

## BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS—FOUNDATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

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### How to Remedy the Drifting

2 Tim 2:15 provides the remedy that will halt the doctrinal slippage that was going on in Ephesus. That verse and its context bring out several key elements in remedying the drifting.

(1) **The goal.** Notice Paul does not tell Timothy to attack the problem directly. He tells him to use indirect means. Don't limit yourself to confronting these men directly, though that sometimes may be necessary as 2 Tim 4:2b indicates ("reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering"). Rather your goal is to gain the approval of God by making yourself an unashamed workman. Concentrate on the positive side of teaching the Word of truth. You are to be a God-pleaser, not a man-pleaser. You are not to allow yourself to be distracted by mere human considerations. You are to have an eye that is single toward His will and glory. You are looking for His seal of approval. Strive to maintain His standards so that you have nothing to be ashamed of before Him.

*Dokimon* includes two ideas, that of being tested and that of being approved. Some never have the opportunity of being tested that seminarians have. It is a great privilege to be tested, but how are you going to respond to the test?

You should also have as your goal not to be ashamed because you have done a shoddy job. Nor should you be ashamed of your work before men. Note Paul's elaborating on this theme at 1:8, 12, 16. Hold your head up, Timothy. Do the right kind of job and you will not have to apologize to anyone.

(2) **The means.** The instrumental participle *orthotomounta* in 2:15 tells how Timothy can satisfy the standard set earlier in the same verse: "cutting straight the word of truth" or "handling the word of truth accurately." We can't be sure what figure Paul had in mind with this participle. Sometimes in secular Greek writings it referred to a mason squaring and cutting a stone to fit exactly into a predetermined opening. Other times it referred to a farmer's ploughing a straight furrow in his field or to a tentmaker cutting a piece of canvass to exactly the right size. Still other times it referred to a road-maker constructing a straight road.

Because of the word's use in Prov 3:6 and 11:5 ("In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make your paths straight"; "The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight") and the use of similar terminology in Heb 12:13 ("make straight paths for your feet"), Paul probably had in mind the figure of road construction. The specifications for the construction have to be exactly right. Illus. Construction of the south leg of the north-south interstate through Atlanta one summer. The same must be true for constructing the road of truth.

Some have objected to trying to understand just what figure Paul had in mind. All we need to do is to be in the same ballpark with our interpretation. They claim that knowing the broad sense of the word is sufficient, and pressing to figure out the specific meaning is an example of *logomachia* ("striving with words," "hair splitting") that Paul forbids in the verse just before 2:15. That is not what Paul meant by *logomachia*, however. In 1 Tim 6:4 the word refers to quibbling over words, so here he probably refers to verbal disputes that distract from the close attention that should be given the word of truth. "Truth" highlights the contrast between God's

unshakable special revelation and the worthless chatter of the novelty seekers. There is a correlation between the quality of our detailed analysis of Scripture and maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy.

In 2:15 the command is instilling in Timothy's mind the importance of precision. Learning the general idea of what Scripture teaches is not sufficient because it gives the novelty teachers too much room to roam in search of their innovations. It allows them to shade the truth a little bit this way or that way in order to integrate the Bible with psychology, science, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, mathematics, modern linguistics, or some other secular discipline that allegedly has come up with additional truth from God's general revelation. Our handling of Scripture has to be right. It has to be accurate. It has to be right on target.

### **General Introduction**

Dr. Dean has suggested topics for me to cover in the three sessions we are together: General Considerations regarding Biblical Hermeneutics, The Principle of Single Meaning, and Hermeneutical Principles in the Gospels. Today's topic will take us through an assortment of general considerations related to biblical hermeneutics. Undoubtedly, certain matters of consideration will overlap from one session into another, but I will endeavor to keep the three subjects distinct.

I expect to encounter differences of opinion among us. We will allow for periods of discussion at the end of each presentation so that we may interact with each other. I welcome your questions and observations because I always learn from that kind of discussion.

The first thing to do is to review with you the role of hermeneutics in relation to other subjects in the theological curriculum. In view of our limited time, this is accomplished most easily in viewing a chart, but before we can do that, we must define terms.

### **CHART #1**

#### **Clarifying the Definition**

With the traditional grammatical-historical approach to exegesis, three areas of study constitute the foundational approach to obtaining the meaning of a biblical text, if meaning is what you are seeking from a biblical text. At this point we must inject a parenthesis into our discussion because of recent confusion that has been injected into the discussion of biblical interpretation. Definitions of key terms have varied from traditional senses of the words, making it necessary for us to review some of these changes so that we may recapture the original sense.

- (1) The meaning of hermeneutics is at least fourfold:
  - (a) a philosophical and linguistic mind-set,<sup>1</sup>
  - (b) a set of principles,
  - (c) an interpretive use of these principles,
  - (d) and an application of the resulting interpretation to contemporary situations.
- (2) The meaning of exegesis includes the following:

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<sup>1</sup>Documentation for each of the suggested definitions may be found in my *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 20-27).

- (a) an implementation of valid interpretive principles,
- (b) an aspect of hermeneutics,
- (c) an implementation of valid interpretive principles plus a subjective sensitivity to additional divinely intended meanings,
- (d) and an application of the results of interpretation to contemporary situations.

It is worthy of note that meanings (a) and (d) are identical with meanings (c) and (d) assigned to hermeneutics.

(3) The meaning of meaning includes the following:

- (a) a referent (what the text is talking about),
- (b) a sense (what is being said about the referent),
- (c) an intention (the truth intention of the author),
- (d) a significance (contemporary application),
- (e) a value (an expression of preference and priority),
- (f) an entailment (a related consequence associated with biblical words),
- (g) the connotation of the text as an entity independent of its source and its

readership,

- (h) the signification of the text.

(4) Interpretation has the following variations:

- (a) an understanding of the authorial intention,
- (b) an understanding of the authorial intention and the present-day relevance,
- (c) an understanding of the present-day relevance,
- (d) a practical compliance with the contemporary application.

To one who thought he understood these four terms, the proliferation of ramifications now attached to them is bewildering. As a practicing exegete, I thought that hermeneutics was as (1) (b) above defines it: a set of principles; that exegesis was as (2) (a) speaks of it: an implementation of valid interpretative principles; that meaning was as (3) (c) describes it: the truth intention of the author; and that interpretation was as (4) (a) declares it to be: an understanding of the authorial intention. I am happy to be in harmony with *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* in my understanding. But I discover that current hermeneutical literature has three or more additional definitions for each of these words.

No one intentionally created this state of confusion, but it is a shame that the propounders of new hermeneutical approaches did not utilize new terms for different meanings rather than assigning new meanings to old terms. It is almost as if there is an unconscious desire to retain a continuity with the past where little or no continuity exists. This practice of assigning new meanings to old words has resulted in an unusually high degree of uncertainty in communication among evangelicals. To what do we attribute this confusion?

Final answers to that question are evasive, but my proposal is that confusion in defining common hermeneutical terms has arisen at least in part from different hermeneutical principles that have come into play among evangelicals in recent years.

For the sake of clarity and emphasis, I will use the time-honored definitions of hermeneutics, exegesis, meaning, and interpretation as stated above:

- Hermeneutics is a set of principles.
- Exegesis is an implementation of valid interpretive principles.

- Meaning is the truth intention of the author.
- Interpretation is an understanding of the truth intention of the author.

### **The Foundational Nature of Hermeneutics**

The chart on display shows the foundational role of hermeneutics, traditionally referred to as grammatical-historical principles. The grammar requires a knowledge of the principles of the biblical languages. The history necessitates an awareness of the facts of history. Obviously, to utilize the principles of hermeneutics, a person must have a working knowledge of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek of the text of Scripture. He must know what books belong in the canon and must establish the exact text of the autographs of the books of the Bible. He gets help here from that portion of Biblical Introduction known as General Introduction with the area of Special Introduction furnish him an understanding of the history surrounding the writing of each book.

Even here, however, confusion has arisen in the disciplines that stand beside hermeneutics as foundational to the practice of exegesis which is at Level 2 in the Theological Curriculum. For one thing, traditional grammatical principles have come under assault by a relatively new discipline frequently referred to as Modern Linguistics. Modern linguistics, though it is still in a fluid stage of development, has challenged principles of grammar that have been a hinge and staple of grammar of long standing. Daniel Wallace's well-known *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* is full of the influence of Modern Linguistic principles that have strayed away centuries-old understanding of grammatical principles. A typical example of this is his "plenary genitive" in which he not only allows for but also advocates more than a single meaning for a given grammatical construction.

The English word "historical" has several meanings. It can be either history as a record of actual happenings simultaneous with the chronology of the narrative or history as interpreted by later chronological generations. Grammatical-historical principles have traditionally looked to the former of these definitions, but some evangelicals today are veering away from that meaning and opting for the dynamic concept of history. Progressive Dispensationalism is an example of the dynamic concept—i.e., a continuous record of past events—versus a stable concept [past events connected with someone or some event].

In light of such deviations from traditional definitions of various terms, when one speaks of following grammatical-historical principles of interpretation, he must be careful to define his terms carefully. Otherwise, his hermeneutical principles may be indistinguishable from those used by the new evangelical hermeneutics.

### **Recent Additions to the Foundation**

Evangelical hermeneutics as now practiced in many and probably most evangelical environments takes on a different complexion from the traditional evangelical model. Level 1 in the Schema of Relationships Between Fields of Theological Study has a new member. The resulting new Schema looks like this.

### **CHART #2**

From the Schema one can see that the new resident at Level 1 is "Preunderstanding."

Definitions of preunderstanding vary widely. That is probably the most conspicuous difference in the practice of biblical interpretation. It has been the rise to prominence of preunderstanding which has been defined as “hermeneutical self-awareness.”<sup>2</sup> Most consider this addition to the arena of hermeneutical guidelines to be an absolute necessity and a healthy development.<sup>3</sup> The special attention devoted to the interpreter is ultimately the result of the Kantian emphasis on subjective reality as distinct from objective reality.

With many, preunderstanding is the principal determiner of one’s eventual understanding of Scripture.<sup>4</sup> With others, it is possible to overcome preunderstanding partially and to approximate the text’s objective meaning to some degree.<sup>5</sup> But with almost all, if not all, preunderstanding as a starting-point for hermeneutics is here to stay.<sup>6</sup>

What then is preunderstanding? For Silva, it is another name for prejudice and a commitment to the traditional view of inspiration,<sup>7</sup> but it also includes such things as a dispensational theology.<sup>8</sup> Another definition cited above is hermeneutical self-awareness<sup>9</sup> by which Osborne includes the impact of church history, contemporary meanings of word symbols,

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<sup>2</sup>Osborne, G. R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 267, 286-87; W. W. Klein, C. L. Blomberg, and R. L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, Word, 1993) 7; M. Silva, in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics, The Search for Meaning*, co-authored by W. C. Kaiser, Jr., and M. Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 264. Blaising and Bock also recognize and welcome the change in evangelical hermeneutics with its incorporation of preunderstanding when they write, “And by the late 1980s, evangelicals became more aware of the problem of the interpreter’s historical context and traditional preunderstanding of the text being interpreted. These developments . . . have opened up new vistas for discussion which were not considered by earlier interpreters, including classical and many revised dispensationalists” (Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* [Wheaton: Victor, 1993]) 35-36).

<sup>4</sup>E.g., McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand* 65; R. McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 19; M. J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 88.

<sup>5</sup>For example, Klein et al., 115.

<sup>6</sup>Osborne, *Spiral* 286-87, 294; Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* 88.

<sup>7</sup>Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 237, 245.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 264.

<sup>9</sup>Osborne, *Spiral* 7.

personal experiences, one's confessional tradition, and rational thinking.<sup>10</sup> McCartney and Clayton use "presuppositions" to speak of the same thing as "preunderstanding" and define them as one's views regarding life and ultimate realities and about the nature of the text being studied.<sup>11</sup>

KBH, following Ferguson, define preunderstanding as "a body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it."<sup>12</sup> They distinguish these from presuppositions, including in the latter such things as the inspiration of the Bible, its authoritativeness and truthfulness, its spiritual worth and effectiveness, its unity and diversity, its clarity, and a fixed canon of sixty-six books.<sup>13</sup> How this differs from preunderstanding is difficult to decipher, especially in light of their use of the same point—one's view of the miraculous—as an illustration of both preunderstanding and presuppositions.<sup>14</sup>

Johnson lists five hermeneutical premises which he apparently equates with preunderstanding: the literal, the grammatical, the historical, the textual design, and the theological.<sup>15</sup> McQuilkin's name for preunderstanding is presuppositions. He gives the following: as a supernatural book, the Bible is authoritative and trustworthy; as a natural book, it uses human communication.<sup>16</sup> Tate refers to preunderstanding as the interpreter's present horizon of understanding, i.e., the colored lenses through which the reader views the text.<sup>17</sup> He seems to distinguish preunderstanding, at least to some extent, from presuppositions which he classifies as reader presuppositions and theological presuppositions.<sup>18</sup>

Uncertainty among hermeneutical theoreticians regarding what constitutes preunderstanding is widespread, resulting in multiple preunderstandings of "preunderstanding."

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 14, 266, 267, 292.

<sup>11</sup>McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader* 13.

<sup>12</sup>Klein et al., *Biblical Interpretation* 99; cf. Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics, An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986) 6.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 88-93.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 94, 100. They distinguish preunderstanding from prejudice also by making the latter a subcategory of preunderstanding (ibid., 99 n. 34, 100).

<sup>15</sup>Johnson, E. E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 31-53.

<sup>16</sup>McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying* 20-23.

<sup>17</sup>W. R. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991) 166.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 166-70.

They agree only regarding its influence on the outcome of the interpretive endeavor. In line with this acknowledged subjectivism, most advocate that one must view his own interpretive conclusions as tentative.<sup>19</sup> This relativism leads easily to divesting the Scripture of any value in stating propositional truth, though one writer would limit the uncertainty to ambiguous areas such as sovereignty and responsibility, the millennial issue, and church government.<sup>20</sup> Others pass off this uncertainty as tolerance of fellow believers for the sake of unity—i.e., “I don’t agree with your conclusions . . . , but I concede your interpretation.”<sup>21</sup> If allowed to progress to its logical end, however, this outlook may lead eventually to a realization that what we have considered to be cardinal dogmas—such as the deity of Christ, His second coming, and His substitutionary atonement—are merely the myopic conclusions of Western, white, middle-class, male interpretations.<sup>22</sup> Such a hermeneutical approach would spell the end of meaningful Christian doctrine.

### **Reasons Why the Current Foundation Is Shaky**

The new and primary role given to preunderstanding in the exegetical process conflicts sharply with traditional grammatical-historical principles. It injects subjective elements into interpretation that have been purposely and consciously shunned in quests for the meaning of Scripture until the emergence of new hermeneutical principles among evangelicals since the 1970s and 1980s.

Those who studied hermeneutics in many, if not most, evangelical colleges and seminaries during the 1950s and before learned the importance of seeking objectivity in interpretation, i.e., letting the text speak for itself without imposing personal biases on what the meaning might be. Ramm has put it this way:

The true philological spirit, or critical spirit, or scholarly spirit, in Biblical interpretation has as its goal to discover the original meaning and intention of the text. Its goal is *exegesis*—to lead the meaning out of the text and shuns *eisogesis*—bringing a meaning to the text. . . .

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It is very difficult for any person to approach the Holy Scriptures free from prejudices and assumptions which distort the text. The danger of having a set theological system is that in the interpretation of Scripture the system tends to govern the interpretation rather than the interpretation correcting the system. . . .

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Calvin said that the Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at will.

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<sup>19</sup>E.g., Klein *et al.*, *Biblical Interpretation* 306; Kaiser, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 88; McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader* 164; Osborne, *Spiral* 307.

<sup>20</sup>Osborne, *Spiral* 287.

<sup>21</sup>Klein *et al.*, *Biblical Interpretation* 150-51; cf. 139-44.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* 125.

Rather it is the Word of God whose teachings must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text.<sup>23</sup>

Before the hermeneutical revolution that began among evangelicals during the 1970s and 1980s, objectivity was the highest priority. Beginning study of a text with a conscious preunderstanding of what it would yield was unthought of, as Ramm so emphatically states before he ever conceived that evangelicals would advocate letting subjective considerations become a part of interpretation. He allows that such occurred with nonevangelicals such as Butlmann and Tillich, but insisted that it not happen among those of evangelical persuasions.<sup>24</sup>

Terry supports the same quest for objectivity, expressing it in different terms:

The objectionable feature of these methods [i.e., the Apologetic and Dogmatic methods] is that they virtually set out with the ostensible purpose of maintaining a preconceived hypothesis. The hypothesis may be right, but the procedure is always liable to mislead. It presents the constant temptation to *find* desired meanings in words and ignore the scope and general purpose of the writer. There are cases where it is well to assume a hypothesis, and use it as a means of investigation; but in all such cases the hypothesis is only assumed tentatively, not affirmed dogmatically. In the exposition of the Bible, apology and dogma have a legitimate place. The true apology defends the sacred books against an unreasonable and captious criticism, and presents their claims to be regarded as the revelation of God. But this can be done only by pursuing rational methods, and by the use of a convincing logic. So also the Scriptures are profitable for dogma, but the dogma must be shown to be a legitimate teaching of the Scripture, not a traditional idea attached to the Scripture. . . .

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The systematic expounder of Scripture doctrine . . . must not import into the text of Scripture the ideas of later times, or build upon any words or passages a dogma which they do not legitimately teach. The apologetic and dogmatic methods of interpretation which proceed from the standpoint of a formulated creed, and appeal to all words and sentiments scattered here and there in the Scriptures, which may by any possibility lend support to a foregone conclusion, have been condemned already. . . . By such methods many false notions have been urged upon men as matters of faith. But no man has a right to foist into his expositions of Scripture his own dogmatic conceptions, or those of others, and then insist that these are an essential part of divine revelation. Only that which is clearly read therein, or legitimately proved thereby, can be properly held as scriptural doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 115-16.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, 2nd ed. (reprint; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, n.d.) 171-72, 583-84.



In his classic work on hermeneutics Terry insisted on letting the text speak for itself, without allowing ideas foreign to the text to intervene in its interpretation. Though he lived long before the notion of beginning the exegetical process with a preunderstanding of what it was going to say had made its appearance among conservatives, he clearly sought to obtain an objective awareness of what biblical writers intended when they penned the words of Scripture. The only assumption he made was unavoidable: he was dealing with an inspired book, not an uninspired one.<sup>26</sup>

That has always been the goal of grammatical-historical interpretation until the recent changeover in hermeneutical principles among some evangelicals. The method consciously seeks to rule out any personal biases or predispositions in order to let the rules of grammar and the facts of history of each text speak for themselves. That quest for objectivity has allowed the Bible to yield propositional truths that constitute a sure foundation for evangelical Christianity.

The present state of affairs among evangelicals is a far cry from the certainty God intended His people to have, however. He gave revelations to Paul and others “that *we might know* the things freely given to us by God” (1 Cor 2:12, emphasis added), not that we might tentatively theorize regarding what God may have given us.

Exegesis is not an exercise designed to correct my preunderstanding as the hermeneutical circle or hermeneutical spiral approaches contend. It is rather a scientific exercise designed to allow the text to speak for itself.

Often I hear the objection, “Impossible! A person cannot divest himself of a preunderstanding about what a text should mean. Every person is biased. He should recognize his own bias and let the text correct it. He should continue going back and forth between a corrected preunderstanding and the text a number of times, each time getting closer to what the text means.” Note the frequency with which current evangelicals refer to the “Hermeneutical Circle” or the “Hermeneutical Spiral.” I propose that the interpreter should begin with a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, and let the text speak for itself. Again, I hear the protest, “Impossible.”

The following analogy may help portray what an approach to hermeneutics should be. Our quest for objectivity in interpretation resembles our quest for Christian sanctification. Rather than expending all our energies explaining why we cannot attain absolute holiness, let us set our sights on the target of being holy as He is holy (1 Pet 1:16). The fact that we cannot attain unblemished holiness does not excuse us from continuing to pursue it without becoming preoccupied with reasons why we must fail. So it is in hermeneutics and exegesis. Our goal is the objective meaning of Scripture. Let us not become distracted from pursuing it. It is within the capability of the Spirit-illuminated believer to arrive at objective meaning—i.e., the meaning God intended to transmit through His human authors. This is possible, not because we are so expert in our interpretations, but because God is an expert communicator in His Word. A failure to have objectivity as a goal is just as serious as a failure to have Christian sanctification as a goal because of the lesson we learn from Paul through 2 Tim 2:15. If Paul taught that lesson to Timothy in his study of Scripture, it certainly is a lesson for us.

There is enough objectivity in using traditional grammatical-historical principles to enable us to do away with the “Circle” and the “Spiral.”

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 137-50.

### **The Source of Preunderstandings**

With the variety of understandings of “preunderstanding,” settling a single source or even a specific number of sources for preunderstanding must be very selective, because each person’s preunderstanding will differ from the next person. Yet the probability is high that most preunderstandings draw from the disciplines at Levels 3 and 4 in the Theological Schema.

For example, a homiletician would come up with a polished outline for the passage he wishes to preach from before accomplishing his exegetical analysis. His exegetical analysis must then conform to his communicatively effective outline he has discovered. Suppose his exegetical study does not match his preconceived outline. That has a deleterious impact on his exegesis.

Were someone to come to a text with the preunderstanding that the only place in the Bible that gives the pure gospel (a Level 3 application) or that John 6:47 contains the minimum content of necessary information in the gospel (another Level 3 application), he has inserted his own preunderstanding at Level 1. Such sequence of exegetical study will lead inevitably to wrong understandings of a text’s meaning. The basic problem is that the whole discussion of a crossless gospel is being carried on at Level 3 with nothing more than a superficial attention to the other categories at Level 1. For example, if an adequate job had been done at Level 1 before getting to Level 3, an interpreter would realize that Jesus had spoken earlier about the content of the gospel. An investigation of historical background would point to Jesus’ references to His coming crucifixion and substitutionary death long before He died on the cross (Matt 20:28). He began making direct predictions of His death shortly after He uttered John 6:47. He told people how to be saved in other books besides the Gospel of John. These are all Level 3 conclusions based on shoddy work at Level 1.

As suggested earlier in this discussion, Dispensationalism—another Level 3 discipline—can be a preunderstanding that needs to be corrected in the exegetical process. With some this may be true. Personally, I have leaned over backwards to keep this separate from my exegetical analysis of a passage. In fact, I consider myself to be first and foremost a grammatical-historical practitioner. In implementing grammatical-historical principles, I find myself in the dispensational camp. Yet I need to beware lest at any time the order should be reversed. If it should become reversed, I am just as guilty as the covenant theologian, the new covenant theologian, the kingdom theologian, or the progressive dispensational theologian in allowing preunderstanding a role in Level 1.<sup>27</sup>

A hot issue in our contemporary society—a Level 3 category—is the effect of global warming on the environment. If I am convinced I need to deal with this in my Bible exposition, I will search high and low to find a passage that teaches the danger of global warming. Since I have made up my mind what I will find in a text, the principles of grammatical-historical exegesis will fall by the wayside as I look for a text dealing with that topic.

In the realm of historical theology—another Level 3 category—at a recent point in church history, the practice of historical criticism became prominent. If I am convinced that an inerrantist can use this device to enhance study of the Gospels, that will become my

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<sup>27</sup>Note my article in the upcoming Spring 2009 issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, entitled “Dispensationalism’s Role in the Public Square.”

preunderstanding at Level 1. We want to deal more specifically with this preunderstanding in our third lecture this week.

Any pet subject, theological or otherwise, can become a preunderstanding at Level 1.

The above four suggestions amount to taking a discipline rightly belonging to Levels 3 and 4 and reinserting them at Level 1 as a preunderstanding, thus throwing the whole exegetical process out of balance. These are but a sampling of the endless number of preunderstandings that throw evangelical interpretations into a quagmire of subjectivism in tune with contemporary deconstructionism in this postmodern era.

### **Principles of Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutics Most Often Undermined**

Cultural uniqueness of the biblical texts - something special about the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text of Scripture

Uniqueness and superiority of special revelation - special revelation always deserves priority over anything that general revelation has to offer

Principle of single meaning - the single meaning intended by the author and understood by the immediate readers has dominant control over any practical application. We want to deal with this on Tuesday.

Distinction between interpretation and application - application completely distinct from interpretation but controlled by correct interpretation

Certainty resting on the biblical text - Scripture given that we may know, not that we may question which answer is correct

Sufficiency of grammatical-historical principles - any addition to the grammatical-historical foundation of exegesis is a distortion

Perspicuity of the biblical text - use of sound, not secret-coded, principles will yield the correct meaning of the text

Historical accuracy of the biblical text - a correct method yields precise facts of history

Literal understanding unless the text justifies a nonliteral approach - literal meaning is a first resort, not a last resort

Inerrancy of the text - the first and only preunderstanding of a biblical text.

### **Recent Emerging Bogus Systems**

Evangelical Hermeneutics mentions five:

Progressive Dispensationalism

Evangelical Feminism

Evangelical Missiology

Theonomy

Open Theism

The list is growing at a rapid rate. With the inroads of Preunderstanding at Level 1 in Theological Study, the rate is bound to increase. Since the book was completed we have already seen such things as the New Perspective on Paul, the Emerging Church, New Covenant Theology, a Noncessationist Movement. Two new “-isms” that are currently arising among evangelicals are Speech-Act Theory and Intertextuality. All of this has happened since the

incorporation of the new evangelical hermeneutics in the 1970s and early 1980s. When examined closely, each of these has its own preunderstanding that throws the exegetical process all out of whack.

In our limited time over the next couple of days, we will delve into some areas more deeply.