

Apostolic Hermeneutics

Using book God's Infallible Word – Bro. David K Bernard

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Grammatical-Historical Method

- Grammatical-historical interpretation is **exegesis** as we have just defined it: seeking the meaning that the writers intended to convey.
- **Exegesis** literally means to bring meaning out of the text
- In other words, we should approach a passage by asking,
 - What does the text say?
 - What did God intend by inspiring these words?

We should not start by asking, How does it support my view? What do I want it to say?

Grammatical-Historical Method

- This method is grammatical because it derives the meaning from the **grammatical context**—the definition of words and their grammatical forms and relationships.
- It is historical because it derives the meaning from the **historical context**, seeking to understand the words and expressions according to their meaning when they were written.

A good and honest heart

- **Luke 8:15** But that on the good ground are they, which in an **honest and good heart**, **having heard the word**, **keep it**, and bring forth fruit with patience.
- **Proverbs 1:23** Turn you at my reproof: behold, **I will pour out my spirit unto you**, I will make known my words unto you.

A lamp unto my feet, light unto my path

- **Psalms 119:105** NUN. Thy word *is* a **lamp unto my feet**, and a **light unto my path**.
- **Psalms 119:104** Through thy precepts *I get understanding*: therefore I hate every false way.
- **Psalms 119:130** The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth **understanding** unto the simple.
- **Psalms 119:140** Thy word *is* very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.
- **Psalms 119:160** Thy word *is true from the beginning*: and every one of thy righteous judgments *endureth* for ever.

The Allegorical Method

- The alternative to grammatical-historical interpretation is the allegorical method, which seeks to find a hidden, “spiritual” meaning beneath the apparent one. The interpreter comes to the text with his own theological presuppositions and finds hidden parallels to them in the text. In effect, he imposes his own theology upon the text.
- The allegorical method is subjective. With this method, different people will arrive at different and often conflicting interpretations, and there is no objective way of choosing among them. If this method were valid, there would be no sure way of determining what is doctrinal truth.

Grammatical Historical rather than Allegorical

- The doctrine of inspiration shows us that the grammatical-historical method is correct and the allegorical method is not. (See chapters 2-4.) Since God inspired the Bible, interpretation must be rooted in the intention of God, not in the intention of the interpreter. Since every word is inspired, including the grammatical forms and relationships, the interpreter must study and be faithful to the meaning of the words and the grammar. Since Scripture carries **divine authority**, our method of interpretation should not be based on subjective human authority but be as objective as possible.

Illumination of the Spirit

- By the grammatical-historical method, anyone can potentially understand the words of Scripture, even an unsaved person. But this method does not guarantee that such a person will integrate the concepts properly and make the appropriate application to his life.
- Even in the natural realm, a person often does not comprehend a matter fully until he becomes committed to it and experiences it personally. And in the spiritual realm, a carnal person cannot grasp the significance of God's Word unless he turns to God, accepts His Word by faith, and seeks spiritual understanding.

Illumination of the Spirit

- “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 2:14). Even the disciples did not comprehend the full implications of Scripture until Jesus opened their understanding (Luke 24:45).
- We should study the Word of God prayerfully, asking God to help us to understand and apply its message personally. Illumination of the Spirit does not replace Bible study but is essential to it.

Scriptures are basically clear and meant to be understood

- Each believer has the potential to understand and obey Scripture for himself without being forced to rely on an authoritative human interpreter (I John 2:27). Each believer is a priest before God (I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6); he has no other mediator than the man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5). The purposes for which God gave Scripture apply to individuals (II Timothy 3:15-17). Clearly, then, God expects and enables individuals to understand and apply His Word to their own lives.

Scripture is meant to be understood

- This is not to say that every biblical statement is simple or its meaning obvious. Some things in Scripture are hard to understand (II Peter 3:16). God expects us to study His Word diligently and prayerfully in order to comprehend its meaning. But we can have assurance that He will not arbitrarily withhold truth from hungry hearts and that He has not hidden essential doctrine in obscure passages.
- Most difficulties in understanding the Scriptures arise because of two reasons (implied by the preceding principles we have discussed): (1) a cultural, linguistic, and contextual distance from the original text and (2) a lack of spiritual illumination.

The Bible is adapted to the human mind

- The Bible expresses truth in finite human vocabulary and thought patterns (although it never accommodates to human error). God's ways and thoughts are above ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). But He has chosen to communicate to us on our level, and consequently His Word speaks effectively to us (Isaiah 55:10-11).
- We must recognize, then, that sometimes the biblical language does not teach a physical or earthly literalism but presents greater spiritual truth in terms that we can comprehend.

Truth is progressively revealed

- “The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:24-25).
- There is a progression from material to spiritual, as spiritual truths are first taught in physical types. “Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17).
- The Bible leads us to greater morality and spirituality under the new covenant. Moral law is unchanging; it is inherent in the nature of God and in the original created order. But the fall of the human race brought gross spiritual darkness.

Truth is progressively revealed

- Moral law is unchanging; it is inherent in the nature of God and in the original created order. But the fall of the human race brought gross spiritual darkness. To bring us into the fullness of His original plan for our race and planet, God has patiently instructed us a step at a time, so that in the New Testament church we see the highest expression of God's will for us individually and collectively. For instance, God's original created order did not allow for polygamy, war, or divorce. In Old Testament times God sought to regulate these evils and worked with humans who were subject to them, but in the New Testament He calls believers to overcome them and gives them power to do so. (See Matthew 5:17-48; 19:3-12; Romans 8:3-4.)

Scripture interprets scripture

- The whole Bible is the context for interpreting a passage. Clear verses help interpret more difficult ones. Taken as a whole, the Bible's message is truth, but a person who selects only part of the truth on a given subject and ignores the rest can quickly fall into error.

The Bible is unified, focused on Jesus Christ

- The Bible teaches one theology with no internal contradictions. Thus we should seek to harmonize all passages, and we should seek to understand the overriding themes of Scripture rather than merely the details.
- A study of the Bible reveals that its unifying theme is God's plan of salvation for the human race through Jesus Christ. He is the focus of all Scripture, and ultimately we must interpret all of Scripture in light of God's manifestation in the flesh as Jesus and His atoning sacrifice on the cross.

Truth has several witnesses

- God uses two or three witnesses to establish truth. Paul appealed to this principle to underscore his teaching: “This will be the third time I am coming to you. ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established’” (II Corinthians 13:1). We should not ignore or discount any passage, but if someone bases a certain doctrine solely on one passage, he is probably misinterpreting it.

Passage has one primary meaning

- This principle follows from the whole rationale for the grammatical-historical method. If a passage does not have an objectively identifiable meaning, then God's purposes for giving Scripture cannot be fulfilled. On the other hand, Scripture is not bound to a specific cultural or historical setting. As the eternal Word of God, it teaches principles that apply to every age, culture, society, and country. Nevertheless, we should first seek the primary meaning of a text before making applications.

Use sound rules of logic

- “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). If someone were to argue that we should not use logic in interpreting the Bible, he would have to use the very thing he professes to reject—logic—to prove his point.
- This point does not mean that we make human reason our ultimate authority. But it simply means that we must interpret Scripture logically rather than illogically.
- Since the Bible is truth, it cannot teach a logical fallacy, for that would contradict the very meaning of truth.

Grammatical Historical Application

- 1) Biblical History
- 2) Biblical Geography (Gog and Magog, Persia)
- 3) Biblical Culture (Eye of the needle)
- 4) Setting (author, speaker, original audience, occasion, purpose)
- 5) Literary mold (genre)
- 6) Special literary forms
 - metaphor Hebrews 12:29 simile Exodus 24:17 hyperbole Judges 7:12
personification Proverbs 1:20-33 metonymy Psalm 51:18 synecdoche Mark
1:5 irony I Kings 18:27; 22:15

Grammatical Historical Application

- 7) Context (immediate literary passage)
- 8) Word Meanings (historical and original language definitions)
- 9) Grammar (Syntax)
- 10) Harmony of Scripture

Conclusion

- The Bible is inexhaustible in its riches. It is so simple that a child can understand and obey its message of salvation, yet it is so profound that a scholar can spend a lifetime without plumbing its depths. No one is an expert in the Word of God, and no one is an authoritative teacher or interpreter of the Word. Let us approach the Bible humbly and hear God as He speaks to us afresh through its pages.

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