



Faithful Hermeneutics for Churches in the African Context

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Introduction

What is ‘Hermeneutics’?

“Who is as the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing?” (Eccl. 8:1)

- The word “hermeneutics” comes from the Greek word *hermeneuo* which means “to interpret.”
- It refers to bringing someone to an understanding of something in his language.

Introduction

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he *interpreted* to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Lk 24:27)

The word “interpreted” comes from the Greek word *diर्मeneuo*, = to translate, interpret, or explain.

Why is Hermeneutics Important?

1. Makes proper interpretation of the Word of God possible.
2. Helps us develop/systemize our theology.
3. Helps us recognize how each doctrine in the Bible harmonizes together.
4. Helps us apply Scripture correctly.
5. Helps us bridge the gap between the author and ourselves.

Why is Hermeneutics Important?

6. Helps us in distinguishing between our own presuppositional biases and what the Bible actually says.

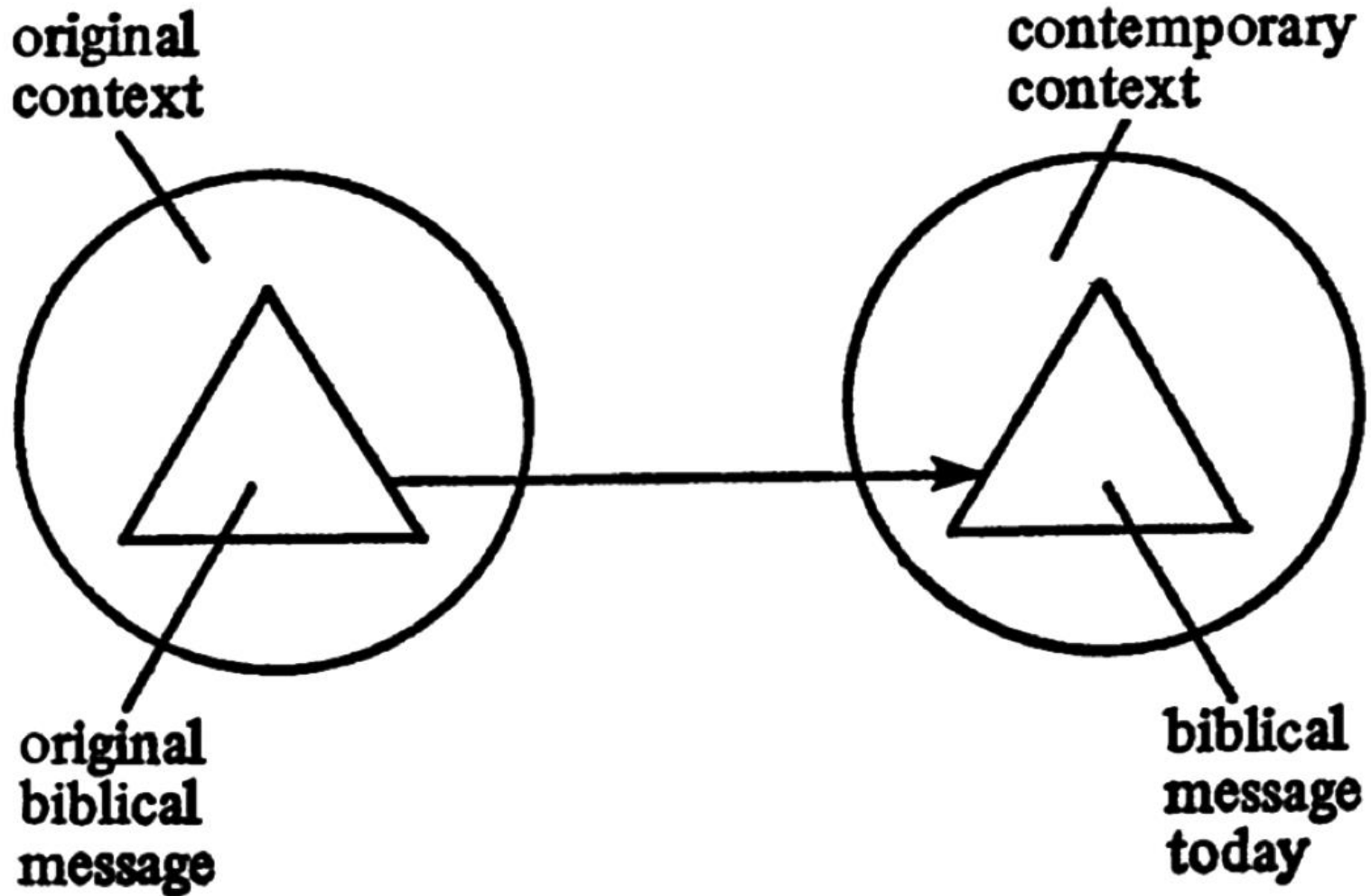
7. Keeps us from falling prey to a false teachings.

8. Aides teachers, in bringing an accurate interpretation to the learners.

The 3 Levels of Hermeneutics

1. “What it meant” (Exegesis)
2. “What it means to/for me” (Devotional), and
3. “How to share with you what it means to me” (Sermonic).

The Contextual Approach and the Hermeneutical Circle



Hindrances to Good Hermeneutics

- Prejudice/Preconceived Ideas
- Pride
- Laziness
- Wishful Thinking
- Clergy/Laity Attitude
- Desire to Be Like (and liked by) the World
- Assuming what is popularly believed is true
- Schismatic Attitude

Common Errors in Hermeneutics

1. Inculturation

Pope John Paul II

“Intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”

“...deep and mutually enriching encounter between the Gospel and a people with its particular culture and tradition.”

Common Errors in Hermeneutics in Africa

2. Indigenisation

John Mbiti

“Allowing indigenous culture to relate more effectively to the Gospel, on its own terms and without pressure from outside.”

Common Errors in Hermeneutics in Africa

3. Ethnohermeneutics

The culturally-sensitive set of principles that guide interpretation in any specific cultural context. They are those principles that are indigenous to the culture and are used to interpret that culture's sacred texts and narratives.

Principles of Faithful Hermeneutics

1. Identify the kind of literature your text is

- Narrative
- Law
- Genealogy
- Prophecy
- Poetry
- Wisdom
- Gospel
- Epistle
- Apocalyptic

Principles of Faithful Hermeneutics

2. Authorial Intent

Interpretation must be based on the author's intention of meaning and not the reader.

Determine the author's context:

Historically,

Grammatically,

Culturally

Literary forms and conventions the author was working in.

Principles of Faithful Hermeneutics

What do the following mean?

“It was a hit!”

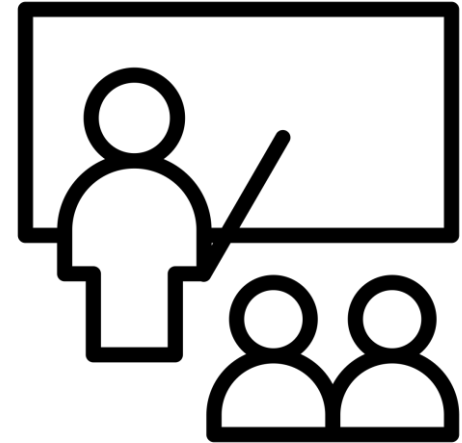
(Music)

“It was a hit!”

(Baseball)

“It was hit!”

(Shooting practice)



Principles of Faithful Hermeneutics

4. Interpret the Bible literally allowing for use of normal figurative language.

When the literal does not make sense (e.g., trees clapping their hands) you may have a figure of speech.



Principles of Faithful Hermeneutics

5. Scripture interprets scripture

- Interpret difficult passages with clear ones. This is sometimes also called the law of noncontradiction or analogy of faith.
- Use the New Testament to help interpret the Old Testament.
 - (1) This recognizes the progressive nature of revelation;
 - (2) Start by interpreting the OT in its context before a NT consideration is made.

Principles of Faithful Hermeneutics

6. Interpretation must be distinguished from application

While there is one interpretation that is historical there are many applications that can be carried over to our modern context.

Principles of Faithful Hermeneutics

6. Interpretation must be distinguished from application

- What universal principles are clearly communicated?
- What specific applications can be justifiably drawn from these principles for a particular people at a particular time?
- What responses are called forth by these applications?

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Conclusion

Stress the Importance of Biblical languages

John Piper – What happens when original languages fall into disuse?

1. The confidence of pastors to determine the precise meaning of Biblical texts diminishes.
2. The uncertainty of having to depend on differing translations will tend to discourage careful textual analysis in sermon preparation.
3. It gives rise to exegetical imprecision and carelessness. And exegetical imprecision is the mother of liberal theology.

“Without languages we could not have received the Gospel. Languages are the scabbard that contains the sword of the Spirit; they are the casket which contains the priceless jewels of antique thought; they are the vessel that holds the wine; and as the gospel says, they are the baskets in which the loaves and fishes are kept to feed the multitude. If through our neglect we let the languages go (which God forbid!), we shall...lose the gospel.” *(Martin Luther)*

