

# An Introduction to Hermeneutics

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The objective of hermeneutics is to: **discover** and **understand** the **intention** of the Holy Spirit for those to whom a given text was **originally written** and then make **applications**.

1. **Discovery** implies methodology and tools.
2. **Understanding** requires discernment, discrimination, wisdom, logic, and communication.
3. **Intention** deals with purpose, principles, and specifics.
4. The **original audience** received a message that was specifically addressed to them—the “then” of the text. This is the only place where true meaning can be found—what it meant to the original audience is what the text means.
5. **Application** insures that the Bible will not be a dead letter. Application addresses the “now” of the text.

The **means** of achieving the objective of hermeneutics will rely on applying **logic** to certain key understandings:

1. The only two ways the Bible can teach are **explicitly** (in so many words), and **implicitly** (that which an explicit statement demands).
  - a. Logic, centering on the laws of thought and the principles of proper argumentation, must be applied to explicit and implicit ideas to insure that they are being correctly understood.
  - b. Accounts of action, popularly referred to as examples, have no binding force of their own. Only that which is first established by the logical evaluation of explicit and implicit teaching can establish whether or not something we read about in Scripture is something we must do.
2. The explicit and implicit teachings of the Bible cannot be understood apart from **context** (the relationship of a given text to certain additional pertinent points).
  - a. **Principles**.
    - i. Primary (the two Great Commandments, Matt. 22:36-40; cf. Matt. 7:12; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14).
    - ii. Secondary (Matt. 23:23; I Cor. 13:13; Matt. 9:10-13; 12:1-7).
  - b. **Purposes**.
    - i. Saving the lost (Jn. 3:17).
    - ii. Sanctifying the saved (Rom. 8:29).
  - c. **Location**.
    - i. **Immediate** location of a passage.
    - ii. **Related** teachings found elsewhere.
    - iii. Possible place in the **progressive development** of certain themes (i.e. the “seed promise,” etc.).
  - d. **Narratives** (people in action “fleshing out” the way God reacts to doctrines as they are lived out—Jesus is the greatest example of this principle; cf. Jn. 14:8-9).
    - i. Approved behavior.
      1. Required.
      2. Allowed.
    - ii. Rejected behavior.
  - e. Points of **History** and **Culture** that allow a passage to be understood in its own time context.
  - f. Qualities of **Truth**.
    - i. Absolute truth—made so by the nature of God (i.e. God cannot lie; Heb. 6:13-18).

- ii. Management provisions for all ages (i.e. marriage; Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-8).
    - iii. Provisions peculiar to particular covenants (i.e. Passover, Lord's Supper, etc.).
  - g. **Language** characteristics.
    - i. Literary genres (prose, poetry, apocalyptic, etc).
    - ii. Figurative devices.
      - 1. Parables, allegory, etc.
      - 2. Simile, metaphor, etc.
- 3. **Application.**
  - a. This is when we live out the implications of a text that has been logically shown to address Christians and the things of the church.
  - b. Only the things that God has bound can be lawfully bound on a person today (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; Jn. 20:23).
  - c. Additionally, in whatever God has released men and women from doing, we must accept that release (see above).
  - d. Such judgments must be tempered by expediency (I Cor. 10:23); but expediency by itself is not law (I Cor. 7:25-28).

## Hermeneutics Checklist

- \* Initial Questions.
  - Are there points of history or culture that make significant contributions toward understanding the passage?
  - How does the passage relate to the purpose of the book?
  - What is the primary concern of the passage?
  - Are there additional concerns?
- \* Basic Textual Considerations.
  - What are the immediate, significant points of context?
    - How does the passage relate to the text immediately before and after it?
    - Divide into paragraph and sentence divisions.
    - Who is being addressed and why?
    - Who authors the text?
    - Is the passage prescriptive or descriptive?
  - What are the Relevant Points in the more Remote Context?
    - Similar discussions elsewhere by the author.
    - Similar discussions elsewhere by other authors.
    - Is the passage part of a theological development that makes it part of a bigger whole?
  - Lexical/Syntactical Considerations.
    - Basic literary forms (prose, poetry, apocalyptic).
    - Special literary forms (figures of speech, allegory, parable, types, etc.).
    - Connecting words (conjunctions, prepositions, and relative pronouns).
    - Grammatical forms (parts of speech).
    - Meaning of key words.
  - Write a Summary of Your Work.