Introduction to Hermeneutics

• What is hermeneutics?
• What is the purpose of hermeneutics?
• Why is hermeneutics necessary?
• Why is hermeneutics important?
• Things you already know about hermeneutics...
• Overview of the hermeneutical process

What is Hermeneutics?

• The theory and practice of interpretation.
  – From Greek word meaning “to explain” or “to interpret” (see John 1:38; 1 Cor. 12:10).
  – How we derive meaning from texts.

What is Hermeneutics?

• Usually defined as “the science and art of biblical interpretation.”
  – Science → rules, procedures, controls.
  – Art ← tact and sensitivity of interpreter.
• It’s also a spiritual act (Grant Osborne, The Hermeneutical Spiral).
What is Hermeneutics?

• Involves both principles and processes.
• Hermeneutic = particular set of beliefs and methods that results in a distinctive approach to biblical interpretation.

What is Hermeneutics?

• Divided into general hermeneutics and special hermeneutics.
  – General = principles for understanding any passage in the Bible (or indeed in any text).
  – Special = principles for understanding particular types of writing in the Bible (letter, poem) or particular figurative forms (parable, allegory).

The Purpose of Hermeneutics

• To understand the meaning of the text.
• Protestants have often called this the plain meaning.
  – Not an esoteric meaning
  – Not a preconceived meaning
  – Not the most “creative” meaning
  – Not the most personal meaning
The Purpose of Hermeneutics

• But whose meaning are we talking about?
• Common sense assumption - authorial intention determines meaning.
  – Assume a communication model.
  – Biblical authorship is complex.
  – We want to get at God’s intended meaning.

Mottoes for Hermeneutics

• “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15
• “We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” Ephesians 4:14-16
• “Apply yourself wholly to the text; apply the text wholly to yourself.” Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752)

Why is Hermeneutics Necessary?

• The nature of the reader
• The nature of Scripture
Why is Hermeneutics Necessary?

• Two horizons - difference in perspective between biblical writers and modern interpreters.

Why is Hermeneutics Important?

• Foundational in spiritual growth and ministry.
• Ultimate purpose is not just information but transformation.
• Foundational in biblical and theological study.
Why is Hermeneutics Important?

• Exegesis

• Eisegesis

Why is Hermeneutics Important?

• Exegesis  \(\rightarrow\) Getting meaning out of a text.
  Greek “ex”

• Eisegesis  \(\rightarrow\) Putting meaning into a text.
  Greek “eis”

Things You Already Know...

How many of you do hermeneutics when you read Scripture?
Things You Already Know...

You want to avoid this scenario...

“That was some sermon, Honey! The man across the aisle from me was in tears!”

Things You Already Know...

“That was my old hermeneutics teacher!”

Things You Already Know...

Why are these examples of poor hermeneutics?
Overview of Hermeneutical Process

First, God’s activity in the process...

Revelation

God’s self-disclosure in creation, word, deed, incarnation.
Inspiration

The divine supervision of the writing of Scripture through the Holy Spirit’s influence on the human authors.

Transmission

The collecting and copying of texts, the formation of the canon, the making of translations.

Illumination

The work of the Holy Spirit which enables us to understand and apply God’s revelation.
**Conviction and Empowering**

- Each of us ➔ Faith community and world

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of the truth of God's revelation and empowers believers for witness.

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**Next, our corresponding activity in interpreting God’s revelation in Scripture...**

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**Preunderstandings**

- God ➔ Human authors

The set of assumptions, questions, and methods we bring to the biblical text.

Ask: What do I believe?
Exegesis

Human authors → Original audience

The careful study of Scripture to determine the meaning in its original historical context.
Ask: What did it mean?

Interpretation

Original audience → Modern audience

Moving from “then and there” to “here and now” (the modern context).
Ask: What does it mean?

Application

Modern audience → Each of us

Personal response to the text; obedience.
Ask: What must I do?
Proclamation and Validation

Each of us → Faith community and world

Witnessing in word and deed; sharing, living out, and testing interpretations.
Ask: What must we/you do? What is the fruit?

Hermeneutical Circle

• Movement between the parts and the whole.

Hermeneutical Circle

• Movement in which the interpreter’s preunderstandings are reshaped by the text.
Hermeneutical Circle

- Preunderstandings
- Proclamation, Validation
- Application
- Interpretation
- Exegesis

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