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Hermeneutics

Source Materials:

“Hermeneutics: the Science and Art of Biblical Interpretation”

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“A Syllabus of Studies in Hermeneutics”, Rollin Thomas Chafer

HERM006

adapted for Grace Notes training by Warren Doud

Grace Notes

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Hermeneutics

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Lesson 9 - The Devotional And Practical Use Of The Bible

All practical lessons, applications, and devotional uses of the Bible should be governed by general hermeneutical principles. This means that sound interpretation must precede any applications that are made. The Bible does not justify using any means to derive a personal application. Some people have been known to use the Bible in ways that approach divination and sorcery rather than as the revealed Word of God. If one closes his eyes, opens the Bible and then blindly points to a passage looking for direction for the day, that disgraces God's Word. In an emergency, our loving God may choose to help out in an unusual way, but for the day-to-day living of life, that approach simply is not satisfactory. At times people take passages and then distort them for "devotional" purposes. That is really not devotion to God but self. If it is done for those one is attempting to teach, it is manipulation and a lack of

reliance on the truth of God's Word to change lives.

The Bible is more a book of principles than a catalog of specific directions. Principles are necessary to cover all contingencies. A set of specifics would indirectly foster hypocrisy and artificial spirituality. True principles that are misapplied can also lead to hypocrisy and pseudo-spirituality. The Bible emphasizes the "Inner Spirit" much more than the outward religious cloak as is spelled out clearly in 1 Samuel 15:22 which says, "And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

The Old Testament taught right and wrong on a material level so that hopefully it would be discerned on the more subtle, spiritual level. Morality and Spirituality were lifted to a higher level by being inward and spiritual. Neither morality nor spirituality was to be based solely on the overt (Heb 10:5). The importance of the

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Mental Attitude, even in the Old Testament is clear.

In some instances the Spirit of the statement is clearly to be our guide. In Matthew 5:29-30, the Word says, "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." "And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell." The "spirit" of the statement involves causes for stumbling over the gospel of Jesus Christ. These "stumbling blocks" should be removed at all costs. Hopefully, without loss of an eye or a hand.

We must also translate commands given in the context of one culture into our culture. In Exodus 23:19; 34:26 and Deuteronomy 14:21, there is a command to "not boil a baby goat in its mother's milk." This command is difficult to even understand in most of today's cultures. This action refers to one of the Canaanite fertility rituals. The principle taught is to not embrace the pagan practices of other cultures, which has meaning for today in any culture.

We may also receive guidance from examples that the Bible records. We must however, make a distinction between what the Bible records and what it approves. The Inspiration of Scripture extends only to truthfulness of the recording. We may make direct application from incidents that the Bible directly censures or approves.

Specific commands to individuals are not the Will of God for us. For example, Abraham was commanded to offer up Isaac as a picture or type of the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gen 22 cf. Heb 11:17-19). There are principles to be learned from that incident and applied to our lives, but the specific requirement for us is not there. It is best to seek to determine the outstanding Spiritual Principle in the lives of people in

Scripture that cross all time frames and cultures and then apply that principle to our life.

The application in our lives does not need a literal reproduction of the Biblical situation. For example, water Baptism does not need to be done in the Jordan River and the Lord's Table does not need to be done in an "upper room" to honor and glorify our Lord by fulfilling His commands.

The Practical and Devotional use of the Bible probably concerns itself with the Promises of God more than any other thing. There have been many disappointed and angry people throughout the centuries who have taken a "promise" out of context and then "claimed" it as being from God. We must remember that practical application must be drawn from correct interpretation. At times we may think that God has reneged on His Word, when the real problem is in our understanding. Just because God made a promise to Abraham does not mean that He has made the same promise to you. We must seek to determine if the promise was to a specific individual or nation. When we study God's Promises we must first determine whether or not they are universal or personal in nature. For example, John 3:16 says "whosoever believes in Him shall have eternal life." That is an example of a universal promise that is open to anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. A personal promise would be found in the Abrahamic Covenant. The promise was given to Abraham. If we "go forth from the land of our relatives," it does not mean that God will make a new covenant with us.

We must also determine if a promise is conditional or unconditional. Are there requirements that we are to meet before a promise is fulfilled?

We must also determine if the promise is for our time frame or it involves a specific time frame. We know that the wolf and lamb will dwell together and that the leopard will lie down with the goat (Isa 11:6; 65:25), but those

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passages refer to the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The communicator of God's Word must remember that he is bound to it in his preaching and teaching. His primary job is to communicate God's Word to those "allotted to his charge (1 Pet 5:2)" accurately and in an understandable manner. The use of vocabulary that the hearers cannot understand is tantamount to "speaking in tongues with no interpreter (1 Cor 14:27-28). The test of the communication is whether or not the hearers grow in love (1 Tim 1:5) and grace (2 Pet 3:18). Some common problems involve pulling verses out of context and then "sermonizing" or "allegorizing" them, seeking to impart a meaning that does not come from that verse. What is wonderful is that in spite of our inadequacies and mistakes, we serve a God who is gracious and will use us to further His plan.

Lesson 10 - Inerrancy And Secular Science the Issue Of Infallibility And Inerrancy

Infallibility concerns faith and morals while inerrancy is concerned with historical and factual matters. The Bible claims inerrancy in all matters of history pertaining to faith and morals. This recognizes the common usage of the words and figures of speech.

Inerrancy does not demand lucidity as a clear interpretation of every passage may not be possible due to our lack of knowledge. We should expect some passages to be difficult to understand. The Bible does not reveal everything on a given subject in one place, so it is possible to miss something that may clarify the passage under consideration.

Belief in inerrancy leads us to affirm that there are no contradictions. Logic involves the principles of non-contradiction. Thus, many parts of the Word will be clearly logical. There may be parts of the Word that appear to not be logical, but we must remember that man's logic

may not be God's. When things appear illogical, it is because we are missing the God-factor in our understanding.

As we pursue our belief in inerrancy we must be sure that we have the correct text. We must also realize that inerrancy does not mean completeness of detail. That which is revealed though is literal.

Inerrancy does not demand that we possess the original manuscripts nor have a perfect text. What we do have has so few textual variants that there is no cause for alarm.

The "Problem" of Science

The Bible makes no assertion of being done in a scientific language. The language of the Bible is phenomenal which means it is descriptive. For example, snails would be called, "crawling things," along with any number of other creatures that crawl along the ground.

The Bible is a culturally conditioned revelation meaning that it was written to communicate to people with terms that they understood. Therefore, we don't need to seek modern scientific theories. Science though can attempt to fill in what is found in outline form.

God will often use natural phenomena to bring about super-scientific events, such as the Genesis Flood. In Genesis 7:11, the verb in the phrase "all the fountains of the great deep burst open" is in a passive voice and is more accurately translated "were burst open" indicating that it was done by an outside force. In the 1990's, the theory has been advanced by science that a meteor or comet hit the earth and caused the extinction of the dinosaurs, "millions and millions" of years ago. Donald Wesley Patten wrote a book in 1966 called *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch* that describes in detail a model for just such an event. Patten's scientific model fits the Biblical description. Where the Bible touches on science, we are assured accuracy.

Since God is eternal and Creation is temporal, it should be clear that space, time energy, matter,

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the material and the immaterial are all subordinate to God (Col 1:17). God is not bound by any law higher than Himself (Heb 6:13).

Science can only generalize how God works in some places at some times (2Pet3:4).

Any scientific law only talks about how God *did* act at certain times and places, not how He *must* act at all times and places. Any scientific law doesn't find God and is not a law for God but only a normal expression of man for that condition. If God reveals that He acted in some way at some time at some point contrary to how He usually acts, this supersedes any scientific law

Although science can be trusted in most cases (and should be), whenever we have outside authoritative revelation from God we are bound to trust the Word of God instead of man's beliefs.

Four Prerequisites (Rollin Chafer)

Under the tests required by the Bible it proves itself to be unlike any other literature. The world recognizes it only as a fallible collection of ancient religious lore, but the child of God proves its divine origin daily as the Spirit author discloses its hidden riches in response to his believing search. There are four Scripture terms which, in their Biblical significance, differentiate the Bible from all other writings. In both their interrelations and separate functions these Scripture facts are basic to an understanding of the Bible. All trustworthy principles of interpretation operate in conformity to these four facts and no reliable principle of Scripture explanation is divorceable from them. The truth of this is so generally recognized that those who attempt to force an extra-Biblical interpretation on the Bible either deny or tone down the Scriptural significance of these terms.

These four fundamental facts are:

(1) Revelation - both the subject matter imparted from the mind of God and the method of that impartation;

(2) Inspiration - the divine means employed by which the revelatory matter is accurately transmitted;

(3) Illumination - the Spirit's action upon the mind of the believer, enabling him to perceive the truth of the divine disclosures; and

(4) Interpretation - explanation of the meaning of the verbal expression through which God's thoughts are transmitted, applied in the Bible to both isolated subjects and the systemic development of themes and doctrines.

These terms taken collectively express the necessary elements for the transmittance of God's thoughts to the mind of man. On the other hand, it is essential that their respective functions should be clearly differentiated. This we may do only in outline in this course.

The Function of Revelation.

The function of divine revelation is to *reveal*. Its office is to uncover, bring to light and make known those things of God which man cannot otherwise know. This God has done through His recorded Word. If the Word is not received ignorance must result. Man can not know God apart from His revelation of Himself. He can not know the way of life apart from God's disclosures on the subject. He has never been able to guess God's purpose in the earth. He knows it only because it has been made a subject of revelation.

"Moreover, although writing is not essential to revelation as thus defined, 'the idea of a written revelation may be said to be logically involved in the notion of a living God. Speech is natural to spirit; and if God is by nature spirit it will be to Him a matter of nature to reveal Himself'" (quoted, Fairbairn, *Christ in Mod. Theo.*, p. 496).

Dr. Arthur T. Pierson defined revelation thus: "Revelation is the divine impartation and communication of truth to the mind of man, whatever be its mode or channel," citing Rom

1:17; 16:25; Eph 3:3–5; Amos 3:7.¹ Angus-Green give the following: “The word revelation (lit. *drawing back the veil*) is the Latin equivalent of the Greek apokalupsis (Apocalypse), an uncovering.”²

There are, among others, three facts the believing acceptance of which is necessary to an understanding, and therefore an interpretation, of the divine revelation.

(1) The Authoritativeness of the

Scriptures. Reliance upon the authoritativeness of God’s recorded Word is the bedrock requirement of one who would become a Biblically correct interpreter of the significance of that selfsame Word.

“What think ye of Christ?” divides all classes of humanity into two groups—believers and unbelievers. It is not a matter of intellectuality, but a heart adjustment to God in Christ. Dr. Pierson puts it thus: “It is a unique law of the spiritual life, that knowing is not in order to believing, but believing is in order to knowing. Faith is not the result, as the condition, of the highest knowledge. God sent Isaiah to say to Ahaz, ‘If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established’ (Isa 7:9). The deep meaning is that if they (Judah) *would not believe they would not be established in knowledge.*”³

(2) Progressiveness in the Divine

Revelation. Revelation had a beginning and ending in time. Between these termini, separated by many centuries, God revealed His doctrine, plans and eternal purpose gradually, progressively, unfolding the revelatory bloom petal by petal.

It is fundamental to Biblically correct interpretations that not only the fact of the

progressiveness of these unfoldings be taken into account, but, because of this fact, systematical study of them is necessary for the acquirement of a balanced knowledge of the Truth.

(3) Orderliness in the Progress of the Divine Purpose.

Has God revealed an orderly sequence of events through and by which His eternal purpose in the earth has been, is being and will be accomplished? An affirmative answer starts the student on that straight and narrow way which leads to the fullest possible knowledge of God’s programmed purpose, with very definite and circumscribed instructions for his service in the dispensational age in which he lives. On the other hand, a negative answer leads inevitably into the broad way of destructive interpretation which, by blurring the clear dispensational lines of demarcation in the Word, admits a wide scope of mere human opinion concerning not only the Christian’s present-age service but the trustworthiness of predictive prophecy.

Although the Scriptures do not outline God’s complete program in any one context, they do reveal here and there segments of it, varying in comprehensiveness, which, when studied together, furnish a knowledge of the successive steps of God’s purpose so far as He has revealed it. There is a law of revelation, ignored by many theologians, which the student should keep clearly in mind, namely, that wherever portions of the divine program are treated in the Bible the great divisional events are *found in the same sequence.*

An example of this is found in the comparison of Deut 30:1–10 and Acts 15:13–18. This comparison will disclose the synchronizing steps and those which are complementary.

The Function of Divine Inspiration.

¹ *Knowing The Scriptures*, p. 14.

² *Cyclopedic Handbook of the Bible*, p. 125f.

³ *The Making of a Sermon*, Intro., p. 9.

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Divine inspiration of the Scriptures and the revelation disclosed by means of it are inseparable. In fact, the doctrine of Scripture inspiration is one of the disclosures of God's revelation, and not something extraneous to it. It is God, the Spirit, who spoke through a lowly fisherman that classic Scripture, "Holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21; cf. 2 Tim 3:16).

Although revelation and inspiration are thus inseparably bound together in the Scriptures as not only exhibited in these instances but by specific treatment in 1 Cor 2, for application to all revelation, an important distinction in their relation to the content of Scripture should be made. Not all Scripture is revelation of *God's mind and will*. On the other hand, all Scripture is *divinely inspired*. Again we quote:

"Every student must observe what in Holy Scripture carries authority, and what only accuracy. Satan's words to Eve (Gen 3:5), though accurately recorded, are false and misleading in intention and sentiment, exactly contrary to God's mind. The greater part of the book of Job, though an inspired record of events and sayings, is expressly disowned of God as not rightly spoken (Job 42:7). We must therefore discriminate and distinguish *three degrees of authority* in the inspired record:

- (1) An authoritative narrative where sentiments and acts are not sanctioned and may be disowned as disapproved of God.
- (2) An authoritative narrative where sentiments and acts are not expressly approved or disapproved and must be judged by the general standards of Scripture teaching.
- (3) An authoritative narrative where the sentiments and acts are inspired and controlled by the Spirit of God, and therefore represent His mind and will.

"Lack of proper discrimination in matters such as these has often led to much confusion and needless controversy. But, with these careful

limitations, Verbal Inspiration is an absolute necessity if, in any proper sense, there be divine inspiration at all. As Dean Burgon has expressed it, what music would be without notes, a mathematical sum without figures, so would an inspired book be without words controlled by the inspiring Spirit."⁴

If God by inspiration has transmitted His revelation accurately through the medium of language-and this accurate transmission by means of words is the function of inspiration-it follows that close attention and loyalty to the words *as transmitted*, and not as some theologians wrest them to fit extra-Biblical theories, are fundamental to Biblically correct interpretations.

The Function of Divine Illumination.

In various grammatical forms the Greek word *photizo*-to illuminate, give light to, shine-occurs eleven times in the N.T. In one passage only it is used to denote physical light (Luke 11:36). In the realm of the spiritual it is used in three senses: revelatory (Example, 2 Tim 1:10); lighting with the glory of God (Example, Rev 21:23); and the illuminating of the human heart (Example, Eph 1:18; 3:9; Heb 6:4; 10:32). In these latter passages the synonymous words, "illuminated" and "enlightened," are both employed in the A.V.

Extended example: Eph 1:17-19.

The Function of Biblical Interpretation.

The Bible employs the word *interpretation* in two of its defined senses, namely (1) Explanation (Examples, *pesher*, interpretation, occurring 31 times in Dan 2:4-7:16; *hermeneuo*, interpretation, Heb 7:2). (2) Translation of words from another language (Example, the Lord's cry on the cross, Mark 15:34). The general meaning of the word, as used in the Bible, is explanation, making clear what otherwise would be obscure.

⁴ Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, p. 16f.

Biblical interpretation, as employed under the direction of the Spirit by the sacred writers, predicates an understandable Bible. Concerning the adaptability of the Bible to human capacity, Perry Wayland Sinks writes: "The Bible even as literature-and both in its origin and history-is a human as well as divine Book. It is *human* in that it is *to* and *for* man, and not to and for supernatural intelligences or the conceived populations of other planets; it is *divine* in that it is *of* God and *from* God."⁵

Four General Rules of Interpretation (Rollin Chafer)

These four general rules of interpretation, all finding their place under the inductive method of study, are incorporated in all standard works on Hermeneutics. The order found in, and the quotations from, these various works are followed in this section. "These are not peculiar to Scripture, but simply bespeak in regard to it those qualities of candor and intelligent common sense which the study of any literature requires.

The first rule of Biblical interpretation is: Interpret grammatically

Give due regard to the meaning of words, the form of sentences, and the peculiarities of idiom in the language employed. The sense of Scripture is to be determined by the words: a true knowledge of the words is the knowledge of the sense. The words of Scripture must be taken in their common meaning, unless such meaning is shown to be inconsistent with other words in the sentence, with argument or context, or with other parts of Scripture.

The true meaning of any passage of Scripture, then, is not every sense which the words will bear, nor is it every sense which is true in itself, but that which is intended by the inspired writers, or even by the Holy Spirit, though

⁵ Sinks, *The Reign of the Manuscript*, p. 40f. Also lecture quotation from G. Frederick Wright, *Divine Authority of the Bible*, p. 103.

imperfectly understood by the writers themselves."⁶

Out of the multitude of examples cited in the various texts, one from Lockhart on Ephesians 2:8 may be cited. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God." He says: "We may ask, what is the gift of God? Many would answer, 'grace,' many others, 'faith,' some, 'salvation.' But what does the grammar require?" After eliminating "grace" and "faith" as the antecedents of "that," he proceeds: "The only other possible antecedent is the salvation expressed by the verb 'saved.' Some have objected that the Greek noun for salvation is feminine; but we must notice that salvation is here expressed by the verb, and Greek grammar again requires that a pronoun which refers to the action of a verb for its antecedent must be neuter.

This exactly suits the case; and the meaning is, Ye are saved by grace through faith; but the salvation is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Here the interpretation that accords with the grammar is reasonable and satisfactory."⁷ I have pointed out before, however, that the observance of all grammatical requirements often leaves one short of the meaning of the doctrinal contents of the text. Cellérier has this in mind when he says: "Suppose that he [an interpreter] undertakes to explain the words of Jesus to the paralytic: 'My son, thy sins be forgiven thee' (Mark 2:5), Grammatical Hermeneutics may readily do its work, but it will not fathom the depth of meaning which these words contain."⁸

The second rule of interpretation is: "Interpret according to the context."

The meaning of a word will often be modified by the connection in which it is used. This rule

⁶ Angus-Green, *Cyclopedic Handbook of the Bible*, p. 180.

⁷ *Principles of Interpretation*, p. 83f.

⁸ *Man. d'Hermen.*, p. 53.

is often of great theological importance.”⁹ (Examples: Various meanings of *Faith, Flesh, Salvation, Grace*, etc.). “The study of the context is the most legitimate, efficacious, and trustworthy resource at the command of the interpreter. Nothing can be more convenient than to explain an author by himself, and to have recourse to the entire train of thought. It is much less easy for sophism to abuse this mode of interpretation than that of dealing with etymology, philology, and exceptions of syntax.”¹⁰ Although these latter are often valuable aids, they may also be pushed to harmful effects. (Example: The etymological study of some words indicates that their significance has entirely departed from the root meaning.

On the ground of etymology, therefore, it would be misleading for an interpreter to hold to the root meaning in such cases). One of the most helpful results of contextual study is furnished by the definitions of the author’s own terms. (Examples: “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” 2 Tim 3:17. By *perfect* here is meant, “Thoroughly furnished” for service. There are a number of contexts in which the word *perfect* needs the light from the context for its exact meaning. In such passages the thought is not perfection in its widest sense, but maturity in a specified line of experience or endeavor.)

The third rule of interpretation is: “Regard the scope or design of the book itself, or some large section in which the words and expressions occur.”

Sometimes the context does not give all the light needed to determine the meaning of a word or a phrase. In such cases the third rule is

necessary.¹¹ The purpose in writing a book is often clearly mentioned, especially in the N.T. Epistles. This avowed purpose will often throw light on passages otherwise obscure. Terry gives the following example: “There can be no doubt that, after his opening salutation and personal address, the apostle [Paul] announces his great theme [of Romans] in verse 16 of the first chapter.

It is *the Gospel considered as the power of God unto salvation to every believer, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*. It manifestly expresses, in a happy personal way, the scope of the entire epistle.” After an analysis of the entire epistle, he says: “It will be found that a proper attention to this general plan and scope of the Epistle will greatly help to the understanding of its smaller sections.”¹²

The fourth and most comprehensive rule of Biblical interpretation is: Compare Scripture with Scripture.

A Scripture truth is really the consistent explanation of all that Scripture teaches in reference to the question examined; and a Scripture duty is the consistent explanation of all the precepts of Scripture on the duty.”¹³ As has already been noted, this procedure was not employed until the Reformation; and sound hermeneutics was not developed until this method was adopted. It results in “the analogy of faith which regulates the interpretation of each passage in conformity with the whole tenor of revealed truth.” Under this general head Cellérier also says: “To admit a positive revelation and to reject things positively revealed is a great inconsistency.”¹⁴ This

⁹ Angus-Green, *Cyclopedic Handbook of the Bible*, p. 186.

¹⁰ Cellérier, *Man. d’Hermen.*, p. 191.

¹¹ Angus-Green, *Cyclopedic Handbook of the Bible*, p. 192.

¹² *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 111.

¹³ Angus-Green, *Cyclopedic Handbook of the Bible*, p. 195.

¹⁴ Cellérier, *Man. d’Hermen.*, p. 19.

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inconsistency is not uncommon. Some interpreters who claim to accept the Bible as the revealed Word of God, reject specific revelations in it because these do not fit into the framework of their preconceived theology.

Exercises for HERM006

1. What must govern all practical uses of the Bible? Why?
2. Discuss the statement, "the Bible is more a book of principles than a catalog of specific directions."
3. How did the Old Testament teach moral truth?
4. Why should we look for the "spirit" of statements without allegorizing them?
5. Why is it important to look for the cultural significance before making practical applications?
6. What are important things we should look for in determining God's promises.
7. What is the test of a communicator?
8. Describe the difference between infallibility and inerrancy.
9. What does belief in inerrancy lead us to affirm?
10. Seek to explain how the Theologian should view science.