

THE NEW HERMENEUTIC

Handout for Lesson 21 of *Thought Provoking Questions*

WHAT IS THE NEW HERMENEUTIC?

- » Those promoting change among churches of Christ disguise their efforts by urging fresh, responsible exegesis and the need to interpret the Bible correctly.
- » They argue that we have misinterpreted the Bible by using faulty hermeneutical methods as a result of which we have arrived at wrong doctrinal conclusion.
- » They conclude that we need to discard the old hermeneutic and employ a new one.
- » Those who urge the need for a new hermeneutic among churches of Christ are extremely vague when it comes to identifying and defining what they mean by the “new hermeneutic.”
- » Most of their effort has been spent criticizing the “old hermeneutic” and the shortcomings that they deem it to have.
- » The old or traditional hermeneutic criticized is the approach that Biblical teaching is established by command, example, and necessary inference.
- » The search for a new hermeneutic is not the result of Bible study as much as it is of the desire to express dissatisfaction with the status quo and to undermine the past.
- » If a new hermeneutic is needed today to understand the Bible and live the Christian life, then those who have preceded us and died did so without understanding the Bible.
- » If, on the other hand, those using the old hermeneutic were able to understand the Bible enough to be saved, then what need is there for a new hermeneutic?

THE ALLEGED SHORTCOMINGS

- » The old hermeneutic is said to be rationalistic, forensic, and too dependent upon logic, human reason, and inference.
 - ☛ One says, “I believe it is extremely dangerous to elevate human reasoning to the level of God’s command.”
 - ☛ Additionally he wrote, “There is no doctrine more potentially dan-

gerous ... than elevating necessary inference and approved examples to the status of God’s commands.”

- ☛ Yet, the Bible itself repeatedly urges the use of sound reasoning in arriving at its teaching. (Isa. 1:18; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1; Acts 17:3; 18:26; 26:25)
- » The old hermeneutic relies too much on reason because, they allege, it arose in the Enlightenment, the days of John Locke, and was perpetuated by Alexander Campbell.

THE SOURCE OF THE LOGOPHOBIA

- » Aversion to logic throughout history has been closely associated with a desire to be relieved of the confining nature of God’s word.
- » The new hermeneutic is rooted in subjectivity and relativism in its approach to Scripture.
- » It seeks to give man more say in his religious pursuits, while attributing such subjective inclination to the Holy Spirit.

FREEDOM AND UNITY

- » It is not coincidental that the new hermeneutic’s advocates frequently speak of “freedom” and “unity.”
- » They speak of the need for a hermeneutic that will cause Scripture to be “more relevant,” help “in getting closer to God and each other,” be “more palatable to an age that denigrates authoritarianism,” and be able to “relate to people where they live” without being “insensitive and impersonal.”
- » They say that we should approach interpretation, not as “rational animals,” but as “story-telling animals.”

WHAT SAITH THE BIBLE?

The Bible teaches that we get close to God with rules and through rules.
We can’t love Jesus without his law. (John 14:15)
Saul failed to fully comply with God’s instructions. (1 Samuel 15) Despite expressed good motives – to sacrifice to God while getting along with the people – Samuel declared God’s view, “Behold to obey is better than sacrifice.” (v. 22)

Solomon pronounced obedience to be “the whole of man.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Paul said there were only two directions in life – “sin unto death” or “obedience unto righteousness.” (Romans 6:16)

Jesus is the “author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him.” (Hebrews 5:9)

THE HERMENEUTICAL TRIAD: COMMAND, EXAMPLE, NECESSARY INFERENCE

- » While these are time honored and well understood principles for Biblical interpretation, some have suggested that it would be perhaps clearer to use the terms “direct statement, accounts of actions, and implication.”

JESUS’ HERMENEUTIC

- » Jesus’ hermeneutical procedures consisted of:
 - ☛ A heavy reliance upon scriptural quotation;
 - ☛ A keen use of the principles of logic and sound reasoning;
 - ☛ A recognition of what the Hebrew scriptures taught implicitly as well as explicitly; and
 - ☛ A view of written revelation as objective, absolute, propositional, and verbally inspired.
- » Jesus never made an argument that was not both valid and sound.

THE CORRECT PROCEDURE

- » The correct procedure in coming to an understanding of the teaching of Scripture is to gather all of the relevant data concerning the direct statements, accounts of action, and implied statements.
- » This includes grammatical, lexical, syntactical, analogical, and historical information, as well as attention to literary genre.
- » Once all data pertaining to the Bible’s explicit and implicit teaching has been gathered, the interpreter must then draw only those conclusions that are warranted by the data.