

HERMENEUTICS I

FALLS INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST INSTITUTE

INTRODUCTION TO COURSE

Class One

Text: II Timothy 2:15 *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*

Introduction: The word study means *“make efforts, to be diligent”*; *“to fix the mind closely upon a subject”*; *“to muse, to meditate”*; *“To apply the mind to books”*; *“to read and examine for the purpose of learning and understanding”*. The words *“rightly dividing”* mean *“expounding correctly”*. That phrase literally means to *“make a straight cut”*.

Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of interpreting the text of the Bible. It is the science of Biblical interpretation!

While this course will be dedicated to teaching and explaining the principles and methods of studying and interpreting God’s Word in order that we might *“rightly divide”* it, I want this first lesson to emphasize the overall importance of studying God’s Word. Let us consider the following points from Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible.

*“At first glance it would seem totally unnecessary to discuss reasons for studying God’s Word. One might assume that, upon conversion, the most natural thing for a new believer to do would be to begin a lifelong study of that Book which originally brought him to Christ. But personal observation, as well as church history, proves the facts to be quite the opposite. The truth is, most Christians know very little about the Bible! **Here then are some sound reasons for studying the Scriptures.**”*

I. **Because of its Author.**

Often God is thought of as a Creator, a Redeemer, a Shepherd, a Judge, etc. This is correct thinking, of course, for He does indeed function in all these roles. But there is one great accomplishment of God which is almost always left off the divine attributes lists compiled by men. This wonderful but forgotten role is that of Author! God has written a book, and the profound and priceless book is the Bible. As testified to by any human author, the nicest thing one can say to an author is, ‘Oh, yes, I’ve read your book.’

It is a tragic but true fact that many of the Christians who will someday (along with all believers) stand before the judgment seat of Christ will be sadly forced to admit that, while they were saved by heeding the salvation message in God’s Book, they nevertheless failed to take the time to read it. Thus, if for no other reason, the Bible should be carefully read to allow the believer to proclaim to Christ on that day: ‘Dear Jesus, there were many things I did not do on earth that

I should have done, as well as other things I did do that I should not have, but one thing I did—I read your book!’

II. **Because of the often repeated command to read it.**

‘This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success’ (Joshua 1:8).

‘Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth’ (II Timothy 2:15).

‘But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’ (Matthew 4:4).

Especially to be noted is the last verse. Jesus said every word.

III. **Because the Bible is God’s chosen way to accomplish His divine will.**

A. *Sinners are saved through the message of the Bible.*

‘For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.’ (Romans 10:13-17).

‘But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words’ (Acts 2:14).

‘Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ (Acts 2:37).

‘Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city’ (Acts 8:4-8).

‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever’ (I Peter 1:23).

‘Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures’ (James 1:18).

B. *Saints are sanctified through the message of the Bible.*

‘Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth’ (James 1:18).

‘As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby’ (I Peter 2:2).

‘For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication’ (I Thessalonians 4:3).

'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (Psalm 119:9-11).

'Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar' (Proverbs 30:5-6).

'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you' (John 15:7).

'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified' (Acts 20:32).

IV. **Because our enemy the devil has read it.**

During the account in Matthew 4, Christ is tempted three times by the devil. On each occasion the Saviour answered Satan with the phrase, 'It is written', and then proceeded to quote from the Word of God as found in the book of Deuteronomy. But what is almost always overlooked is the fact that the phrase 'it is written' is repeated four times in Matthew 4, and that the fourth time it is the devil using it to quote Scripture to Christ! Note the background at this point.

'Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone' (Matthew 4:5-6). Here Satan quotes from Psalm 91:11-12. It is taken completely out of context, to be sure, but how did Satan know about it in the first place? The answer is painfully obvious. One day when the devil had nothing better to do, he must have sat down and studied Psalm 91. Many Christians today have probably never even read this Psalm, but the devil apparently has it memorized! Thus, we need to read God's Word lest Satan get an advantage upon us.

V. **Because of the example of Paul.**

Paul was probably the greatest Christian that ever lived. His spiritual accomplishments are nothing short of staggering. Here was a man who made the first three missionary journeys, who founded and pastored the first fifty or more Bible believing churches, who wrote over half of the New Testament, and who on five occasions saw the resurrected Christ, and at least once was caught up into the third heaven itself! But then, he was arrested, condemned to death, and placed in prison. Note carefully his final words to Timothy just prior to his execution.

'For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing... The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments' (II Timothy 4:6-8,13).

What were these parchments? They were his copies of the Old Testament scrolls. The point to be made here is that in spite of all his marvelous achievements, the

old apostle felt that he could profit from studying the Word of God on the eve of his death.

VI. **Because the Bible alone provides answers to life's three (major) questions.**

These questions, pondered by every generation, are:

A. Where did I come from?

'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them' (Genesis 1:26-27).

'Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture' (Psalm 100:3).

B. Why am I here?

'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man' (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created' (Revelation 4:11).

C. Where am I going?

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God' (John 3:16-18).

'The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever' (Psalm 23:1,6).

'And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire' (Revelation 20:15).

VII. **Because we'll never have the opportunity to apply many of its verses after we leave this earth.**

A. There will be no opportunity to apply I Corinthians 10:13 in heaven.

'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.'

Reason: In heaven there will be no temptation.

B. There will be no opportunity to apply I John 1:9 in heaven.

'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

Reason: In heaven there will be no sin.

C. There will be no opportunity to apply Philippians 4:19 in heaven.

'But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'

Reason: In heaven there will be no need.

D. *There will be no opportunity to apply John 14:1-3 in heaven.*

'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'

Reason: In heaven there will be no sorrow.

E. *There will be no opportunity to apply Psalm 23:4 in heaven.*

'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.'

Reason: In heaven there will be no death.

VIII. **Because the only ultimate proof for our faith is the Bible.**

- A. Our feelings do not dictate that our faith is right!
- B. Our followers do not dictate that our faith is right!
- C. Our lineage, heritage, and history do not prove that our faith is right!
- D. Our Bible proves that our faith is right! Romans 10:17 says "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"

Introductory Principles concerning Biblical Interpretation:

A. The Bible is to be interpreted Literally.

1. The dictionary defines *literal* interpretation as that type of interpretation that is "based on the actual words in their ordinary meaning...not going beyond the facts."
2. Scripture, in general, is always to be interpreted at face value. Genesis 1:1 said "*In the beginning, God*" – that is a fact to be taken literally. When God said "*And the evening and the morning were the first day*", then literally the evening and the morning were the first day! That is a literal reading. It would be good for people to realize that God's Word is literal. In Jonah 3:4, Jonah said "*And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*" The Ninevites took that literal and repented. God spared their city. It would be well for lost people to take God's prophecies concerning Hell literally; and it would be well if backsliders took God's promise of physical judgment literal!!! When the scriptures make common sense, seek no other sense, or you will end up with nonsense.
3. There are times, no doubt, when the scripture speaks in a figurative way. However, we cannot assume that a Bible text is figurative just because we do not understand it. When a text that you're reading doesn't make any sense taken literally or doesn't fit with the rest of the passage literally, in general, you can understand that to be a figurative statement. We use figures of speech all the time. For example, "*I laughed my head off*" or "*I cried my eyes out*". And so, God does condescend to our language. For

example, the Bible says “*Ye are the salt of the earth*”, and we understand that to be figurative: I am not literal salt in a literal salt shaker...Lot’s wife-maybe- me-no!!! ☺ Another example: Isaiah 55:12 “*For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*” We understand that to be figurative because trees do not have hands to clap. This is called personification and it is used to illustrate. The entire Book of Proverbs personifies wisdom as a woman.

- B. **The Bible is to be interpreted Grammatically.** “Grammatical interpretation observes the impact that grammar plays in any given text. Thus, 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**).” **Let me simplify that: we need to understand the language if we are going to interpret it properly! We need to do word studies! As we study prophecy, a good dictionary is a must, and a Strong’s Concordance is invaluable.** Knowing if something is a noun, verb, or adjective will help you to interpret properly. When we say grammatical, we are saying that we follow the grammatical rules of literature. We understand that there similies, metaphors, etc. Example: I Peter 5:8 calls the devil a roaring lion, but we understand the devil is not a literal lion, but following grammatical interpretation, we understand that the devil is being compared to a lion to show us something of the nature and purpose of the devil.
- C. **The Bible is to be interpreted Historically.** “Historical interpretation takes into account historical context, setting, and circumstances in which the words of Scripture were written.” This is how the Bible is to be read and understood and this is how we read and understand other books.
- D. **The Bible is to be interpreted Christologically.**
1. John 5:39 “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and **they are they which testify of me.***”
 2. Luke 24:27 “*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, **he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.***”
 3. II Peter 1:11 “*Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, **when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.***”
 4. Hebrews 10:7 “*Then said I, Lo, I come (**in the volume of the book it is written of me,**) to do thy will, O God.*”

