

Living Way Church  
Biblical Studies Program - March 2013  
Knowing Scripture: The Art and Science of Biblical Interpretation  
Lesson One

- I. Introduction
  - A. Hermeneutics - The art of finding the meaning of an author's words and phrases and of explaining it to others
  - B. Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation
- II. Summary of Sproul's Knowing Scripture (pages 15-48)
  - A. Why study the Bible?
    1. Two myths:
      - a. Myth one - *the Bible is so difficult to understand that only highly skilled theologians with technical training can deal with the Scriptures*
        - (1) As mature, educated adults we can understand the basic message of the Bible
        - (2) A person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of biblical scholars
        - (3) Certainly, more difficult words and concepts can be found in other types of literature (e.g., textbooks) than on most pages of the Bible
      - b. Myth two - *the Bible is boring*
    2. The clarity of Scripture
      - a. The Bible is basically clear; it is simple enough for any literate person to understand its basic message
      - b. This is not to say that all parts of the Bible are equally clear or that there are no difficult passages or sections to be found in it
    3. We fail in our duty to study God's word, not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because the Bible is dull and boring, but because it is work
    4. Our problem is not lack of intelligence or lack of passion; our problem is that we are often lazy
    5. The biblical basis for Bible study
      - a. Deuteronomy 6:4-9
      - b. Second Timothy 3:14-17
        - (1) Continuity is important - Consistency is necessary for a sound basis of biblical studies
        - (2) The Scripture is able to impart wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10)
        - (3) Inspired by God or "*God-breathed*" - The Bible comes from God; He has transmitted His Word through human authors

6. The Christian who is not diligently involved in a serious study of Scripture is simply inadequate as a disciple of Christ
  7. The Bible as revelation
    - a. Though much can be learned about God from the study of nature, it is His self-revelation in Scripture that is most complete and most valuable for us
    - b. The Bible is addressed primarily, though not exclusively, to our understanding – that means the mind
  8. Why should we study the Bible?
    - a. One could cite numerous reasons why you would benefit from the serious study of the Bible, but ultimately the main reason why we should study the Bible is because it is our duty
    - b. We live as human beings under an obligation by divine mandate diligently study God's word
- B. Personal Bible Study and Private Interpretation
1. Two of the great legacies of the Protestant Reformation were the principle of private interpretation and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular
  2. Martin Luther himself brought the issue of private interpretation of the Bible into sharp focus in the 16th century
  3. *"Unless I am convinced by sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I cannot recant. For my conscience is held captive by the word of God and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; I can do no other ...God help me"*
  4. Did the Reformers promote the notion of unbridledness?
    - a. Does private interpretation mean that an individual has the right to interpret Scripture to suit himself?
    - b. May a person interpret Scripture in a whimsical manner with no restraint?
    - c. Should the private individual take the interpretation of others seriously, such as those who specialize in teaching the Scriptures?
  5. Private interpretation never meant that individuals have the right to distort Scripture
  6. With the right of private interpretation comes the responsibility of accurate interpretation
  7. Private interpretation opened the Bible for all people, but it did not do away with the principle of an educated vocational ministers
  8. The Reformers recognized that in Old and New Testament practice and teaching there was a significant place for the rabbi, the scribe, and the ministry of teaching

9. Martin Luther's famous doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers" can be misunderstood – it did not deny the reality that God has always used His ministers for gathering and strengthening His church to Himself, and for the governing and the preservation of His people
10. Objectivity and Subjectivity
  - a. The application of a biblical text to my life may have strong subjective overtones; however, "subjectivism" takes place when we distort the objective meaning of terms to suit our own interests
  - b. In seeking an objective understanding of Scripture, we are seeking to understand what the Word says in its context before we go about the equally necessary task of applying it to ourselves
11. In sound biblical interpretation, our first goal is to arrive at the objective meaning of Scripture
  - a. Exegesis means to explain what Scripture says
    - (1) Comes from the Greek word meaning "to guide out of"
    - (2) To exegete Scripture is to get out of the words the meaning that is there, no more and no less
  - b. Eisegesis involves reading into the text something that isn't there at all
12. No one has a perfectly pure understanding of Scripture; we all hold some views and entertain some ideas that are not of God
13. Our views need the sounding boards of other people's research and expertise
14. The role of the teacher is extremely important in the church
15. Teaching elders (or pastors) are responsible primarily for teaching and equipping the saints for ministry
  - a. Though small groups and home Bible studies can be very effective in promoting renewal of the church and the transformation of society, somewhere along the line people must receive educated teaching
  - b. Private study and interpretation must be balanced by the collective wisdom of the teachers
16. A good teacher must have sound knowledge and the necessary skills to unravel difficult portions of Scripture – there should be an understanding of language, history, and theology
17. Private Bible study is an important means of grace for Christians
18. It is a privilege and a duty for all believers

- III. Hearing God Clearly (Lesson One; Lecture Two)
  - A. The principles of Biblical interpretation are as important to us spiritually as our immune system is to our bodies
  - B. Consider the first recorded words of the serpent
    - 1. *“Did God actually say...”* (Gen 3:1)
    - 2. The idea behind the question was, “What did God mean?”
  - C. Their willingness to hear God’s meaning was a life or death issue
    - 1. The last Adam (Jesus Christ) had to pass the same test Adam failed
      - a. Jesus said to the devil, “Man [lives]...by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4)
      - b. That truth made it clear what Jesus would base His choices upon
    - 2. However, it still did not establish His hermeneutic, but His next statement to the devil made it clear that He considered the devil’s use of Scripture to violate God’s purpose in giving it; in other words, Jesus was conscious of both a right and wrong use of Scripture
    - 3. For Jesus also, this matter of interpretation was a life and death issue
  - D. As the father of lies, Satan, who comes as an angel of light, surely appeals to ignorance (whether it be willful or not) to corrupt the understanding of God’s message
    - 1. Paul warns about those who were *“peddlers of God’s word”* (2 Cor 2:17) – the illegitimate use of God’s Word (eisegesis)
    - 2. False teachers may be sincere, but gravely misguided through having a faulty hermeneutic (2 Peter 3:16 – *“...which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction”*)
    - 3. Paul exhorts Timothy to correctly handle the word of truth
      - a. 2 Tim 2:15 – *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”*
      - b. 2 Thess 2:10 – *“...because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”*
    - 4. James warns us that teachers (we assume that James is referring to Bible teachers) will be judged more strictly (James 3:1) – a stricter judgment because we are speaking for God
    - 5. Jesus warns that to break God’s commands and teach others to do the same (even with the *“least of these commandments”*) will cause us to be called the least in the kingdom (Matt 5:19)
  - E. Jesus’ greatest conflicts and most dire warnings were with the keepers of Scripture – the scribes and the Pharisees
    - 1. It is a temptation to interpret Scripture in ways that benefit our

- own belief or strengthen our position
  - 2. Jesus accused them of transgressing the commandment of God for the sake of their tradition (Matt 15:3 – *“And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”*)
  - 3. We must realize that we can be deceived by our own prejudices and political leanings unless we handle Scripture in a way that allows Scripture to cut through us, as it is supposed to do
  - 4. The leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians
    - a. Pharisees – hypocrisy and outward show (Matt 23:14,16; Lk 12:1)
    - b. Sadducees – skepticism and willful ignorance (Matt 22:23,29)
    - c. Herodians – malice and political guile (Matt 22:16-21; Mk 3:6)
- F. Jesus knew Scripture well, understood God’s purposes in His commands, and He could thereby distinguish which matters were more important to God (Matt 12:6-8; Mk 2:27; Matt 22:36; Matt 23:23)
- G. It is hoped that this course will give us some tools to use which will cause us to handle Scripture in the way it is intended to be read
- H. When we are confronted with new, different, or strange material, our process of understanding changes from spontaneous to self-conscious
  - 1. We must ask many questions of the new material if we are to learn a concept which we did not know before
  - 2. Simply adding additional information to a concept we already understand may not require the same rigorous effort
- I. Because human nature is to be lazy and proud, the untrained reader tends
  - 1. To assume definitions
  - 2. To not ask questions of the text
  - 3. To skip any unclear sections
  - 4. To be satisfied with the first interpretation that presents itself
  - 5. To not notice the details that might suggest thoughts with which we are unfamiliar
  - 6. To stick with spontaneous interpretation
- J. A humble approach to Scripture assumes that God wants to elevate the reader with new and extraordinary thoughts, using all the means of communication to their maximum extent
  - 1. Therefore, we must expect both hard work and revelation through the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:17)
  - 2. Proverbs 2:1-5 sets a precedent for this effort
- K. God clearly tells us that His thoughts differ from ours (Isa 55:8) and that we have thoughts which resist His thoughts (2 Cor 10:5)
- L. Various kinds of gaps exist between the text and us:
  - 1. The language gap

- a. You need only think of the differences between various Bible translations into English to be able to anticipate some of the problems involved
  - b. The language gap concerns the need to obtain an accurate translation from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of the Bible into our own language
- 2. The culture gap
  - a. This can involve a host of matters relating to the world of the Bible, and the many differences between it and our own world
  - b. The world of the Bible is a world vastly different from ours; yet, it is similar enough not to be totally alien
- 3. The history gap
  - a. This is similar to the culture gap, but also includes the problem of understanding the events recorded in biblical narrative for their historical value
  - b. The Christian faith rests upon key events in history
  - c. The Bible places great importance on certain events that modern historians either discount or regard as unimportant
- 4. The literature gap
  - a. How ancient authors wrote is a key matter for hermeneutics
  - b. This means that types, or genres, of literature, as well as the multitude of idioms and literary devices, will affect the way we interpret the literature
- 5. The textual gap
  - a. Because we do not possess any of the original biblical documents (autographs), we are thus reliant on the transmission of the text by handwritten texts until the invention of the printing press
  - b. Even the non-technically trained Bible reader will recognize the problem from the occasional footnotes that occur in most standard translations, which draw attention contextual variance or uncertainties of translation, because of obscurities in the expected text
- 6. The intended reader/ hearer gap
  - a. In dealing with this as an aspect of the history gap, we must also take account of the continuing relevance of the Bible to us as the word of God
  - b. How is the ancient text of the Bible relevant to us today?
- M. Biblical hermeneutics is the study of those principles which help us to responsibly bridge these and other gaps