

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. The definite rules and laws that apply to accurate interpretation qualify it as a science. The fact that a thorough application of hermeneutics requires skill and time qualify it as an art. The importance of proper interpretation of God's Word can hardly be overemphasized. Many a soul has been veered off course into a dark and dreary land of spurious doctrine. The workman of God must be able to combat these errors. For what is often at stake is not merely life or death, but rather heaven or hell. Responsible hermeneutics is governed by two major categories, foundational rules and particular guidelines. Both shall be discussed herein.

The foundational rules of hermeneutics are crucial to rightly dividing the Word of Truth. These foundations separate orthodox Christian teaching from that of the cultists, heretics, new agers, mystics, and pseudo-Christians. Those who use Scripture to construct worldviews completely foreign to that of Christendom do so through a violation of one or more of the foundational rules. These rules are:

- ❑ The Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is God's Word
- ❑ The Bible can be adequately understood in the translations
- ❑ The Bible is a unity
- ❑ The Bible is its own interpreter
- ❑ The Bible language is mainly normal human language
- ❑ Our understanding of the Bible must be accompanied by an honest, intelligent and obedient response to its message
- ❑ The Holy Spirit's teaching is necessary for understanding the Bible
(rules from *How to Understand Your Bible*, pgs. 28-31)

As logical and commonplace as these principles may seem, there are those who interpret the Bible from completely different tenets. The mind science cults and other metaphysical groups violate nearly every one of these precious guideposts. Catholics of long ago condemned any Scripture translated into the modern-day tongue. Liberal theologians allegorize passages that are clearly literal in meaning. Some people deny the authority of the Old Testament, and thus are left with only half a Bible. Still others think that they can understand the Bible as merely a book of history and so never seek the Holy Spirit's deeper teaching. What a blessing it is for the well-trained child of God to avoid such pitfalls!

The particular guidelines of hermeneutics are natural extensions of the foundational rules. They aid the hermeneutician in the technical aspects of Biblical interpretation. Unlike those who violate the foundational rules of hermeneutics, fumbling the ball in these finer points doesn't necessarily make one a heretic or demon-possessed deceiver. It simply means that the intended meaning was not extracted and promulgated. It is still a grievous error. It still should be avoided at all costs. It still has eternal consequences. Knowing this, these particulars should be given the utmost attention by every Christian leader. The particular guidelines are:

- ❑ Consider the context
- ❑ Understand the words
- ❑ Understand the grammar
- ❑ Grasp the author's intention
- ❑ Study the background
- ❑ Interpret Scripture by Scripture
(guidelines from *How to Understand Your Bible*, pgs. 49, 55, 61, 71, 76, 85)

The Bible is God's gift to mankind. It is the sword of the Spirit. It is an offensive weapon. One must be careful not to lop off his own leg when wielding such a device. Hermeneutics teaches the regenerate how to handle the Word of God. The foundational rules and particular guidelines that have been listed are time-tested truths of Biblical interpretation. Other methods of interpretation, which do not embody the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, are polluted with human folly and destroy the human soul. These practices usually end up demoting Christ while exalting man. We must guard against error in our exegesis. We must heed the admonition of the Apostle Paul: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2: 15).