

Biblical Hermeneutics

I think we would all agree that when we communicate any thought, it usually involves at least two parties in its process: the communicator who delivers the message and the recipient who receives and interprets the message in their mind. Both individuals must follow some basic principles/rules/standardized patterns for clear communication to occur: the communicator must express the message clearly, and the recipient must understand the communicator's meaning in its context. If individuals follow these rules for communication, usually the communication is successful and the intended message is understood. If that be the case, how much more significant is the practice of attempting to understand correctly what God has communicated to each of us in His Word?

Article V of the Immanuel Bible Church constitution serves as a declaration of what we teach from the cover of Scripture—we call this our “Statement-of-Faith”. The preamble of our statement of faith describes the lens through which we look at Scripture to arrive at the theological positions upon which we stand. The lens through which we look can also be called the “hermeneutic” (Greek= “to understand, translate, solve”), or the methodology we use to interpret the Scriptures which enables us to arrive at the theological positions we ascribe to. This attempt at accurate comprehension is the study of interpretation, also known as hermeneutics. The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to protect us from misapplying Scripture or allowing bias to color our understanding of truth. **“Your Word is truth”** (John 17:17—Speaking to God as Jesus prayed for His disciples in His high priestly prayer).

I believe it was Martin Luther who said: **“Hermeneutics is the battlefield on which the war is won or lost.”** I think we would agree.

Thus, we state in our constitution (via the preamble to the statement of faith) that the teaching of Immanuel Bible Church is based on an interpretation of the Scripture that is:

1. Normal
2. Literal
3. Grammatical
4. Historical
5. Systematic

As a direct result of this, **the elders of Immanuel Bible Church without hesitation or apology believe and affirm that the Immanuel Bible Church statement of faith reflects the truth of God's Word.**

Before we go any further, let's look at some definitions:

Biblical hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation of the Bible or other sacred texts. Biblical hermeneutics is the method of interpreting Scripture so we can bridge the gaps between modern-day readers of the Bible, its original audiences, and God as its ultimate author.

Biblical exegesis The word *exegesis* literally means “to lead out of” and therefore is the actual interpretation of the Scriptures, the **bringing out of its meaning**; having applied consistent hermeneutic principles and careful, objective analysis. That means that the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text. Our responsibility as Bible readers is to draw out the truth from the text open before us, not to try and make Scripture say whatever we'd like—or what was never intended.

Biblical eisegesis literally means “to lead into”, as in “leading our own ideas into the text”. So, **eisegesis is when we “read something into” a biblical text that may not actually be there**, while exegesis is when we work to “draw out” of the text what is actually there and was actually intended.

An example of eisegesis – (reading into a biblical text) This might be the small group member who, no matter which passage of Scripture you're reading, always manages somehow to bring the discussion around to their particular **hobby horse**, whether it be ***predestination, or God's love, or human sin, or the need to care for the poor.*** All these things are in the Bible - but they're not in every text. If we think they are, then we're “eisegeting” the text instead of “exegeting” it.

Biblical Significance

Understanding those definitions, let's briefly look at why this hermeneutical discussion is so important.

Remember the Apostle Paul's clear admonition in **2 Timothy 2:15** where he exhorts believers to be involved in hermeneutics—the careful study of the Word?

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who . . . correctly handles the word of truth.”

The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to help us to know how to properly interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.

Why is this so important?

Remember what Paul reminded us in 2 Timothy 3? He said that despite the deception of evil men...

- 14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,**
15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The wisdom that leads to salvation itself lies in the balance of the correct interpretation of Scripture.

Also: In the next two verses, Paul tells us that the Scripture is able to equip man for EVERY GOOD WORK! If that is the case, we must get to the proper interpretation of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

- 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;**
17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Observing, interpreting and applying the text is critical to living the abundant and obedient Christian life. We must value, employ and protect the proper interpretation of Scripture. What we value in life, we go to (or should go to) great lengths to guard and protect.

Illustration:

I think it would be accurate to say that most if not all men carry some form of a wallet and most if not all women carry some form of a purse wherever they go, and I presume that inside each wallet or purse are perhaps some varied denominations of U.S. currency. Whether it is a \$1, \$5, \$10, \$50 or perhaps even \$100, the United States Bureau of Engraving and Printing goes to great lengths to ensure the authenticity and consistency of not only the bills in your wallet, but each and every one of the more than 8 billion denominational notes it prints every year; the “treasure of the United States”. Of particular note, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing Police force is tasked with the security of the monetary plates, used to print our money and they are also tasked with guarding the money which is printed on those plates. They literally are the ones our nation depends upon to “guard the treasure”. In order to prevent counterfeiting and all the ills which come with that evil, the BEP police are tasked with retaining the integrity of the printing standard (printing plates) and guarding the money (treasure) which the printing plates produce. They literally guard our treasure! Aren’t we thankful that our government goes to such great lengths to protect the integrity and the value of our currency? **You see friends, what we value in life, we go to great lengths to guard and protect.**

And let’s be clear, this “treasure” (The Word of God) is not just a treasure in our estimation but God explains the significant worth of His own Word (the “treasure”) throughout His Scripture. Here are just a few examples of the value God places on His own Word- so we need to get the interpretation correct:

Hebrews 4:12

(For the word of God) is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

2 Timothy 3:16

(All Scripture) is God-breathed and profitable...

2 Timothy 3:17

Equips man for every good work

Romans 1:16

Power of God for salvation

Psalm 119:115

Lamp to our feet, light to our path

Psalm 19 (King David)

Perfect / Revives the soul

Makes wise the simple/ Causes the heart joy

Enlightens the eyes/More desirable than gold

Isaiah 40:8 (durability)

The grass withers, the flower fades

but the word of our God will stand forever.

God values the treasure of His Word so much that ***He will make it endure forever!*** Friends, what God values, we should value and what we value, we should go to great lengths to handle properly and protect.

Perhaps that is why the Apostle Paul, at the end of his life, the Apostle Paul gave his spiritual understudy, Timothy two three-word imperatives: **“Retain the Standard” and “Guard the Treasure”!** in 2 Timothy 1:13-14.

- 13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.**
- 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.**

Retain= “dig in”, like a baseball player’s cleats or an anchor holding a ship
Standard-

Standard in Greek Means a form or a pattern, perhaps we can think of it as a “sketch” of an architect’s blueprint. These are like the “plates” from which our money is printed.

The standard (or “hermeneutic”) that we hold to as we interpret Scripture is as follows:

1. **Normal** - We understand the actual **words** of Scripture in their common usage unless otherwise indicated by the context. *Interpretation must be based on the author’s intention of meaning and not the reader’s understanding.* For instance, we interpret the word “day” (“yom” used 2,301 times in OT) in the Genesis

account of creation to be a literal 24 hour day. We believe that was Moses' intention and so we take it that way.

2. **Literal** – We understand the **meaning** of Scripture in its ordinary sense unless the context requires a figurative interpretation.

Two concepts seem to be in view.

First, literal interpretation encompasses the idea of assigning to every word the same meaning it would have in its normal usage, whether employed in speaking, writing, or thinking.

Second, literalism resists going beyond what is written and interpreters resist the temptation to import foreign ideas from outside the text.

By way of examples using a literal hermeneutic, we take the six-day creation account literally. We believe there was a flood, an Ark, a large fish which swallowed Jonah, a virgin who gave birth, water that changed into wine and we believe in the literal death, burial, resurrection, ascension and second coming of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, as an additional example, when Jesus speaks of having fed “the five thousand” in [Mark 8:19](#), the law of hermeneutics says we should understand that He meant *five thousand* literally—there was a very large crowd of hungry people that numbered five thousand who were fed with real bread and real fish by a miracle-working Savior. Any attempt to “spiritualize” the number or to deny a literal miracle is to do injustice to the text, and put into question the credibility of both Jesus' spoken words and His miraculous ability.

But we must also remember that by taking a literal approach, we take the plain **meaning** of the text at face value unless it is an obvious “figure of speech”. For example, [Isaiah 55:12](#) **states as a result of the joy of the millennium kingdom “the trees of the field will clap their hands”**. Since trees do not have hands or clap this must be a figure of speech.

Additionally, we look for words such as “like” or “as” which can also communicate a figure of speech. I think we see this in the book of Revelation where John has been given a vision of things in the future. He can't always know what he is seeing because it is futuristic, but he tries to describe things using terms like or as.

Thus, in a normal or literal interpretation, the Bible is best allowed to speak for itself. In contrast, an allegorical method seeks to understand the words of the passage in a deeper, more obscure way; it searches for the spiritual meaning that is usually ***beyond the intent of the author***. According to distinguished DTS professor Roy Zuck, “***Allegorizing is searching for a hidden or a secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of a text.***”

Example: In Genesis 2:10–14, Moses recorded that a river left the Garden of Eden and formed four rivers, which he named and then gave additional details concerning them. A literal interpretation is that Moses described a physical garden and four physical rivers, but an allegorical interpretation is that the river of Eden signified goodness, Eden signified wisdom, and the four rivers signified four character qualities; obviously not what the author (Moses) intended.

3. **Grammatical** - using the recognized rules of Hebrew and Greek grammar to interpret scripture. Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT) have their own grammatical patterns. English (Subject, verb, object). Hebrew (verb, subject, object). Greek (each sentence seems to be different). The overall point is that word order, tense, person, gender, etc. all matter to the proper interpretation and applicatio

Bible interpreters must correctly analyze the relationship that words, phrases, or sentences have toward one another. Such an analysis entails the study of lexicology (meaning of words), morphology (form of words), parts of speech (function of words), and syntax (relationship of words). [Syntax example: **Syntax** is the way that words or terms are combined to form clauses, phrases, or sentences. Word order plays a significant role in determining the meaning of any passage.

Example: The meaning of John 3:16 "**For God so loved the world...**" would change drastically with a simple change in word order, "**For the world so loved God...**"].

Example: When Paul writes of “**our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ**” in Titus 2:13, the rules of Greek grammar state that *God* and *Savior* are parallel terms and they are both in apposition to *Jesus Christ*—in other words, Paul clearly calls Jesus “our great God.” Interpreting a passage contextually involves considering the context of a verse or passage when trying to determine the

meaning. The context includes the verses immediately preceding and following, the chapter, the book, and, most broadly, the entire Bible.

[**Apposition:** relationship between two or more words or phrases in which the two units are **grammatically** parallel and have the same **referent** (e.g. *my friend Sue* ; *the first US president, George Washington*).]

4. **Historical** – We understand the words of Scripture in the context of the times in which they were written. Certain textual passages have universal application (10 Commandments, Great Commission) while other textual passages only applied to a specific period of time. As an example, we don't follow the animal sacrificial system of the Law of the Old Testament.

5. **Systematic** – We compare the teaching of a passage with the entire Bible in view (What does Paul say in 2 Timothy 1 and how does that compare with what he said throughout all of his Epistles. How does Paul's teaching interact with the rest of Scripture?). Scripture must complement and not contradict Scripture if indeed it is all inspired by God and we believe that it is.

Example: One should not conclude from James 2:24 that salvation is by works when Ephesians 2:8–9 clearly denies that misunderstanding.

In summary, these are the “standards of sound words” and we are committed to holding fast and retaining our standard/pattern because we adhere to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:13-14 that **the goal of learning the Word and teaching the Word is:**

- 13 ...that we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.**
- 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;**
- 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,**

Four Dangers of not using a sound hermeneutical approach (J. Dwight Pentecost)

1. First and foremost, the ***authority transfers from the text to the interpreter***. In other words, the basic authority in interpretation ceases to be the Scriptures, but rather the mind of the interpreter.
2. Second, the Scripture itself is not being interpreted. The ***issue becomes not what God has spoken but what the interpreter thinks***.
3. Third, one is left without any means by which the conclusions of the interpreter may be tested. When the objective standard of language's common meaning is dispensed with, ***one man's personal interpretation becomes just as valid as anyone else's***.
4. Fourth, there is ***no mechanism to control the imagination of the interpreter***.

Suggestions for further study:

1. Literal vs. "dynamic equivalent" versions of Scripture
2. Bible study resources/commentaries (Bible Knowledge Commentary, MacArthur, Precept Austin, Logos)

Take-aways (Unbeliever/Believer)

I want to close today by discussing some practical take-aways. Every time we look at Scripture we should ask "What does it say? What does it mean? And what should I do?" (Observation, Interpretation, Application) I want to spend some time on what we should do to "Guard the Treasure". I think also that when we look at Scripture that there is application for both the believer and unbeliever so let me first start with those outside of the family of faith.

Take away #1

SURRENDER

Our discussion today regarding the defense of the faith is obviously directed toward those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that these two imperatives, Retaining the Standard and Guarding the Treasure are only possible for those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ because of our need to rely on the Holy Spirit who resides within us to accomplish the task. That ability is not available to those who are separated from Christ. In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:18 reminds us that **“the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing”**. But, we as believers in Jesus Christ and because of our love for Him and His Word, we are compelled to tell you of your need for Him. The task before you my friend is not one of retaining the standard or guarding the treasure, your task simply involves the surrender of your life to Jesus, the only one who has the power to forgive you of your sins. I invite you to do that today.

Take away #2

ENGAGE

For those of us here who have a relationship with Christ, our task is pretty clear. Whosoever has accepted the message of salvation for himself is, entrusted with the stewardship of that message and for sharing the message with others. Every Christian man and woman who has the Word is thereby bound to tell the Word faithfully/truthfully/correctly as Paul says in the faith and love which are in Jesus Christ. The love of God should compel us to want to share the good news with the lost. That is the stewardship of our salvation.

Take away #3

DEFEND

Finally, I remember a conversation I had many years ago with my father, a career police officer. In a discussion about counterfeiting, I asked him how he and his fellow officers were able to remember all the different methods used to counterfeit let's say a \$20. He said it was simple, we just spend a lot of time studying the real McCoy and then it makes it much easier to spot a counterfeit bill. I think you understand the point. So, after having recommitted to study, live, teach and preach by the “standard of sound words” we are indeed called to “Guard the Treasure” which has been entrusted to us. Friends, you and I are literally surrounded by those who ascribe to counterfeit religion and are duped by and sharing false

teaching. They are even bold enough (or are making it convenient enough) to come and knock on our front doors! What an opportunity! We owe it to ourselves and we owe it to them to know the word so well that we can with great grace and humility, identify, challenge and correct counterfeit, false teaching.

2 Timothy 2:15 says that we should **“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”** We offer ample opportunities throughout the week on our campus and throughout the community for each of us to sharpen our skills so that we can **Retain the Standard** and **Guard the Treasure**. We entrusted our lives to Christ and in turn He has entrusted the Gospel to us and gave us the Holy Spirit. ***We now bear a tremendous responsibility!***