

Summary of Hermeneutics Sunday School Class to Date

Note: Hermeneutics is simply the study of how to interpret the Bible.

Summary Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant [without error of any kind] in the autographs [original manuscripts].

Canonicity

A relevant quote on the subject of Biblical Authority and Inerrancy from the well known evangelical scholar F.F. Bruce from his book *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

History and theology are inextricably intertwined in the gospel of our salvation, which owes its eternal and universal validity to certain events which happened in Palestine when Tiberius ruled the Roman Empire... Some claim the historical reliability is not important because the fundamental principles of Christianity are laid down in the Sermon on the Mount, etc. and their validity is not affected by the truth or falsehood of the narrative framework in which they are set. The story of Jesus may be myth or legend but the teaching ascribed to him has value all its own... Just like Confucianism, Plato, etc... But Christianity is more than a code of ethics or a metaphysical system. It is good news bound up in history... God entered into history in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ... This is what makes Christianity unique from all the other religions of the world... its teachings are anchored in time and therefore the reliability of the writings which purport to record this revelation is a question of first rate importance. [See also I Cor. 15:1-20]

Summary Statement on the Inspiration of the Bible

God superintended his desired meaning through the personalities and individual styles of the human authors of the Bible in such a way that it communicates what God intended even down to the level of each letter. [See II Tim. 3:16-17, II Pet. 1:20-21]

Each one of us already has an interpretive framework (i.e. hermeneutical theory) by which we seek to correctly understand and apply what we find in the Bible. The question is whether that framework is correct or not. Since one of the main goals of interpreting the Bible is to discover the meaning of the text being studied we must first ask which of the three components of communication determines the meaning. Is the meaning determined by: 1) The Author?, 2) the Text?, or 3) the Reader? We affirm that the Author determines the meaning. The meaning of the text originates with and is controlled by the author. Thus, the meaning is whatever the author intended it to mean. This is the "common sense approach" that we use in normal, every day communication. It is interesting to note that in order to argue against this view you have to assume that it is true if you hope to make your point with your readers/hearers! This debate has

ramifications outside of the question of how to interpret the Bible. It was one of the main issues in the proceedings involving Supreme Court Judge candidates Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas. The issue of Constitutional Law revolved around whether or not it is proper or even possible to attempt to understand the Constitution based on the intent of the original framers. I argued with regard to both the Constitution and the Bible (and any other document) that in order to evaluate competing truth claims (i.e. different opinions as to what something means) the only hope to finding a definitive answer is to look to the original author's intention for the meaning.

Note: We should not confuse an author's intentions with an author's motives. When we seek to discover what an author intended we are not trying to discover what motivated him/her to write nor are we trying to relive the experiences of the author. The goal is simply to understand what the author consciously sought to communicate to his/her readers by what he/she wrote. Put in these terms it is hard to understand why there should even be a controversy about this at all. Indeed! In order for a text to exist, someone, sometime, somewhere decided to write it and have others read it for the purpose of conveying something meaningful. What a text meant when it was written can never change. It can no more change than any other historical event can change. It is this meaning that we are after.

Some Important Definitions [from *Playing by the Rules* by Dr. Robert Stein]

Meaning: That pattern of meaning which the author willed to convey by the words s/he used. (The meaning includes any implications—see below).

Implications: Those meanings in a text of which the author may have been unaware of but which nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern of meaning s/he willed. Implications like meaning are also determined by the author. Example: Eph. 5:18—Some implications of “Don’t get drunk with wine” are “Don’t get drunk with beer” and “Don’t get high on marijuana” which are based on the principle “Don’t lose control of your behavior through any substance that can cause intoxication.”

Significance: How a reader responds to the meaning of a text. The effect that the text's meaning (once it has been understood) has on a reader. While there is only one meaning there can be as many “significances” as there are readers. Significance involves what readers do as they respond to the meaning of the text. It is the application of the meaning or significances of the text to me.

Understanding: Possessing the correct mental grasp of the text's meaning.

Interpretation: The verbal or written expression of a text's meaning. These may also be many.