

Learning and Applying Biblical Hermeneutics

Dry Sermon

After a long, **dry** sermon, the minister announced that he would like to meet with the **board** after the service.

The first man to arrive **was a stranger**.

"You misunderstood my announcement," said the minister, the meeting is for the **board**.

"I know," said the man, **"if there was anyone more board than me, I'd like to meet him."**

This sermon is not **short**, but we hope you will not find it **dry** or **boring**.

Introduction:

- A. When a person becomes a Christian, he is often eager and delighted to begin his new life, but success in that life depends on receiving spiritual nourishment from the Bible, the Word of God.
- B. Studying Scripture can be both **enjoyable** and **profitable**, or it can become **boring, frustrating**, and **unsatisfying**, depending on how one **approaches** it.
 - 1. Many people simply do not know how to study properly.
 - a. As a result, they fail to receive the spiritual nutrition they need, may draw wrong conclusions, become deceived by false teachings, or even give up the faith altogether.
 - b. Peter warns that abandoning the faith can leave a person worse off than before.
 - 2. Using faulty study methods—or merely repeating tradition—and then teaching **error** to others only

compounds the sin, which is why **James** warns that **teachers** will be **judged more strictly**.

James 3:1 & 2 Not many [of you] should become teachers [self-constituted censors and reprovers of others], my brothers, for you know that we [teachers] will be judged by a higher standard and with greater severity [than other people].--Thus we assume the greater accountability and the more condemnation. **Amplified**.

Body

I. Let's begin the lesson proper by looking together at what the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth:

1 Cor 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

A. Why would God command something like this if He approved of the opposite, **denominationalism as it is today**, or if it were not possible for brethren to “**all speak the same thing**” and be “**perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**”?

B. The **number** of things over which disciples who study the Bible **disagree** is **astounding**.

1. We could easily produce a list of over 300 things...
2. Why is this true?

II. How can one know for sure his position on any issue is the truth? Think about it.

A. Can one know the truth based on...

1. How many times he has heard or read a passage or related passages he has been **told** are relevant to a subject?

2. How well he listens or reads?
3. Which church he belongs to?
4. How eloquent his teachers or mentors are or were? OR,

5. **The method he uses to study?**

- B. If you do not agree that the answer to the question is the last one, then you should seriously consider that your conclusions on some very important Bible topics may have been reached prematurely.

II. Why do Bible Students differ?

- A. "The discrepancies in interpretations may be accounted for upon one of four hypotheses:

- 1) Those who profess to draw conclusions from the Bible are dishonest; or
- 2) The Bible itself is unintelligible, or
- 3) It teaches the contradictions which are professedly drawn from it; **or**
- 4) It is not interpreted according to the proper method" **(The Organon of Scriptures).**

- B. We can rule out the first three, and the 4th one **makes sense.**

II. What are we talking about when we refer to interpreting Scripture according to the "*proper method*"?

- A. We are talking about hermeneutics.

1. **Wikipedia defines Biblical hermeneutics as:**

‘methods of interpretation’, “methodology of Biblical interpretation”, specifically in the sense of devising ‘rules’ for ‘correct Biblical interpretation’.

2. The **passage** that best addresses the need to have and apply good hermeneutics is:

2 Tim. 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**"

3. Some do not like rules, but they are necessary if we want to ensure that we are correct in our biblical interpretation.

B. Biblical hermeneutics is "*the science of knowing how to properly interpret the various types of literature and the various passages relating to Bible topics, found in the Bible.*"

1. This is the **purpose** of biblical hermeneutics - to help us know how to interpret, understand, and **apply** the Bible.
2. You show me a person who is not interested in biblical hermeneutics, and I'll show you a person who either is not interested in the **truth revealed in the Bible** or thinks God gives him revelation without his having to learn it from proper study.

III. **Good Biblical hermeneutics to get the truth requires that we look at history, grammar, context, and the meaning of words:**

- A. **Historical** interpretation refers to understanding the culture, background, and situation that prompted the text.
- B. **Grammatical** interpretation is recognizing the rules of grammar and nuances of the Hebrew and Greek languages and applying those principles to the understanding of a passage.

C. **Contextual** interpretation involves considering the surrounding context of a verse/passage when determining its meaning.

1. Taking phrases or verses out of context **leads to misunderstanding**.
2. However, we must also be careful not to assume that everything nearby belongs to the same context, since a writer may have moved on to another subject.
 - a. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, **Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.**
 - b. Because this verse appears near statements about wealth and poverty, some conclude that it is about **economics**, yet the passage is no more limited to economics than to any other way a child should be trained.

We must look up the...

D. **Meaning of words**

1. There are many versions or translations, and virtually all of them have made some mistakes, such as using a word that changes the meaning, which we shall illustrate later in this lesson.
2. Some mistakenly view biblical hermeneutics as limiting our ability to learn new truths from God's Word or stifling the Holy Spirit's ability to reveal to us the meaning of God's Word.
 - a. This is not the case.

- b. The Holy Spirit teaches through the Word, and we must **learn** from **it**.
- c. The **goal** of biblical hermeneutics is to point us to the correct interpretation, which is **truth already written** into the text by men inspired of God.
 - 1) The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to protect us from **improperly** applying Scripture to a particular situation.
 - 2) Biblical hermeneutics points us to the true meaning and application of Scripture.

IV. **Let's talk now about the difference between exegesis and eisegesis.**

A. ***Exegesis*** and ***eisegesis*** are two conflicting approaches in Bible study.

B. Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis.

The word exegesis literally means ***“to lead out of,”*** meaning the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text as he uses the best hermeneutics he knows.

C. The opposite approach to proper study of Scripture is ***eisegesis***.

- 1. This is where the Bible interpreter tries to ***“force”*** the Bible to mean something that fits their existing belief or understanding of a particular issue or doctrine.
- 2. Although a person may apply good hermeneutics to some issues, he may not be willing to do so

when studying an issue that is emotional or one that would require a change that would result in difficulties in life...

- a. Like maybe a preacher getting fired, or
- b. Not being asked to hold meetings, or the possibility of being ostracized, etc.

3. People who interpret the Bible this way are usually not willing to let the Bible speak for itself and let the chips fall where they may.

- a. They start with the up-front goal of proving a point they already believe in, and everything they read and interpret is **filtered** through that paradigm.

- b. We should have the mind of **A.W. Tozer**, who wrote:

“The true follower of Christ will not ask, “If I embrace this truth, what will it cost me?” Rather he will say, “This is true. God help me to walk in it, let come what may!”

D. The word ***eisegesis*** literally means “***to lead into***,” which means the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants.

E. Obviously, only **exegesis** does justice to the text.

1. **Eisegesis** is a mishandling of the text and often leads to a misinterpretation.
2. **Exegesis** is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its **grammar, syntax, context, and application**.

3. **Eisegesis** is concerned only with making a point, even at the expense of the meaning of words or the true application.

4. **2 Tim. 2: 15** commands us to use exegetical methods:

“Present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

a. An honest student of the Bible will be an **exegete**, allowing the text and other passages to speak, all of which he will weigh carefully (seeking harmony) in his study of the meaning of a text or the truth regarding an issue.

b. “**Eisegesis** easily lends itself to error, as the would-be interpreter attempts to align the text with his own preconceived notions.” (John Nel)

5. **Exegesis** allows us to agree with the Bible; **eisegesis** seeks to force the Bible to agree with us.

F. The process of exegesis involves:

- 1) **observation**: what does the passage say?
- 2) **interpretation**: what does the passage mean?
- 3) **correlation**: how does the passage relate to the rest of the Bible? and
- 4) **application**: how should this passage affect my life?

G. Eisegesis, on the other hand, involves:

- 1) **Imagination**: what idea do I want to present?
- 2) **Exploration**: what Scripture passage seems to fit with my idea? and
- 3) **Application**: what does my idea mean?

1. Notice that, in **eisegesis**, there is **no** examination of the words of the text or their relationship with each other, **no** cross-referencing with related passages, and **no** real desire to understand the actual meaning.

- a. Scripture serves only as a **prop** to the interpreter's idea.
- b. To illustrate, let us consider the subject **"impossibility of apostasy"** (OSAS).
 - 1) Those who promote this doctrine often use **Eph 4:30 as support: "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."**
 - 2) They interpret this to mean that a Christian is sealed inside a container that cannot be opened, and therefore can never lose his salvation.
 - i. That conclusion is derived using BAD hermeneutics.
 - ii. To be confident we have the truth, we must use GOOD hermeneutics.
 - 3) **2 Cor 1:22** – is a related passage:

BARNES "Who hath also sealed us" - The word used here...means to seal up; to close and make fast with a seal, or signet; as, e. g., books, letters, etc. that they may not be read. It is also used in the sense of setting a mark on anything, or a seal, to denote that it is genuine, authentic, confirmed, or approved, as when a deed, compact, or agreement is sealed. It is thus made sure; and is confirmed or established. Hence, it is applied to persons, as denoting that they are approved, as in Rev 7:3;

- i. Those who use **Eph 4:30** to teach the *impossibility of apostasy* fail to consider and apply the **many passages** that clearly teach a person can fall away, which is **eisegesis**—a clear example of the error that results when people fail to use good hermeneutics.
- ii. One who seeks to study by **exegesis**, on the other hand, realizing that there are numerous clear passages throughout the Bible that

teach that one may fall away, sees the red flag, **rejects** *eisegesis*, and proceeds to look at the passage without the traditional lens that has influenced many regarding this passage.

3. Of course, **exegesis** takes more time than **eisegesis**.

- a. But if we are to be those unashamed workmen “**who correctly handle the word of truth,**” then we must **take the time** to truly understand the text.
- b. **Exegesis** is the only way to reach that goal.

VI. To understand a scripture/passage, we must observe rules of hermeneutics.

- A. We cannot grasp the Bible’s revealed truth without following sound principles of interpretation, which we shall call RULES.
- B. I want to briefly review a list of common-sense rules with you. Some question the validity of some of them—judge for yourself.
- C. The List:

1. Have a love for truth.

- a. Obviously, if a man doesn't have a love for truth, he won't find it in the Bible.
- b. In fact, failure to have a love for truth will result in believing a lie (2 Thes. 2:10-12).

2. Study with proper motive.

- a. If a man studies the Bible to prove beliefs he already has, he isn't likely to gain much from his efforts.

- b. Neither is a man likely to learn the truth if he studies the Bible in order to disprove it, although some have.
- c. A man must study it honestly, with an open mind, free of preconceived ideas, and take it for what it says.

3. Rightly divide the word - or "*handle aright*" as the RV translates it.

- a. This involves:
 - 1) Knowing that there are three dispensations or periods of time - Patriarchal; Mosaic; and Christian.
 - 2) Knowing the difference between the Old and New Testament.
- b. A considerable number of people who profess Christianity do not rightly divide the word in this way.

4. Consider who the author is or who is speaking.

- a. The speaker may be a man not inspired, or even the devil, and certainly we do not have to obey what they have said.
- b. But if Jesus or an apostle is speaking, it could be for us to obey - determined by who the author is addressing.

5. Consider who is addressed, particularly their relationship to God.

- a. Take for example **Luke 24:49**. *"And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high".*
 - 1) If we fail to consider who is addressed, we would have to go to Jerusalem...

b. Another example: I John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".*

- 1) Who is being addressed here?
- 2) Could just anyone apply that to himself?
- 3) On over in **ch. 2:7**, he addresses it to "*brethren*".
 - i. It is brethren who need to be in the habit of confessing sins, rather than denying them.
 - ii. And it does not apply to those who are not Christians.

6. Look up the meaning of words, because, depending on the translation you are using, a word may be archaic or may be improperly translated.

7. Get all that the Bible says on any subject before drawing your conclusion.

a. Many read where we are saved by faith, but fail to apply Scripture that teaches obedience, and so they conclude we are saved by *faith only*.

- 1) Thus, in studying the Bible, we can't always just pluck out a verse and say, "**This is what the Bible teaches**" on a subject or topic.

b. We must consider all the Scriptures on the matter...

8. Know the difference between figurative and nonfigurative language.

a. Some of the Bible was written in figurative language, perhaps to keep the enemies of Christianity from understanding.

b. People do grave injustice to the Scriptures when they literalize passages that are figurative.

9. Use good common sense, just as in studying any other book.

- a. For instance, would it be exercising good common sense to say that "*Born of water*" in **John 3:5** has reference to the **first birth** when Jesus was speaking to an old man instead of an unborn child?
- b. We must use good common sense, or we will draw some conclusions that were not intended to be taught.

10. Read and Meditate.

- a. It is possible to spend a great deal of time reading but not really grasping what is intended to be taught.
- b. So read a passage and think about it, and keep these other rules in mind as you read.

11. Do not interpret a passage in a way that contradicts other passages whose meaning and teaching are clear.
(This overlaps with #7, "Get all the scriptures....")

12. Do not interpret a passage in a way that forces an unacceptable conclusion—one that contradicts an important foundational principle.

- D. I recently debated well-known preacher Pat Donahue, who has participated in more formal debates than anyone I know. (One of the kinder men I've debated)
 - 1. He teaches that when a Christian commits any sin, he immediately falls from grace and is lost until he becomes aware of the sin, repents, and confesses it to God.
 - a. I appealed to sound hermeneutics to reach agreement, specifically the rule: **"Do not draw a conclusion that is unacceptable."**
 - b. I pointed out that, if his teaching is correct, then we are **all** lost, since **"none are righteous, no, not**

one” (Rom. 3:10) and “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

- 1) Did he accept the point?
- 2) No, he insisted that no such rule exists, claimed I had invented it, and continued defending a position that, if true, would mean no saved person exists on earth or was ever saved.

THERE COULD BE NO GREATER CONSEQUENCE!

2. Now let us test whether Pat is correct in saying this rule is fabricated and should be ignored.

- a. Suppose someone teaches that Jesus was **merely a man and not God** while on earth.
 - 1) For that claim to be true, Scripture would have to support it, and no passage could teach that Jesus was God while on earth.
 - 2) But since many passages affirm His deity—and show Him forgiving sins, which only God can do—we must reject the claim that Jesus was merely a man.

- b. To reject the rule and accept that Jesus was **just a man** would be to disregard the inspiration and harmony of Scripture.

(It is not just JWs that teach this nonsense; we have brethren in the church who teach it.)

3. Do you see the importance of this rule?
4. Do you agree with Pat that I made this up and that it should be disregarded?

E. Another controversial subject in the church would be far less disputed (settled, actually) if brethren consistently applied this rule.

1. I am referring to Jesus' teaching that a woman who was "**put away**" (sent away, kicked out) would commit adultery if she married.
 - a. Many have been led to think He was talking about a "**divorced**" woman, perhaps mainly because the Greek word APOLUO has been incorrectly translated as divorce.
 - 1) The warning of adultery applied to Jewish women because their men were sending away their wives without following God's command regarding divorce.
 - 2) In that time, a lawful divorce, with the certificate prescribed in Deuteronomy 24:1–2, freed the woman to "**go and be another man's wife.**"
 - 3) Merely sending a woman away is not divorce.
 - 4) Jesus taught that a woman sent away without a certificate would commit adultery if she married because she was still married.
 - 5) The timeless principle is that, with the certificate, she was free to marry.
 - 6) Men, however, could marry after divorcing a wife—or even after merely sending her away—because they were not forbidden to have more than one wife at a time, yet even **men** who get divorced are being told they will be living in adultery if they marry.

- F. Now let us return to the rule: ***do not interpret a passage in a way that requires an unacceptable conclusion.***
1. Under the law then in force, divorce ended a marriage, allowing the divorced woman to “go and be another man’s wife” (Deut. 24:1,2).
 - a. The claim that Jesus changed that law cannot stand, because doing so would have contradicted Moses’ teaching—a teaching God commanded Moses to give and even **used** regarding His own divorce.
 - 1) In revealing the details of His divorce of Israel, God emphasized the need to give the bill of divorcement, not just send them away. **Jer 3:8**
 - 2) This aligns with Mal 2:16, which says that **God hates putting away**, which many versions translate as “divorce.”

Mal. 2:16 **For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.**
 - b. Jesus was addressing Jewish men who were dealing *treacherously* with their wives.
 - c. In Mark 10:11, He called this “**adultery against her.**” This was the man’s sin. (Taking another wife, even while she lived, was not a sin for him.)
 - d. The exception clause, “**except it be for fornication,**” refers to cases in which a man would **not** be guilty of adultery against his woman by sending her away without divorce, because the union itself was **unlawful**.

- 1) Such a relationship is described as **incest**.
Scripture gives two examples: **Herod**, who had his brother's wife while his brother was still living, contrary to the Law, and the man in 1 Cor. 5 who had his father's wife.
- 2) In such cases, a mere *putting away*, rather than divorce, is the correct course.
- 3) A **man** was not guilty of *treachery* if he **divorced** his wife. Often, the woman **wanted** a divorce so she could get away from a man who did not love her and mistreated her, such as by sending her out of the house and refusing to divorce her.....
 - i. That is not to say he did not sin – breaking the covenant is certainly a sin.
- 4) When the exception clause is interpreted to apply only when one has committed adultery, numerous problems arise.
 - i. **First**, it does not say adultery.
 - ii. **Second**, it punishes an innocent person whose spouse has divorced them (A thing God condemns) and requires breaking up legal and happy homes.
 - iii. **Third**, the teaching greatly hinders evangelists from reaching the lost because over half of those who might otherwise be converted are not, once they are told what tradition requires of them.
 - iv. The doctrine is so discouraging that many preachers are reluctant to spend time evangelizing.

2. We have been talking about Jesus' teachings to the Jews under the Law; let's now look briefly at New Testament teachings to Christians.
 - a. **Paul wrote to Christians, not Jews.**
 - b. In his letter to the Corinthians, he was very clear in answering questions regarding divorce and marriage.
 - 1) He gave a command to allow every man and woman to have a spouse, giving the reason: *"to avoid fornication"* (1 Cor. 7:1–2).
 - 2) Later in the same chapter, he speaks to the *"unmarried"* (divorced people are unmarried) and says that if they cannot exercise self-control, *"let them marry"* (vv. 8–9), which is a command.
 - 3) To make the point even clearer, Paul contrasts those who are *"bound"* (married) with those who are *"loosed"* (divorced), and he states that the *"loosed"* do not sin if they marry (27, 28).
 - i. Why is this so hard for some to accept?
 - ii. If this teaching is accepted, there is no need to decide who was at fault, who filed first, or who deserves punishment.
 - iii. It removes the role of prosecutor and judge from those who would break up marriages and impose celibacy.
3. One more thing about this RULE before we move on:
 - a. It is unacceptable to adopt what many say Jesus taught about marriage, because that would mean He sinned, and the consequence could not be greater.

- b. If Jesus sinned, He could not be the Savior, and we are all lost.

VII. Why are there different Christian interpretations?

A. If all Christians have the same Bible and the same Holy Spirit, should not Christians be able to agree?

B. Answer:

1. A good teacher may present the lesson clearly, patiently, and repeatedly; yet some students still fail to receive what is being taught.
2. Similarly, the Holy Spirit has given us the Scriptures and teaches through them, but not everyone approaches teaching with the same **humility, care, or willingness to obey**.
3. Therefore, one reason people arrive at different interpretations of the Bible is that some do not truly listen to the Teacher—the Holy Spirit—as He speaks through the Word.

But there are other reasons for different interpretations:

a. Selfishness and pride.

Sad to say, many interpretations of the Bible are based on an individual's own personal biases and pet doctrines.

b. Failure to mature.

When Christians are not maturing as they should, their handling of the Word of God is affected.

“I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly” (1 Cor. 3:2-3).

c. Undue emphasis on tradition.

- 1) Some churches claim to follow the Bible yet interpret it through the **lens** of long-held traditions.
- 2) When those traditions conflict with Scripture, tradition is treated as the higher authority; it becomes the standard.
- 3) For example, some say the only ones who are qualified or eligible for marriage are:
“Those never married”; “Those who have divorced their spouse for fornication”; and “Those whose spouse has died.”
 - i. These words are often uttered or written ALONE as if they are a sound argument, or as if they are authority from God that settles the matter.
 - ii. As a result, the Word’s authority is diminished, church leadership is effectively placed above Scripture, and actions are taken that only benefit the devil.

Conclusion:

- A. God has given us a book that contains his revelation to man.
 1. He exhorts us to read and study that book and to do it in the proper way. **"handling aright"**
 2. The fact that others neglect it, misrepresent it, misunderstand it, and misuse it does not relieve us of our responsibility.
- B. “Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science because it follows rules; it is an art because the rules must be applied skillfully.”
“Benard Ram”

1. There are rules and principles, but some of the more difficult or controversial passages require more effort than others.
 - a. We should always be open to changing an interpretation if the evidence supports it.
 - b. The important thing is to **be** dogmatic where Scripture is clear (not just where ONE passage appears to be clear) and to **avoid** being dogmatic where Scripture is **not** so clear.
 - c. There was unity in the early church because they were **steadfast in the apostles' doctrine**.
 - d. There will be unity in the church again when we get back to the apostles' doctrine and forego the other doctrines, fads, and gimmicks that have crept into the church.
2. We can understand the things our Creator wants us to know. Eph 5:17 **Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.**

Invitation

Credits to:

https://www.gotquestions.org/exegesis-eisegesis.html?utm_source=copilot.com

"What Is Exegesis And Eisegesis" (published December 8, 2016) John Nel.