also
    - a. Jn 1.17
    - b. Jn 16.24
    - c. 2 Cor 3.7-11

Key word: "divinely sanctioned change"
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#### IV. Objection to normal hermeneutics

Since NT uses OT in a non-literal sense (in some places) we are not required to use a non-literal sense.
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- A. NT most often uses a normal, literal interpretation of OT passages
- B. NT sometimes uses the OT in different ways [but still dependent on literal meaning]

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<sup>3</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 129.

1. As an illustration (Rm 9.9-12)
  2. As an analogy (1 Cor 1.19)
  3. By way of application (Rm 12.19)
  4. Rhetorically (Jas 4.6)
- C. But NT most often uses OT in the normal and plain sense (see previous examples)

“Hardly ever do New Testament writers not use the Old Testament in a historical-grammatical sense (which, of course, includes the use of figures of speech). The rule is that they interpreted the Old Testament plainly; exceptions are rare and typological (but in a sense all of the Old Testament is typical in relation to the fuller revelation of the New Testament).

“However, the crux of the matter is this: Can we as interpreters follow the example of the biblical writers in these rare exceptional uses of the Old Testament that seem to be nonliteral? Of course, the answer is yes, if we want to. But if we do it, we do so without apostolic authority, only with personal authority; comparatively, that is not much authority. Any and all uses of the Old Testament that the New Testament writers made were made under divine inspiration and were therefore done properly and authoritatively. If we depart from the plain sense of the text, we do so improperly without such authority. What the biblical writers wrote was infallible; the work of all interpreters is fallible.

“To sum up: It is God who desired to give man His Word. It is God who also gave the gift of language so He could fulfill that desire. He gave us His Word in order to communicate, not confound. We should seek to understand that communication plainly, for that is the normal way beings communicate.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 131.

## V. Illumination

### A. Defined

1. Christ brings light to all men to have the opportunity of a deeper understanding of God's revelation
  - a. Jn 1.9
  - b. 2 Tim 1.10
2. Christian conversion brings further enlightenment into truth
  - a. Heb 6.4
  - b. Eph 1.18
  - c. Eph 3.9

### B. The means of illumination

See especially Jn 16.12-15 and 1 Cor 2.9-3.2.

1. "The Spirit is the Teacher, and His presence in the believer guarantees the availability of this ministry to all believers.
2. "Unbelievers, therefore, cannot experience this ministry. Even though they may achieve a high level of understanding of the Bible, they consider what they know basically as foolishness.
3. "The Spirit's teaching encompasses "all the truth," including that of "what is to come," i.e. Christian doctrine including prophecy.
4. "Carnality in the believer can thwart this ministry.
5. "The purpose of the Spirit's ministry is to glorify Christ.
6. "The Spirit will use those who have the gift of teaching to carry out His ministry (Rom. 12:7; 1 John 2:27). This includes the writings of those who, now dead, have left the results of the Spirit's work in their lives in that written form."<sup>5</sup>

### C. Qualifications:

1. Illumination *is not* direct revelation
2. Spirit uses our minds, our study, and our meditation the words of the Bible
3. The result of illumination is to glorify Christ and guide Christians in their walk.

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<sup>5</sup> These six points directly from Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 132.