Part 5
The Protestant System of Hermeneutics

Introduction:

The Divine Inspiration of Scripture is the foundation from which we begin, for "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2Tim 3:16-17). The Protestant Approach to Hermeneutics recognizes that the Bible must be understood as absolute truth including all the miracles. This adds new depth to common words such faith, love, redemption and salvation because not only are concepts presented but facts are given to validate the concepts.

Also at the core of "How to Study the Bible" is acceptance of the fact that the Bible has been inspired by God in its entirety. This is called verbal-plenary inspiration indicating that every part of the Bible has been inspired by God.

To correctly interpret God's Word first requires that the individual is a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ because, "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:14-16)." The second requirement for correct interpretation of God's Word is directly related to one's relationship with the Holy Spirit, because it is His function to "guide us into all truth (John 16:13)." The third requirement is an intellectual honesty that consistently and eagerly uses the tools that God has given us to learn His Word. We are instructed to, "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)."

The goal of interpretation is always to be love. All goals in life are supposed to revolve around what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself called the "Two Greatest Commandments." In Mark 12:28-31, the text reports, "And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." The Apostle Paul gave his teaching objective in 1 Tim 1:5 which says, "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

The intent of this love-guided teaching should be to promote the Spiritual growth of the Believer in the Lord Jesus. This principle is clearly taught in Ephesians 4:11-16,

that says, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until 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. 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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Interpretation must be tested with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Timothy 6:3-5, Paul says, “If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”

For Personal Study

1. What is the foundation of the Protestant system of Hermeneutics? Why?

2. What are three personal requirements for the interpretation of Scripture?

3. What should be the objective of all interpretation and why?

4. What should our teaching promote and why?

5. What is the standard we are to use to test interpretation?

Part 6
The Protestant System of Hermeneutics:

Theological Perspectives:

There are certain theological perspectives that our method of Bible study must include in order for us to approach the text and interpret Scripture properly.

The **first** principle involves the Clarity of Scripture, which is clearly taught in 2 Peter 1:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 14:33. The passage in 2 Peter says, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Scripture is clear because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. We must remember that although Scripture is "clear" there still may be parts that are difficult to understand.

One of the basic guiding principles is that "God said what He meant and meant what He said." We must seek to know His Word as He intended. We also know that, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace (1 Cor 14:33)," so where there is confusion it is on our part and not God's. Therefore, "problem passages" come from our lack of knowledge, our perspective or desire to "do His will (John 7:17). The use of the original languages under the ministry of the Holy Spirit will clarify many of these problems.

The **second** principle is that Revelation is Accommodated, which means that it was originally communicated in language to be understood by the initial recipients. The Scripture often uses analogies to inescapable realities that fit the time frame in which it was written. The application of this principle requires some knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of the people to which the portion of the Word was addressed.

The **third** theological principle is that Revelation is Progressive. This refers to the fact that various precepts are initially presented in a summary form and then enlarged. A wonderful example is found in the "promised seed of the woman" found in Genesis 3:15. More information about the Messiah is found throughout the Old Testament, especially in the types and symbols that are used to give a vivid picture of the Messiah who was to come. The New Testament is documentation of the reality that Messiah has come. While this is the clearest example of Progressive Revelation, there are many concepts that are initially presented and then developed.

The **fourth** principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture meaning that the obscure passage should give way to the clear. This principle realizes that essential truths are not hidden. We should look for detailed passages on a given subject and let them be the guide in the interpretation of the passages with less detail. An illustration of this principle is found in the comparison of Matthew 24:40 with Matthew 13:49. In

Matthew 24, the phrase "one will be taken, and one will be left" could refer either to the righteous being taken at the Rapture of the church or the wicked being taken at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. The passage in Matthew 13 which is also found in a context dealing with the "last days" says that it will be the "wicked who will be taken out from the righteous." Thus, we are able to interpret the Matthew 24 passage as referring to the Second Advent and not the Rapture because Scripture has interpreted Scripture.

The **fifth** principle is the Analogy of Faith. This principle means that there is only one system of truth in Scripture. There are not two or more theological systems. The practical application of this is that all doctrines and conceptual studies must be in harmony with one another. The interpretation of particular passages of Scripture must not contradict the total teaching of Scripture on a given subject. For example, eternal salvation is either by grace through faith, or by works, but not both. God's Word does not have two different systems or means to eternal salvation, but rather it has one (Eph 2:8-9). Therefore, passages that relate our "works" done in this body to eternity must be understood in view of the passages that clearly specify that our eternal salvation is by grace.

The **sixth** theological principle is the Unity of Meaning of the Scripture. This is why believers develop a systematic theology that seeks to understand and explain how various passages and concepts fit together. This principle seeks to understand and communicate how God has put His Word together. Man's tendency though is to "read into" God's Word what he wants to find (eisegesis). When man desires (either intentionally or not) to impose his system upon God's Word he is prone to presumptive allegories and distortions of the Scriptures. Knowing what God says and desires should always be the first priority of the student of His Word.

For Personal Study

1. Explain in your own words the principle of the Clarity of Scripture.

2. Explain in your own words the principle that Revelation is Accommodated.

3. Explain in your own words the principle that Revelation is Progressive.

4. What is the significance and importance of the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture?

5. What is the Analogy of Faith?

6. What is the value of the principle regarding the Unity of Meaning?

Part 7
The Protestant System of Hermeneutics

Grammatical Perspectives

Philology is a technical term meaning a "friend of words." It refers to a love of learning and desire to study the disciplines of language. Since the Bible is made up of words, there is need for the technical and comparative study of the words that are used in the Bible. The student of the Word of God must pay careful attention to the specific words and the context in which the Holy Spirit placed them into the Scripture. While it is possible to gain some tremendous insights into God's Word from a study of the words used in various translations, one must be very careful of trying to develop a theology from anything other than the original languages. The disciple with no training in the original languages will need to rely on the work of others in many of these areas.

The first principle we will consider is that we should approach the Scriptures believing that God's Word is Basically Literal. The Literal Approach to Scripture recognizes the natural or usual speech constructions and implications of a particular writing or expression. It follows the ordinary and apparent sense of the words that are used in their historical context. This is not a “letterist” approach that reads meaning into letters but instead is the usual method of interpretation of any literature. We approach God's Word literally because we find that the statements and descriptions He gives of the Messiah had literal fulfillment in Jesus Christ. If there are spiritual meanings that come from signs, symbols, parables and the like they still depend on the literal strata of a language. Only in a literal approach is there any hindrance to abuse of the interpretation of the Scriptures. The Literal Approach does not overlook figures of speech, symbols, or types.

The practice of the literal is done by the Study of Words which is our second principle. Words establish the context of a body of literature. In the study of words, you will find that some are technical or very specific in their meaning while others are non-technical or general in their meanings. It makes sense that the non-technical words should be interpreted in view of the technical words that surround them. This is actually a specific application of letting Scripture interpret Scripture and the clear passages interpret the obscure.

As we study the words we look at the way they were formed which is called "etymology." This type of study can give tremendous insight into the meaning of the word. For example, the Greek word PARAKALEO is formed from the word PARA meaning "alongside" and KALEO meaning "to call." The word itself then means to "call alongside." It is a word variously translated as "comfort," "encourage," or "exhort." It implies though a call to another person into a relationship that is "arm-in-arm" with you. There are many good lexicons available that explain the way the words were formed.

We also must study words comparatively referring to how they relate to other words. This will involve Concordance studies. An exhaustive Concordance will show every place a given word is used. Many also have number codes that tell which Greek or Hebrew words have been translated by that particular word. Strong's Concordance is probably the best for the beginning student. It is also valuable for the advanced student. The Comparative Study of words also considers synonyms (words with similar or identical meanings) and antonyms which are words with opposite meanings. There are very few pure synonyms, so the careful student will find beautiful subtleties of meaning that can greatly enhance his understanding of the Word.

It is also important to study words culturally meaning their significance to the culture that used them in the era in which they were used. There is a trap of not applying a correct Biblical chronology to the study of the words. We must realize that words change meanings over the course of time. The meanings also tend to go from specific to general. This principle was espoused by Martin Luther and John Calvin and sought to determine the original designation of a particular word. In Latin it is known as the *usus loquendi*.

When possible, the serious student may also consider cognate languages, which are languages of the same linguistic family. However, one must beware of placing too much emphasis on this study.

The Literal Approach to Scripture is also practiced by considering the grammatical structure of sentences because words form sentences. Sentences are units of thought. The research is the same as for the study of words. One must consider the Context in which the sentence is found. The immediate context considers the sentences and paragraphs in closest proximity to the one under consideration. The intermediate context considers the book in which the sentence is placed and the remote context considers the rest of the Bible.

In our study of sentences we must also know what type of language is under consideration. It may be "Analytic" which depends on the word order to communicate the meaning. Hebrew and English are examples of "Analytic" languages. It may also be"Agglutinative" which is considered a "synthetic" language where case endings are primarily used to convey the intended meaning.

The study of parallel passages is also important to the Literal Approach to the Scripture. Just because one finds wording similar to that found in another passage, the passages still may not be parallel. The issue should not be forced.

One should also look at similar concepts. An example of this would be to study the "Resurrection of the Dead" as found in 1Corinthians 15 and Revelation 20.

The Literal Approach also considers the Literary Genre of the passage under consideration. A genre is a standardized pattern of writing, such as poetry and prose. The Literary Genre makes us consider various figures of speech, such as in Revelation 5:5 where the Lord is called the "lion" of Judah. Jesus Christ is not a literal "lion," so the figure of speech represents a trait that He literally possesses. Scripture also uses Parables and even an Allegory (Gal 4:24). Recognizing the Literary Genre does not touch the literal hermeneutical principles, but instead clearly identifies figurative language and literally interprets. Song of Solomon is clearly loaded with figurative language, but its interpretation must be first considered literally.

It is extremely important that the interpreter of Scripture have some knowledge of Biblical history and chronology in particular. This is important in understanding the Biblical culture customs and rituals. Revelation comes in and through a cultural form and in some cases the principles taught are transcultural. It is an art determining when.

The student of God's word must come to the Scriptures with some basic questions. As we approach any passage we must seek to answer the "Who, what, when, where, why and how." After those questions are answered, there are some secondary questions we would ask such as, "How does this apply to me or the ones I am to teach?" and “Are there any conditions to these principles such as special circumstances?"

The student of God's Word must approach His Word with Intellectual Honesty, seeking to know what God has said. There are many hindrances to correct interpretation including the desire for the applause of men, vanity, flattery, fear, and inconsistent or unbalanced study (like only studying topics and not studying through a book). Every time we go into the Word we should submit our biases to the absolute standard of truth, the Word of God, because only His Word is Truth (John 17:17). We also must seek to learn from Him in order to do His will (John 7:17) and not simply as an academic exercise. The Pharisees demonstrate what happens when we leave the desire for a relationship with the Living God out of our study of His Word (also read John 5:39-47). Let us pray, pray and pray.

<u>The Sequence Of Interpretation:</u>

The first step is to analyze the words realizing that the technical or specific words set the context and that the non-technical or general words are interpreted by the context.

The second step is to analyze the grammar recognizing the word functions that are forced by the words themselves or the grammatical construction. These set the context and serve as the basis to interpret the words that can have optional grammatical functions. In other words we are letting the clear interpret the questionable.

The third step is to interpret based on the contexts, looking first at the immediate context in which we find the word, namely within the sentence or paragraph, then at the intermediate context which refers to its location within the book in which it is found and then at the remote context which considers the rest of the Scripture. Correct interpretation will not violate any of these contexts.

For Personal Study:

1. Why would we accept a principle that says we would first consider words to be basically literal in their meaning?
2. How do we establish the literal meaning?
3. What value can there be in the study of how words are formed?
4. What is the value of comparing words?
5. Why would we want to study the grammatical structure of sentences?
6. Why would the context be important in the interpretation of the word?
7. Why would we want to study parallel passages and similar concepts?
8. Why would history and culture also impact our study?
9. What are some hindrances to the correct interpretation of Scripture?

Part 8:
The Doctrinal Use of The Bible

The Theological or Doctrinal Interpretation extends the study of the grammar to its full significance. It is a Synoptic or Comparative view of all the Biblical data on a given subject. Theology must be built upon general hermeneutical principles.

Principles Of Doctrinal Studies:

The Theologian is a redeemed man standing in the midst of Divine Revelation. Thus he must be committed to understanding the Word of God. This should not be a dry, abstract, or impersonal investigation, but one must seek to set personal biases aside.

The main themes of the Bible are God, man, Jesus Christ and the Christian life. At the heart of the Bible is Jesus Christ and Salvation. The Bible is often mistreated when people try and make it a handbook for politics.

Theology must rest on the Literal Interpretation, which does not overlook figurative language. The Main Burden of Theology must totally include the theology of the New Testament. Determining what God's Word has to say through exegesis (reading out) must be prior to any system of theology. The System has to be built up exegetically, brick by brick. Of necessity, one will have to use the rules of logic within this system, but the theologian must be careful to not extend his doctrines beyond the Scriptural evidence because his evidence is Scripture itself.

The Theologian is striving for a system, which is a group of interrelated assertions. Therefore, there must be a systematic gathering of data from the entire Bible before it is interrelated into a coherent system. It is helpful to know the history of philosophy and the history of theological development. Liberal theologians claim there any many systems of theology found within the Bible, yet such would be confusing which is not a characteristic of God (1 Cor 14:33). Conservative scholars believe that there is one interpretation of a given passage while there may be many applications.

Proper Theological development of necessity must have proof texts given that are the result of the correct understanding of the Scriptures. This means that the exegesis "reading out" must be done according to basic principles of interpretation that properly recognize the context. Liberal theologians do not believe one needs a proof text to establish theology, but they even use a proof text to try and prove that we shouldn't use them (2Cor 3:6 Letter kills, but the Spirit gives life).

What is not a matter of clear-cut revelation should not be made a matter of creed or faith. This leads to making moral judgments without the benefit of Scripture, in effect defining sin. In Romans 5:13, it says, "sin is not imputed where there is no

law." Thus, when man starts defining law apart from God's Word, he is playing God. What is specifically spelled out as sin, we can and should learn and apply.

The Theologian must also keep the practical nature of the Word in mind. There is plenty of information about living the Christian Life. The Scriptures do not deal specifically with every little thing or circumstance we will deal with in life, but they will touch upon every aspect of our lives by means of principles.

The Theologian must also recognize the responsibility to the Universal Church. There has clearly been enough division within Christ's Body through the centuries over so-called "doctrinal" issues to last us for eternity. For the Theologian to present information to the Church that is not based upon sound principles of hermeneutics is irresponsible and denotes a lack of love for the Body of Christ as well as a sinful self-love.

For Personal Study:

1. What is the doctrinal study of the Bible designed to do?

2. What is the Theologian?

3. What are the main themes of the Bible?

4. What must theology rest on?

5. What is the Theologian striving for? How is it built?

6. What is a requirement for a proper theological system?

7. Consider how legalism occurs when one goes beyond the Word.

8. What should not be made a matter of creed or faith? Why?

9. Why should we keep in mind the question, "How then should we live?"

10. Why should the Theologian not present principles to the Church that are not firmly grounded in Scripture?