



A Course

In

**HERMENEUTICS,
STUDIES IN**

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

Pineland, Florida 33945

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INTRODUCTION

HERMENEUTICS — BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

A NOTE FROM DR. PHIL STRINGER

This material was developed by Dr. Phil Stringer.

There is a college syllabus material on Biblical Interpretation that has circulated among Bible Colleges for decades. No one seems to know where it originated or who the author or authors are. Some materials from this syllabus was used in Lectures 8, 9, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23 and 24. Lecture 26 is a reproduction of the Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The American Bible College is greatly indebted to Dr. Phil Stringer for his gracious permission to use these lectures on hermeneutics for this course. Dr. Stringer is both an outstanding preacher and Bible scholar. It is our prayer that our Lord Jesus will continue to use Dr. Stringer and his varied ministries for His honor and glory.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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LECTURE ONE: THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE

"The Interpretation of Scripture is a stewardship which we have from God. It is a part of the ministry of the word."

~ ~ Clark Pinnock (Biblical Revelation, p. 208)

~ ~

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ONLY PROPER INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE—THE ILLUMINATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. This makes the Bible different from any other book, I John 2:27; John 16:13, 14:26.

B. God ordains human teachers by giving this spiritual gift, but they are only tools not authority, I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Ps. 119: 98 -100.

C. Nothing takes the place of Personal Bible study. Acts 17:11.

D. No Christian is ever so advanced that they can quit learning, I Cor. 8:2.

II HERMENEUTICS

A. Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is also a spiritual act. (In the Greek, it comes from the name for the god Hermes—the Greek messenger god.) The Greek verb, hermeneuo, is often translated "explain."

B. This is especially important for anyone who accepts the Bible as the final authority (historic Protestants), even more so for those who accept the Bible as the sole authority (Baptists).

III. YOU CAN PROVE ANYTHING FROM THE BIBLE IF YOU USE IMPROPER HERMENEUTICS, II PETER 1:20; 3:15-16; I COR. 2:7

"There is no folly, no God-dishonoring theology, no iniquity, no sacerdotal pueisility for which chapter and verse may not be cited by an enslaved intelligence."

~ ~ Edward White ~ ~

"In religion, what error but some sober brow will bless it and approve it with a text, hiding the grossness with fair ornament."

~ ~ Shakespeare; Bossani —Merchant of Venice

~ ~

"Much of the present religious confusion is the fruit of erroneus methods of Bible study."

~ ~ Albert Garner ~ ~

A. Some examples—notice the use of the word "saved":

[Arminian misuse – Mark 13:13 (denying eternal security)

Scriptural use - James 5:20; James 1:2-5; Romans 10:13; Acts 2:23-40]

B. Notice the verses used to teach baptismal regeneration:

John 3:5-6

I Peter 3:21

Acts 2:38

Titus 3:15

IV. GOALS OF HERMENEUTICS

A. Discover (not determine) the meaning of the Word of God, Nehemiah 8:1,7-8.

B. Bridge the language gap:

Greek uses word endings

English uses word order

C. Bridge the culture gap.

D. Bridge the historical gap.

V. GOD COULD HAVE MADE THE SCRIPTURE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND THAN HE DID

Augustine comments on the way the challenge of Scripture leads to humility:

"Hasty and careless readers are led astray by many and manifold obscurities and ambiguities, substituting one meaning for another; and in some places they cannot hit upon even a fair interpretation. Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness. And I do not doubt that all this was divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride by toil and of preventing a feeling of satiety in the intellect, which generally holds in small esteem what is discovered without difficulty..."

Whoever then thinks that he understands the holy scriptures or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and of our neighbor, does not yet understand them as ye ought."

VI. RELATED TRUTHS

A. Bible Exegesis—correct understanding of the text.

B. Biblical Theology—study of divine revelation as it was given.

C. Systematic Theology—arranging Biblical data in logical order.

VII. DEAN JOHN BURGON DISCUSSES BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION (Inspiration and Interpretation, pp. 160 -163):

"I have already said enough to feel at liberty to gather out of it all, the two chief propositions concerning Holy Scripture, which it is my business this morning to establish. And first, I assert that it may be regarded as a fundamental rule, that the Bible *is not to be interpreted like any other book*. This I gather infallibly from the plain fact, that *the inspired Writers themselves* habitually interpret it *as no other book either is, or can be interpreted*."

Next, I assert without fear of contradiction that inspired Interpretation, whatever varieties of method it may exhibit, is yet uniform and unequivocal in this one result; namely, that it proves Holy Scriptures to be of far deeper significancy than at first sight appears. By no imaginable artifice of Rhetoric or sophistry of evasion, by no possible vehemence of denial or

plausibility of counter assertion, can it be rendered probable that Scripture has invariably one only meaning; and *that* meaning, the most obvious and easy to those who first heard or read it.

I would not be misunderstood by this audience, nor do I fear that I shall be. I am not denying (God forbid!) the literal sense of Scripture. Rather am I, above all, contending for it. We may *never* play tricks with the letter. Those Six Days of Creation, depend upon it, were *six days*: and the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge, and the Serpent, were the very things they are called, and no other things. So of every other part of the Bible. The Temptation of our LORD was as a matter of fact a transaction as one of His walks by the sea of Galilee. *In what form* the Tempter came to Him, hath not been revealed. *After what fashion* the Prince of the Power of the Air contrived the dazzling panorama "in a moment of time," I do not pretend to understand. The literal sense of what has been revealed, is, for all that, to be depended on. All is sincere History: *nothing* is ever allegory, - *nothing* may ever be evacuated or explained away! We have our LORD's own word for it. The speech in Paradise, and what happened at the time of the Flood; the fate of Lot's wife, and what befell the cities of the plain; the conduct of David (when he ate the shew-bread), and the visit to Solomon of the Queen of Sheba; the history of the widow of Sarepta, and of Naaman the Syrian: all these stories of the Old Testament are by our LORD Himself appealed to as veritable History.

But I am proving that Scripture itself, literally understood, compels us to believe that *under* the letter of Scripture, (which of course is to be interpreted literally), there lies a deeper and sometimes a far less obvious meaning; occasionally a meaning so improbable, (as men account improbability), that, but for the finger of GOD pointing it out, we could never by possibility have discerned it; so extraordinary, that when it is shewn us, it needs an effort of the heart and of the mind to embrace it fully.

Cases of literal interpretation are indeed of constant occurrence in Scripture; but the principle on which they depend is obvious, and common to all writings alike. I do not doubt, for a moment, that the history of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, which we heard read this morning, is a *bona fide* narrative, *truer* and *more* authentic in details, than is to be found in any other book of History. Neither do I doubt that the obvious teaching, the *moral* interpretation as it may be called, of that incident, is the proper one: viz. that even for the most fiery of fleshly trials, GOD's grace is sufficient: that Joseph's safety lay in refusing to *be* with her, joined to his holy fear of sinning *against GOD*: that lust is ever cruel, and will hunt for the precious life: finally, that the way of purity, though it may lead at first to sorrow, will infallibly conduct to blessedness at the last. Considerations like these, which are obvious

and easy, are also unquestionably *true*; and especially precious, (*who* ever doubted it?) as helps to personal holiness. But still, there may underlie this narrative, for aught I see to the contrary, a mystical signification. Potiphar's wife may, (as the best and wisest of ancient and modern Divines have thought,) symbolize the Power of Darkness; and Joseph, our Divine LORD. The garment Joseph left in the woman's hand, may represent that fleshly garment of which the true Joseph divested Himself, the mortal body which Satan apprehended (his sole triumph!) and by which he was ensnared, when a greater than Joseph got Him out from an adulterous world. Joseph in the prison, and CHRIST in the grave: Joseph exalted, and CHRIST ascended: Joseph at last feeding the families of the World, and CHRIST becoming the Bread of Life to all: let it not occasion offence, Brethren, if I confess that, for aught I see to the contrary, some such hidden teaching as this, may underlie the plain historical narrative; and in no way interfere with a literal interpretation."

END OF SAMPLE