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**A0630 – July 23, 2006 – Rev 19-20 – Hermeneutics, Exegesis & Systematic
Theology**

I. HERMENEUTICS

Before we study the Millennium in Rev 20 I want to prepare you with three basic terms you need to know; hermeneutics, exegesis, and systematic theology.

A. Introduction

First, I want to talk about hermeneutics and you say “herme-who?” Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the rules by which literature is interpreted. I want to talk about this because Christians are losing their edge. Jude said his generation was living in the last days (Jude 17ff) and Paul said evil men will proceed from bad to worse (1 Tim 3:13). So, we are living in the last days, we’ve been in them for almost 2,000 years and it’s going to get worse. We’re in the apostasy and apostasy has two elements: Christian’s departing from sound doctrine and Christian’s departing from sound behavior. Now, both of those things happen because of departure from sound, verse-by-verse Bible teaching (that is, they happen because preachers want to preach topically).

I always believe that we need to meet the battle where it is and not where it is not and to do this today we have to get down to the bottom line and the bottom line is language. Language is what theological truth is couched in. If we’re going to express anything of real content about Jesus Christ we have to have language. To communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ and the faith once for all delivered to the saints we have to have language.

Now, many of us here today were born in an era called Modernism, a period when people believed that language was absolute and rational and able to communicate objective truth about God and man. Well, unfortunately we don’t live in that era anymore. We live today in the era of Postmodernism where language is relative and considered to fall short of the

ability to communicate absolute truth about God and man. And this is evil because doctrinal truths about God, the very expressions of our faith are couched in language, God's holy word. And because the postmodern culture is infiltrating the Church on every level, local churches are rejecting doctrinal formulations and emphasizing what the culture emphasizes, experience, mystical experience and creating an atmosphere where you can have this experience where you supposedly come into contact with God. Now, it's our duty, as individuals to get on the battlefield and fortify our stance against this pagan mysticism which is assaulting the body of Christ. And so, hermeneutics is very important. Now, you may resist this, you may not like being taken out of your comfort zone and challenged with this but its necessary. A soldier may not like the training it takes to get in shape, he may resist, but it results in stability and he'll be glad the day it saves his life and others. So, you don't have to come along but my advice is that you do.

I remember a discussion between Tommy Ice and Ed Hindson a good old Baptist boy about a pastor-teacher, friend of mine, named Robbie Dean, and Tommy asked Hindson if he knew Robbie and Hindson said, "Yeah, can you believe that guy taught his congregation a class on the documentary hypothesis." And Tommy said, "Yeah, and we should be teaching the documentary hypothesis to our congregations, the secular world uses the documentary hypothesis to undermine the word of God, why shouldn't we teach it to our congregations so their faith can be strengthened rather than undermined, and so they can be ready to give an answer?" Now, I'm not going to teach you the documentary hypothesis today but I am going to tell you about hermeneutics, exegesis and systematic theology because it's vital today for every Christian to understand not only what they believe but why they believe something and in such a way that they can defend it.

B. Definition of Hermeneutics

So, what is hermeneutics anyway? Hermeneutics is the rules by which language is interpreted, particularly the Bible. Yes, there are rules to interpreting language. You can't just make up the meaning. So, hermeneutics are like the rules of a game. Football is a game and there are rules to the game. If the players don't know the rules then they can't play the game, right. So, in every game, if there is going to be progress you have to follow the rules. The game we are talking about is exegesis, and the rules of the game are hermeneutics. There are several such rules that you must follow. If you don't its cheating and there is a penalty. Let me give you eight:

1. Rule of Normal, Literal, Plain Sense

- When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning, unless the language and grammar in the context indicate clearly otherwise.¹
 - This is not wooden literalism. Wooden literalism leaves no room for figures of speech
 - Literal interpretation includes *direct* signification (e.g. “it rained forty days and forty nights” Gen 7:12) and *indirect* signification or figures of speech that are common to all languages (e.g. “inwardly false prophets are ravenous wolves” Matt 7:15).
2. Rule of Authorial Intent
 - We search for the original author’s meaning and not the original audience’s understanding or our own meaning. In other words, it doesn’t matter what it means to you. It matters what the authors means
 3. Rule of Single Meaning
 - A single text can have only a single meaning
 - Interpretation is one, application is many
 4. Rule of Context
 - Immediate Verse (e.g. John 3:16)
 - Verse before (John 3:15)
 - Verse after (John 3:16)
 - Chapter (John 3)
 - Book (John)
 - Other books by same author (1, 2, 3 John, Revelation)
 - NT or OT (NT)
 - Whole Bible
 5. Rule of Double Reference
 - Two prophecies butted up against one another with no indication of a large gap of time in between (Jer 29:10-14; Zech 9:9-10)
 6. Rule of Double Recurrence
 - One event explained generally and then the same event explained in detail (Gen 1 & 2; Ezek 38 & 39)
 7. Rule of Progressive Revelation
 - The Bible came from God to man over time and not all at one time
 8. Rule of Analogy of Faith
 - All interpretations must harmonize with one another
 - The Bible is a consistently harmonious witness
 - God cannot contradict Himself

These are the rules of hermeneutics. If you don’t know these you can’t know how to play the game of exegesis.

II. EXEGESIS

Now, once you know the rules you can get in the game of exegesis. So exegesis is applying the rules, hopefully with consistency with the goal of “drawing out” “interpreting” the text correctly so we know the meaning. There shouldn’t be any cheating. We are interested in drawing out the meaning of the word(s), phrase(s), etc... under consideration. Now, this involves a study of the grammar. So, in my study every week I look at the original languages and I determine the mood, voice, tense, and syntax. That is, I break the verses down into pieces and once I’ve done that I begin putting the pieces back together. It’s a lot like taking something apart and putting it back together (e.g. an engine). Once you’ve done that you know that thing pretty well. Now, that’s one very important way to study the Bible and it’s a game I play every week and I assure you the stakes are high. I can get in a load of trouble if I cheat and get something wrong. So, I strive to apply consistently the rules of hermeneutics by taking the pieces of the verse apart and putting them back together. Now, you don’t see most of that process, every once in a while I show you a little but it’s not really my job to show you the pieces. It’s my job to show you the final product, show you what the text means. But it is vital to do this work behind the scenes in order to get the right interpretation. If you don’t do this work then you could easily tell people that God is saying X when He’s really saying Y. And I don’t think any of us want to put words in God’s mouth, but a lot of people do all the time and don’t seem to have a problem with it. Now, if you do put words in God’s mouth and get the wrong interpretation then you get the wrong application. And that brings us to wrong behavior. And another thing, if a pastor-teacher has serious respect for the word of God then he would never want to distort it. So, personally, I have a great responsibility and I fear the living God and so that means I’m going to follow the rules of hermeneutics very carefully and I’m going to exegete with great care so as not to abuse God’s word. So, I may make mistakes and I have made mistakes but I want you to know how important this task is and the diligence and care with which it is carried out. So, the bottom line is that we have hermeneutics, the rules, and then we have exegesis, the application of the rules. The more consistently we follow the rules the more accurate our exegesis is and that means we get the proper meaning of the verse(s) under consideration which means we get the right application in the moral sphere.

III. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

A. Definition of Terms

This brings me to a third word, theology. Theology comes from two words, *theos* meaning God and *ology* meaning “the study of”. So, technically, “theology” is the study

of God. When we add the word “systematic” we get what is called “systematic theology”. Systematic theology is the work of correlating all God’s special revelation into a total picture, a unified whole.

B. Defense of Need for Systematic Theology

Now, some of you are saying, “I don’t want to know systematic theology, I just want to know the word of God. Leave systematic theology for the experts, professional theologians.” Well, the fact is, you already have a systematic theology, it may not be a very good one, it may have a lot of inconsistencies, but it’s inevitable that you have one and so you might as well understand what a systematic theology is and how to properly build one.

C. Divisions of Systematic Theology

There are twelve basic divisions of systematic theology; Angelology, Anthropology, Bibliology, Christology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, Hamartiology, Israelology, Missiology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, and Theology Proper. In each division we are responsible to find and exegete all the passages related to that division and then combine them in a unified, consistent whole. For example, with Christology we would exegete all the christologically significant texts and then combine them into a unified picture of Christ. That’s a step toward systematic theology but its not there yet because a systematic theology correlates all God’s special revelation into a total picture and not just Christology. So, you would have to go through this same procedure with all twelve divisions and then correlate them all to get a total picture. “But”, you say, “That’s a lot of work!” Yes, it is. “And”, you say, “I already believe certain things about all those areas.” Yes, you do. So, you all have beliefs about things but the problem is that we picked these things up piece-by piece and they are not very well-organized in our minds. Now, when you have things that are not well organized, for example, files in your office, your home library, your garage, your tools, your kitchen utensils. If these things are not organized, if they are not in the proper place, how difficult is it to find what you need? It’s very difficult and frustrating. Now, in the same way you have a mind and in your mind you have all sorts of beliefs/information/data and if it’s not well-organized, if it’s not in the proper places, then how difficult is it going to be to access that information when you need it? You know, when the world starts falling apart around you and you need stability, how are you going to access those beliefs that provide the stability? How are you going to think through the situation and make wise choices? This is not abstract, this is very real and practical. I want to help you get there in your thinking so you can live wisely, so we

have to deal with these kinds of things that we are not used to thinking about. So, here I have argued for the necessity of right divisions in our thinking. However, there is another issue. If all you've done is make the twelve proper divisions and organize the information in each division then you still haven't done systematic theology because systematic theology is correlating all the information from all twelve divisions into a unified whole, a total picture of God and reality.

- e.g. the divisions are like chapters in a book
- e.g. the divisions are like beads on a necklace
- e.g. the divisions are like drawers in a chest
- e.g. the divisions are like files in a filing cabinet
- e.g. the divisions are like parts of a spider web

D. Whole of Systematic Theology

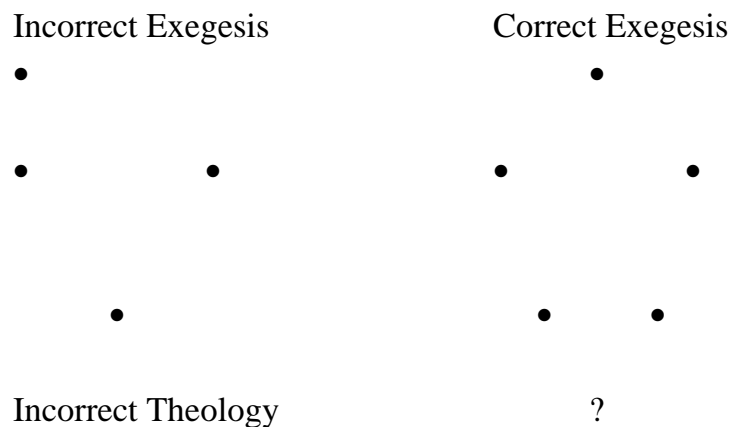
- e.g. systematic theology is like the whole book
- e.g. systematic theology is like the whole necklace
- e.g. systematic theology is like the whole chest of drawers
- e.g. systematic theology is like the whole filing cabinet
- e.g. systematic theology is like the whole spider web

Systematic theology is taking all these divisions and putting them together into a total picture, a unified whole. So, it is not proper to keep these areas compartmentalized. In the last few years Dr Lightner has been spending a lot of energy trying to get students of the Bible to understand this. See, when you go to seminary you take individual classes on the divisions (e.g. Christology, Bibliology, Soteriology, etc...) and so you have drilled into you these divisions. But what you don't have a lot of is how all these divisions fit together. So, you come out with all these compartmentalized beliefs that may or may not be consistent with the other things you believe. And you may be totally unaware of inconsistency in your beliefs. So, systematic theology is showing the interrelatedness between these divisions of study; showing how one affects the other. So, systematic theology is a web-work of beliefs. If you pull on one side of a spider's web it inevitably affects the whole web. Systematic theology is like a spider web, if you pull one doctrine out of its proper place it affects all the others. So, if you keep these areas of theology in little compartments then you will most likely have contradictions in your theology and that is bad because it means you will have contradictions in how you live your life. Inconsistent thinking leads to inconsistent living.

E. Doing Systematic Theology

1. The Exegetical Basis of Systematic Theology

Exegesis is the application of the rules of hermeneutics to the biblical text. So, if you misapply the rules of hermeneutics then your exegesis is incorrect and it will be impossible to get the true theology. So, consistent application of the rules of hermeneutics to all of Scripture is the first step in knowing the mind of God. We might say by way of analogy that exegesis is like a connect the dots. Now, you've all probably done a connect the dots at some point. The nice thing about those connect the dots is that the dots are numbered so that, as long as you know the right sequence of numbers (1, 2, 3, 4 and not 1, 5, 8, 3, 10), you can connect the right dots and get the right picture. Now, the exegesis is like the dots. As long as you've been consistent to the rules of hermeneutics then you have the dots in the right place. If you don't then your dots aren't even in the right place; they don't correlate with the mind of God.



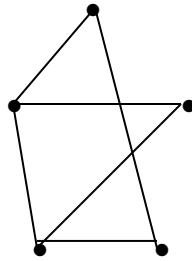
So, getting the dots in the right place is the first step.

2. The Art of Systematic Theology

But we still have a difficulty. The difficulty is that these exegetical dots don't have little numbers next to them telling you where to draw the lines. Drawing the lines is the art of systematic theology. You're asking yourself, "How do all these exegetical truths fit together. What is the picture they are painting so I can know where to draw the lines?" So, even if you have the correct exegesis it doesn't tell you where to draw the lines. You have to deduce where the lines are supposed to be drawn if you want to get the right picture. If you draw the lines in the wrong places then you get the wrong picture. So, you have to be very careful when you do this and you have to be willing to use your eraser

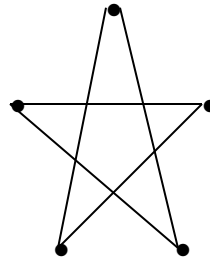
when you realize you've made a mistake. And realize, of course, that this is a very complex picture because it includes everything in the universe. So, for example

Correct Exegesis



Wrong Theology
Wrong Living

Correct Exegesis



Right Theology
Right Living

So, we should be good students of the word of God and that means willing to change your beliefs when you realize you are wrong. Paul said it this way, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). So, we shouldn't harden up so that your systematic theology begins to dictate your exegesis and you end up painting an entirely different picture that doesn't fit with the picture God's word paints.

IV. APPLICATION

Let's go through an example so I can show you how this all works. First, let's ask “How does Hebrews 5:8 Jesus “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” harmonize with James 1:13 “God cannot be tempted by evil” if Jesus is God. Some might conclude that Jesus was not God but this is contradicted by Titus 2:13, 1 John 5:20, Heb 1:8, etc... We may have to go back and check our exegesis to make sure it is correct. And after it has been verified we come back and we are left with answering this supposed contradiction. So, to solve it we can say that Christ was tempted in His human nature and not His divine nature and this harmonizes the two texts. Now, that's in the division of Christology but is this solution related to other divisions of systematic theology? Yes. Obviously, it is related to anthropology because Christ was tempted in His humanity and we are tempted in our humanity. So, this shows that Christ's humanity has a definite connection with our humanity and it shows us that true humanity can be tempted and not sin. But it also has a connection with hamartiology (study of sin) because in His humanity He was without sin and that is connected to soteriology because Christ died for sin in his tempted but sinless humanity and that brings us to Theology Proper because the Father's justice was propitiated by His Son's death. This is showing you how to connect the dots,

how to do systematic theology. But how is this practical? What benefit is there for me being able to connect the dots properly? Man. For starters, seeing the harmony of God's word increases your reverential awe of Him and increases your trust in His faithfulness and veracity. If His word had contradictions it would not be true and our faith would be greatly disturbed (at least I hope it would). But seeing the harmony of His word time and again in new and exciting ways increases our trust in Him. Another thing is it helps us answer difficult questions such as "Did God die on the cross for me?" We even have a song that says, "That Thou my God should's't die for me" and yet something seems wrong with saying "God died" and so, we can deduce from the exercise we went through that Christ's divine nature did not die but His humanity. God didn't die on the cross, it was the perfect humanity of Christ which died on the cross. Another practical application, if Christ was tempted in His humanity then when you undergo temptation Christ can truly empathize with you. You can really turn to Him and call on Him for help knowing that He was tempted in His human nature. So, there are very practical benefits for being able to do systematic theology accurately.

V. SUMMARY

So, we've learned about language and three aspects of biblical interpretation which are crucial to maintaining and propagating God's truth; (1) hermeneutics, the rules of interpreting language; (2) exegesis, the application of the rules; (3) systematic theology, the art of correlating all God's biblical revelation into a unified whole, a total picture. This is the development of a Christian worldview which correlates with God's worldview. To think rightly and live consistently you have to know the rules, follow the rules, and then harmonize the results in each division of God's word and then harmonize them all with one another. Why? Why do you have to do this? To love God! Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15) and one of those commandments is

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth."

(2 Tim 2:15 KJV)

¹ This definition is a modification of a statement made by Cooper, David L., *Messiah: His First Coming Scheduled* (Los Angeles, CA: Biblical Research Society, 1939), 546.

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