

Lesson 2 and 3 – D A Carson lectures 1 – 2 by Julie Cortens

Hermeneutics – “to interpret”

Apostle Paul states “Correctly handle the Word of truth” which assumes there can be an incorrect way to handle it. So HOW do we handle the Word of truth correctly?

Four ways to approach the study of the scriptures.

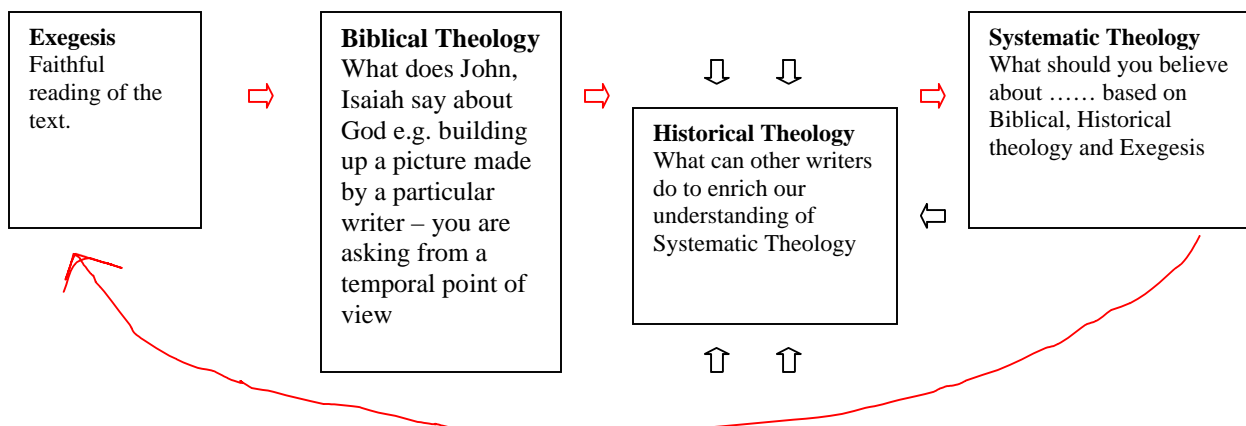
1. Classic approach to hermeneutic - Rules and principals are developed for interpreting the text – **I** study the **text** and then develop principals to interpret it correctly
2. Technical scholarly rules – source criticism e.g. – will not cover here.
3. “New hermeneutic”- the interpreter is not fixed – **I** come to the text with **my** own presuppositions – therefore everything I get out of my study is shaped by who I am. Therefore how can I find truth – how can I find an infallible Word with this bias.
4. The passage of the Bible is placed in an historical geographical and cultural setting. E.g. Rev 3.

How to study words, literary genre, the place of the Holy Spirit in interpreting = all need to be addressed.

Basic Principals of Biblical Interpretation

1. *READ the Bible* – there is no quick course for understanding the scriptures. There must be a general understanding across the whole of scriptures in order to begin to understand the particular areas of study. Read, read, read.
2. *The original languages take precedent.* God revealed Himself to Jews/Gentiles in their language in their culture and in their particular era. The Word is set of 66 historical books. Read commentaries until you are comfortable enough to be able to use commentaries that use the original languages. God has chosen to reveal himself in a particular culture in a particular time. Therefore we need to understand the language and the historical period.
3. *Immediate context takes precedence over a more remote context.* Examine how a Biblical direction functions in its context. Scripture does NOT contradict itself. Focus on the context of the particular scripture first before comparing various scriptures. E.g. John 3:3 and 3:5 “born of water and of the Spirit”Titus – washing of water through the Word – therefore begotten of Word and Spirit vs. water baptism and the Holy Spirit. Start from the immediate context – Jesus is talking to a learned leader of the Jews – Nicodemus is criticized for not understanding what Jesus is talking about. Jesus presupposes that Nicodemus should have understood the Hebrew Bible. The word “Water” and how it is used here in John must be considered – not how it is used by other authors - immediate context says we look at what John means when he uses the word “water”. Also “night” is an important theme for John. Night/dark used in John used when he is talking about evil, death – he plays on the theme of lightness and darkness – good and evil. (see verses 19-21 – some people love darkness) This “immediate” information shapes how we interpret the whole chapter. When we work from the immediate context backward we see that Ezekiel is what Nicodemus should have understood.
4. *It is vital to place the passage of the Bible in it’s historical, geographical cultural setting* e.g. Rev 3 Many of the symbols that Christ uses are drawn from the particular customs, sayings, happenings, settings of the local culture and people. References to sight, dirty water piped in (not good hot and cold water of better places) are used by the Lord to convey His thoughts about the people of Laodicea i.e. – they were like their water – the worst in the empire. This background does not come from Bible reading – it comes from reading commentaries. God has chosen to reveal Himself in space, time and history and so there are cultural realities that need explaining. Another e.g. is Matthew 25. These parables, when understood in the cultural milieu, tells us that we must learn to ‘wait’!

5. *Locate the passage in its place in redemptive history.* This is very complicated! The Bible is not a collection of abstract truths. It is a series of documents, but they are all connected with a common storyline. It is extremely important to place your particular scripture verse on the correct place on the storyline. However everything we think we know about this storyline in historical theology affects our Systematic, Biblical, Exegetical theology. I am influenced by what I know. (Exegesis – the faithful reading of the text, Biblical Theology – unlike Systematic theology you work piece by piece, you are asking the questions from a ‘self’ point of view – Historical Theology – the contribution of other scholars, Systematic Theology – reflection about God and His truth that asks and answers questions – who, what, where, why. e.g. what is God like.) It is important in our reading of text to try to place the text in its historical juncture along the line of God’s historical revelation in redemptive history. However, even if we have ‘learned’ something that is incorrect, the text must always be considered the truth. Our theology must conform to the text not the text conform to our theology.



My exegesis is influenced by biases, presuppositions, experiences and convictions with or without knowledge. They all affect the way I approach biblical theology, historical theology, my exegesis and Systemic Theology. We must recognize that this happens or we will not be able to hear the truths of scripture and so reform our own theology. At the end of the day, Systematic Theology must **help** us control how we do exegesis. The truths we learn will shape the way we read texts. Consider thought that we may learn untruths in our Systematic Theology . The line of authority must lie with the text and NOT our systematic theology. Our reading of scripture must be able to overturn what we have falsely learned. I think this principal of Biblical Interpretation is worthy of several lessons itself. It drives to the core of how we study scriptures and how we approach the scriptures – our own systematic theology.

6. *Delimit the function of Biblical statements and Biblical truths.* John 13 – foot washing. Jesus says His disciples are to do what He has done when He washes their feet. He also tells us we are to do as He as done when He introduces the Lords Table – so why do we not do both? Good question! We need to look at how the command to foot wash “functions” in John 13. In its context the foot washing passage points to Jesus’ death. There is an analogy between Jesus’ foot washing and His cleansing of His people. The other point/lesson here is that the foot washing says that if Jesus has been humble than we too must be humble. So do we accomplish that humbleness by washing each others feet? We need to delimit the function of statements and claims according to the text itself. Carson does not seem to make it clear – at least to me – why we are not to follow His command to wash feet - although the passage says to me that we are commanded to be humble with one another.
7. *Go with the flow.* Most parts of the Bible are designed to be read in their flow. Very few parts of the Bible are not written in a flow – e.g. parts of Proverbs. But the majority are, so read slowly and carefully with the flow. Matt 11 – John the Baptist learns in prison what Christ is doing and asks if He is the Christ. Jesus replies with a summary of His ministry with a quote from scripture – Isaiah

35 and 61. Then adds “blessed is the man who does not fall away”. How does this relate to John the Baptists question? Jesus’ answer is an encouragement to John and others to press on. How do we know? - Read the parts of Isaiah that Christ left out when he quoted Isaiah. WOW!! And there is more – Jesus is saying that John the Baptist is greater than King David! He is the one designated by God to point Him out!...and then Christ says –“and the least in the Kingdom is greater than John” ...could it be that we can point Jesus out even better than John the Baptist??? Even greater than Isaiah? This is an incredible thought – how does God want to use me? If you read the text as a narrative – you will see this.