

Hermeneutics: Learning to Read the Bible Well

Part One – Foundations

Why Interpretation Matters

We often skim familiar verses, assuming we know them. However, when something feels missing or “off” in our faith, it’s often due to shallow or assumed understanding.

Hermeneutics—careful interpretation—ensures we grasp what God meant then and how it applies now, anchoring our faith.

What Is Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is both an art and science of interpreting Scripture. The “art” is discerning meaning with sensitivity to context, genre, and nuance. The “science” is using sound principles to bridge the ancient text to today’s life. Without hermeneutics, we risk projecting our own ideas onto Scripture rather than hearing what God truly communicated.

Three Guiding Questions

1. What does the text say? Carefully observe words, tone, structure—don’t assume meaning.
2. What did it mean then? Understand the historical and cultural context of the original audience.
3. How does it apply now? After interpretation, consider how the principle affects your life, behavior, or worship today.

Context Is King

A verse means what it meant to its original audience. For example, Philippians 4:13 isn’t a promise for any achievement—it’s about contentment in hardship. Always ask: who wrote this, to whom, and why?

Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

When one verse seems confusing, other passages bring clarity. James 2:24 and Romans 3:28 address different questions (faith and works), yet together, they reveal a full picture. Always let clearer passages inform tougher ones.

Genre Governs Meaning

Different genres communicate differently: poetry, like Psalms, uses imagery (e.g., “wings” in Psalm 91), while law is literal. Always identify genre first.

The Hermeneutical Process

- LOOK: Observe words, patterns, structure without jumping ahead.
- LISTEN: Interpret by asking what it meant to them.
- LIVE: Apply the timeless principle to your life.

Hermeneutics in Action

In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus shows anger is the root of murder—a heart issue. In Luke 10:25-37, the Good Samaritan shows that being a neighbor is about compassion, not identity—“Go and do likewise.”