

## How to Study the Bible Pt. 1

# Hermeneutics

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10-15-23

### **Hermeneutics: How to read words from long ago for life today**

To get your attention today, I'd like to share a lesson from when I taught junior high Bible where I would ask students, "I bet you I can prove the Bible says there is no God. Anyone want to bet?" OK...Read the 7th-11th words from Psalm 14:1: "...there is no god." However, we missed the first words of this verse which say, "the fool says in his heart." So, we want to get the whole context!

**Psalm 14:1** The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

Read this: "GODISNOWHERE." God I Snow here? God is now here? God is no where? Remember that the original text had no punctuation or breaks. It might have looked like "godisnowhere."

Does the Bible really say...(fill in the blank)?

Let's remind ourselves how important it is to understand what is in this book and what our goals, challenges, and attitudes might be.

**Some questions to consider:**

**Do we need to study the Bible well? Do we need hermeneutics? Is it worth all this work? Or can we just relax and have good people around us to encourage us; is that enough?**

There are 100 verses on **what the Bible says about itself**. Here are a few:

### **II Tim 3:14-17**

**14** But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, **15** and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in

righteousness, **17** so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

#### **Rom 15:4**

**4** For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

The Bible's words give us hope and uncover our hearts!

#### **Heb 4:12-13**

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **13** Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

There is so much that we try to make sense of in terms of psychology and how people's minds and behaviors work. Gifted counselors try to understand but there's so much more: God's word does this. It doesn't substitute for counselors or doctors but it gives us things that humans can't offer. .

We are so blessed by our **community** here at the Village. But God's words empower our community:

#### **Col 3:15-17**

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **13** Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Several times, Sue has consistently reminded us to have the Word as the center of what we do. As we look at the three passages above, we can see the NEED for God's word and a way to understand it.

It's a process, a human (historical) process and a divine process. The Bible has never been super easy to understand, especially for new believers. Scripture begins to make sense as we mature. So let's start with **humility** because today's English Bibles are written by translators and can be deceiving. I bring my understanding of life, my presuppositions, and ideas to the Word.

The word "hermeneutics" has two channels: Biblical and philosophical. This has been derailed in the past 75 years with beliefs that depart from truth, including deconstruction and philosophers question any meaning. I can cherry pick from verses like Psm 14:1 and conclude there is no god.

The trouble is, we all see, hear, and experience life through cloudy glasses, including how we hear God speaking. We are all also influenced by how we experienced our parents. We just aren't objective! But this is OK because I start with my subjective pre-understanding and come to the text with imperfective understanding. This is enough for God's word to clear up my vision. Then the next time I come to this same text, God will get rid of more of my "stinking thinking." Some people say there is a hermeneutical circle but really it's more like a spiral. Our physical eyes do this in an eye exam: *"Is this better or is this?"*



If I write to you, "GODISNOWHERE," you might come to me and think I need help for a dandruff problem because you think I'm saying "God, I snow here." I was trying to say "God is NOW here." Many people are *trying* to look for things that are wrong: We should not come with this attitude. We do this with politics: "See what this person did this time?" We do this with other religions: I have my proof texts. We listen for people to make a mistake and trip up as opposed to listening really hard to understand why they believe what they believe. We should ask, 'How are they just like me: a person of good intent trying to find a better way to live?' Which of these approaches brings good results?

Often, we read the Bible to find answers to our questions. Instead, we should start by asking "what was the author's intent?"

**The goal of hermeneutics:** To arrive at the meaning of the text that the biblical writers or editors intended for their readers to understand.

My first assignment in seminary was to read different commentaries about the Good Samaritan. They were all different. Some had symbols for Paul, Jesus, etc. This left me wondering what the truth was!

Hermeneutics wants to start with the truth is not far away with what the human was trying to communicate under the Holy Spirit's inspiration: **How does this point to something that is always true? How will this play out to what is true and applicable today? Ask what the original author was trying to say.**

But answering this question is not as simple as it seems because the author lived a very different life from us! Their cultural contexts were very different which make fences that we need to get over. ***We won't find this out by simply reading the verse(s) over and over with a prayerful attitude.*** This is why sitting under good teaching and reading good commentaries is important and helpful. This gives us help to see more clearly into these issues. In our human process, we need to understand the context: the history and the scholarly translators. Today, of course, you can use websites instead of paper books but both require work. It's worth the work!

Another process is to look at the different scales of context: Godisnowhere.

- What was the Greek or Hebrew word?
- What were the words and sentences these words came from?

Does Psalm 24 say that all people who say there is no god are fools? What does the whole psalm say? When was this book written? When was it written in salvation history: Before or after Jesus? What is the consistent message in the word and how does this fit into my life and my community? These are like concentric circles coming out from one little word. This is a big part of hermeneutics.

What did these words mean then and to us now?? We have good intentions when we read books like "God's Promise Book." Consider this verse:

### 2 Chronicles 7:14

**14 If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.**

Some people think this was written to the U.S. but it was actually written to Israel. If we just believe it was written to us, is that enough?



Think of promises like checks that we can cash. If we just write our name on the check, does it now belong to us?

Have you ever had a check that went bad because it wasn't cashed on time? Once this happened to me. My options were to try to write a new date on the check or to contact the giver and ask if they would be willing to write a new check. They were willing to do this because this was their original intent. Similarly, the heart of God is the same for me as for those people whom the promise was for. I can talk to Him about this.

Studying requires hard work:

**II Tim 2:7**

Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

This is the promise we are given. God will give us understanding with our hard work and prayer.

**Ps 19:18 Open my eyes**

Go to the source of what we read:

We have the author to help us understand!

**I Cor 2:12**

**12** What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

The Bible IS a love letter written to you and me but it's a letter that takes understanding. God has used historical narrative, poetry, historical documents of national histories and armies, stories, parables, prophetic and apocalyptic writing to communicate with us. He is waiting for us to say "Father, what did you mean here?" Sometimes this will require some careful research and prayer and waiting and humility. This is my final thought today:

**HUMILITY**

People will disagree on biblical doctrines:

**Heb 4:12-13**

**12** For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **13** Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

I once thought I had all the answers in seminary...now that I'm over twice as old, I know that we are always reforming. But don't give up! **The author is here!**