

Theory

As we consider the topic of biblical hermeneutics, it is important for us to realize that there are a number of different approaches to how we interpret the text that we have been given in the Bible. In this course, we will first briefly address both the posture of hermeneutics, and the most significant methods of Bible interpretation. We will also conclude by presenting a basic description of our chosen hermeneutic, which we believe is practical, sensible, and Biblically consistent. As a follow up to this, we will also present instruction on some practical steps that best lead us into the practice of this hermeneutic as we engage the Bible in study.

Another important thing to understand is we look at these different ways of interpreting the Scriptures is to realize that each one of them is formed from a certain set of presuppositions, or pre-determined conclusions that people bring to the way that they interpret the Scriptures. We readily acknowledge that presuppositions are not only present but required when we study the Bible, so it is important for us to note what some of those presuppositions which helps us determine which hermeneutic approach is more biblically founded and supported.

Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

From a philosophical standpoint, it is important to note that one's hermeneutic (means of interpretation) can be broadly categorized by one of two words: exegesis or eisegesis. We will define the terms briefly and explain how these two postures affect our hermeneutic.

Exegesis is the posture that the meaning of a passage is derived, or "mined out", from within the text. Exegesis views the passage as the container of the intended meaning of the original author (God through men), of which we as readers are meant to discover from within the text. With an exegetical posture, we assume our humility under the author's intended meaning and we seek to uncover it, understand it doctrinally, and apply it personally and contextually.

Eisegesis is the view that external presuppositions and knowledge are brought into the passage in order to come to an understanding of the meaning and application of a particular passage. To put it simply, eisegesis reads the meaning into the text. With an eisegetical posture, we assume authority and freedom as the reader to bring our own cultural and contextual assumptions to interpretation and we seek to validate those personally held

presuppositions from the text.

Comparing Hermeneutic Approaches

Biblical hermeneutics is a very old science, with a plethora of unique approaches, established over centuries. General speaking though, most of these approaches fit into one of two hermeneutic “families”, either the Allegorical or the Literal-Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic. We will briefly explain both in order to provide an adequate backdrop for presenting our chosen method of interpretation.

The Allegorical Hermeneutic

The allegorical hermeneutic primarily sees the Bible as a grouping of writings that present general ideas, and not as historical events and interactions between human beings at actual points in time and space. This method although it sounds very negative much of it is indeed used by more liberal veins of what we would call the Christian religion and they use this very loose method of interpretation to support their various claims about what God can and indeed should do for us. This approach is certainly supported by those who would promote a much more man-centric view of the Christian faith and use it to support the various things that they desire for God to accomplish for them.

When we consider the presuppositional perspective of the allegorical method of Bible interpretation, we recognize that this view does not perceive the Bible as literal nor does it represent the actual facts of human history. This presupposition leads to a very loose conclusions as to the specific and particular meaning of a given passage. Because of this fact, much of the use of the allegorical method leads to very undefined and unverifiable conclusions and applications of what the Bible is speaking about. It is this approach then that is most easily associated with the hermeneutic posture of eisegesis.

The Literal-Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic

The second broader category of Bible interpretation is known as the literal-historical-grammatical method. This method employs a more of a plain sense assumption that the Bible, believing that it means precisely what it claims, in that it represents actual recorded events and interactions of people in real space and time. It also assumed these stories literally represent the presence and interaction of God with humans history. Because of this fact, the literal hermeneutic not only permits but promotes a much more disciplined and structured method of Bible interpretation. It forces the student to come to consistent conclusions about what the meaning of a particular passage is and also provides boundaries

for the potential application of the meaning of that passage.

With this in mind, we acknowledge that the student of the Bible brings this presupposition to their study of the Bible and it leads them to pursue that study with certain values and restraints. These values are:

- Uncovering the authors original intended meaning.
- Considering the application of the meaning to the original audience.
- Using a “principled” view of these conclusions as we consider the personal application of the meaning to our lives today.

Hermeneutical Blending

We must acknowledge that in the broader Christian community, there is much blending of these two methods of interpretation that does occur. For example, we know that there are those in the Reformed community that would support a more literal method of interpretation, however when they come to the doctrine of the end times and the future revealing of the kingdom of God, they would tend to employ a more allegorical method of interpretation. Because of this, we must approach others with grace as we engage the scriptures together, but we must also strive to maintain as consistent a method as possible when it comes to the study of the Bible, no matter the context in the Bible that we find ourselves studying.

As we consider these two methods of Bible interpretation, it is our conviction to hold to the Literal-Historical-Grammatical method. We believe that this approach is most inline with the concept of revelation (God communicating to mankind), considers the grammar and language used, and provides the most consistent way to understand and apply the principles of the Bible as God intended us to. The next section of this course will outline some practical steps that be taken to employ Literal-Historical-Grammatical method to interpreting the Bible.

Narratives

It is important to understand that studying narrative literature must be approached with a clear understanding of the nature of narratives. Narratives are stories, written to illustrate what individual people have acted upon, in real life scenarios, with the truth of God. Many people misunderstand the doctrines and instructions of God by improperly concluding that God instructs on doctrine through narrative accounts. As we seek to study narratives effectively, we must do so by studying the illustrative nature of them, and seek to learn from these accounts as we establish the appropriate doctrinal basis for them in the Epistles.

Prior to applying the steps of Bible study to a specific passage of the book you are studying, take the time to immerse yourself in the overall context of the entire book. Read the entire book, twice, in two different translations (ESV and NLT). You would also benefit by purchasing a Scripture Journal and begin to use it in the beginning stages.

Observation

1. Pray
2. Read: the entire chapter, two times (ESV & NLT), from start to finish, uninterrupted.
3. Places: identify the different places in the chapter.
4. People: identify who the different characters (God and people) in the chapter are, and what they do or say.
5. Questions: write down all your questions.

Interpretation

1. Scenes: mark with a line and number each of the different scenes of the story.
2. Spiritual Concepts: For each scene of the story, record your thoughts about what the scene is communicating about the nature of mankind, the character and work of God, or how people are to relate to Him. Note any cross-references that correspond to the spiritual concepts that you have identified in the scene.
3. Summary: write a one sentence summary of each scene that succinctly details what you believe to be the main point of that particular scene.
4. Principle: Develop a principle for the entire chapter. Remember that the principle should answer the question, "What is the spiritual lesson that we learn in this chapter?"

Application

1. Thinking: consider areas of your thinking that contradict with the principle you have uncovered.
2. Actions: consider areas of your lifestyle and actions that contradict with the principle you have uncovered.
3. Change: consider avenues of change that you could embrace which would better align your thinking and actions with the principle you have uncovered.

Epistles

The study of epistles is a more technical process than the study of other types of New Testament literature. The technical nature of epistles can prove to be intimidating for most people, but with a clear understanding and practical steps to follow, anyone can learn how to faithfully study epistles.

Unlike narratives, epistles exist for the expressed purpose of instruction in the doctrines of God. Oftentimes an epistle will include practical applications and exhortations that are personal in nature, but they are primarily written to explain and teach a specific set of truths from God. It is for this reason that we must take our time and patiently observe, carefully interpret, and faithfully apply the truth of what we discover in them.

Prior to applying the steps of Bible study to a specific passage of the book you are studying, take the time to immerse yourself in the overall context of the entire book. Read the entire book, twice, in two different translations (ESV and NLT). Also take some time to research some background information about the book by reading a Study Bible introduction or a Background Commentary. It would also be beneficial to either print or purchase a scripture journal that you will use for the observation stage of your study. Refer to the “Resources” section of this document to find a link for purchasing a scripture journal.

Observation

1. Pray
2. Read: the entire chapter, two times (ESV & NLT), from start to finish, uninterrupted.
3. Places: identify the different places in the chapter.
4. People: identify who the different characters (God and people) in the chapter are, and what they do or say.
5. Words/Phrases: identify words and phrases that are confusing, theologically significant, and ones that mark transitions in the text. Transition words usually occur at the start of a sentence or paragraph (Examples: and, but, now, therefore, then, so, for).
4. Questions: write down all your questions.

Interpretation

1. Pray.

2. Prepare: copy and paste the ESV version of the passage that you are studying into your word processor, removing all formatting (paragraph breaks, section headings, etc) from the text.
3. Complete thoughts: break the passage into the complete thoughts, one per line, in your word processor. A complete thought is not a sentence per se, because sentences can be made up of many complete thoughts.
4. Outline: all the complete thoughts in the passage. Start at the beginning of your passage with the first complete thought you come across and leave it at left most margin of your document. Continue to the very next complete thought. At this point ask, "Does this second complete thought support/define/explain/modify in some way the previous complete thought?" If the answer is yes, then indent it to show the supporting relationship to the previous complete thought. If it does not support/define/explain/modify the previous statement, then you leave it directly under the previous one, but not indented. This simply shows that the second statement simply carries on the flow of thought and is not modifying the previous one.

As you outline and make decisions as to the relationships between the complete thoughts, make sure that you strive to define the meaning of each one. Usually the defining of each complete thought takes place as you consider what each individual complete thought says, and how it relates to the others around it.

During the outlining process, it is very important to return to those transition words that you marked earlier during the observation step. Identifying the purpose of each transition word can greatly help you determine how each complete thought relates to the others around it. Here are some helps:

- “And” This means that the new material is simply being added to the previous material. (Normally do not indent)
 - “But, Now” These words signal a new related point to the theme line that has already been established. (Normally do not indent)
 - “Therefore, Then, So” These words continue, in some way, the main point that was already stated by introducing a response or action to be taken. (Normally do not indent, but certain contexts can support the use of these words as supportive or descriptive of the previous content)
 - “For” This word signals that the material that follows it is still part of the same point previously mentioned and it merely strengthens it in some way. (Normally indent)
5. Step away and pray: in order to develop the principle well, it is advised that you take

some time away from the formal process of bible study in the passage (from a few hours to even one day). Reread the passage again in a different translation than the one you outlined it in (NLT, NIV, etc). See if this “fresh” reading helps you to better grasp the overall flow of the passage in relationship to your outline. Pray specifically for God to give you insight and direction in summarizing the meaning of the passage. Pray for clarity of thought as you seek to re-express the meaning of the passage in terms of its ultimate purpose in your life.

6. Main Principle: develop a main principle from the outlining of the complete thoughts. A biblical principle by definition is a fundamental conclusion that connects or is demonstrated by the flow of thought in the text. Discovering and expressing these principles in the passage will come as you reflect on and summarize the conclusions from your outline. In every portion of scripture there is a main principle or conclusion but there can also be various secondary principles as well. Note: The main principles throughout the book will ultimately connect to develop the overall flow of the book.

Here are a few practical questions that you can ask to help uncover the principles of a passage:

- Looking at your outline and seeing the relationships of the complete thoughts in it, which complete thought seems to be the main ones?
 - Do most of the complete thoughts modify or explain one main one?
 - How could you restate a summary principle with consideration to the most important complete thought and the major supporting ones?
7. Study Worksheet: is a summary of the outline, principle and other conclusions you have made about the passage you are studying. It should include these items:
 - Finalized outline.
 - Main Principle.
 - Support. List any support in the passage and outside the passage for your conclusion of what the main principle is.
 - Context. Note any observations or considerations of how this passage connects to the previous context or passage in the book of the Bible that you are studying.
 - Mission. Explain how you see the principle of the passage in relationship to the mission of God.
 - Inconsistencies. Write down specific areas of your thinking and lifestyle that are inconsistent with the main principle that the passage is addressing.

Application

1. Consider areas of your thinking that contradict with the principles you have uncovered.
2. Consider areas of your lifestyle and actions that contradict with the principles you have uncovered.
3. Consider avenues of change that you could embrace which would better align your thinking and actions with the principles you have uncovered.

Teaching Others

General Principles

As you begin the process of teaching others to study the Bible, it is important to have a few guiding principles in mind or else you might lose interest from your disciples, or worse yet, unintentionally discourage their efforts.

1. Go slow
2. One idea/process at a time
3. Model it for them
4. Practice it together with them
5. Ask them to model it
6. Encourage and Enjoy

Reading

It is vital to note that this process of more in-depth Bible study is built on a lifestyle and commitment o Bible reading as covered in Literacy Course (LIT102). We strongly urge that you teach, model, and disciple your friends in this step prior to engaging in this content.

Observation

Due to the importance of good observation in the Bible study process, it is important to explain, model, and provide ample time for people to improve in their observation skills. If you are teaching these principle to larger groups, consider breaking into smaller groups to teach these steps. The more practically that you can model and interact through these steps, the better.

1. Pray for patience and awareness of others as they learn this phase.
2. Read the entire section, two times (ESV & NLT), from start to finish, uninterrupted.
3. Listen to an audio recording of the passage.
4. Note the actors (Who is doing the action and who is receiving it?) and the actions (What is being done?). Encourage each individual to develop a system of noting these things that can be consistently used throughout their study of the Bible.
5. Write down any questions and general observations.

6. Write a one sentence summary.
7. Provide a context to share observations and questions.

Interpretation

This is the specific part of Bible study that intimidates most people. With that in mind, we suggest a strategy that will slowly introduce your friends to the concepts within it. The steps listed below are not be understood as principles that need to be entirely covered in one sitting. They should be drawn over a number of gatherings, giving plenty of time for your friends to observe, ask questions, and try it themselves. Be patient, very encouraging, and have fun during this phase. Remember that we are not only trying to inform them of how to do this, but modeling the joy and reward of Bible study.

1. Pray for clarity of mind, both for yourself to communicate these concepts, and for your friends as they learn them.
2. Explain the process of interpreting from a theoretical standpoint. Do not call it "outlining". Explain that you are simply taking a closer look at what the author wrote by slowing down and considering each statement in relationship to the statements around it.
3. For the sake of ease and confidence building, just break up the statements using the commas that already exist in the text. No need to initially go any deeper than that.
4. Model it yourself as they watch.
5. Do it together, asking their input as you work through each statement.
6. Ask one of them to take your place and lead through the process.
7. Ask each individual to bring their own conclusions.
8. Bring back their questions from the Observation stage and see if any of them have been answered or if there is new perspective that helps.

Consideration

As with all the other phases, we suggest that you not press into life actions/application too soon without proper observation and interpretation being done first. Deeply and personally considering the learned truths is vital if there is to be ultimate life change.

1. Pray for insight into other's thinking, helping them to delve more deeply into their thinking and lifestyle.

2. Ask your friends to summarize their conclusions about the passage.
3. Explain the crucial necessity of deeply and personally considering the new truths that they are learning. (Moving from concepts to convictions, thinking to character)
4. Prepare critical questions to prompt more personal interaction with the truths learned.
5. Model it by taking ample time to pray together about the learned truths, specifically asking God to expose areas of your thinking and lifestyle that are not consistent with it.
6. Give them the opportunity, in time, to lead the group discussion of this phase.

Application

Beginning to see lives changed through study and consideration of the Bible is our ultimate aim. In reality, this can take much more time than we would like to give. We must

1. Pray for patience and discernment in leading others into this phase.
2. Ask your friends which truths have been the most convicting during your study.
3. Ask your friends if they have noticed God's prompting to either address areas in their life that are inconsistent with, or step out by faith new areas of lifestyle, that are consistent with the truths that have been learned.
4. Discuss how those steps might be taken to pursue a lifestyle that is more consistent with the truths that have been learned.
5. Pray together about those steps. Pray for wisdom to walk in the truth, and boldness when the walking might be challenging.
6. Plan follow-up discussions to check on progress in the given areas that were discussed.

Further Study

Internet Tools

1. Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com)
2. The Bible Project (<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/>)
3. Google Docs (<https://www.google.com/docs/about/>)
4. iCloud Pages (www.icloud.com)

Books

1. The Essential Evangelical Parallel Bible (<http://a.co/d/f8nOTCn>)
2. IVP Bible Background Commentary Series (<http://a.co/d/eH1zjKT>)
3. Grace New Testament Commentary (<http://a.co/d/fEffyXj>)
4. Bible Knowledge Commentary (<http://a.co/d/7t9ggzh>)
5. Living By The Book, Howard Hendricks (<http://a.co/d/fADzZ6O>)
6. New Testament Exegesis, Gordon Fee (<http://a.co/d/0Mba7Ww>)
7. Scripture Journals, Crossway Publishing
(<https://www.crossway.org/articles/introducing-esv-scripture-journals/>)