The Bible: Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

(Week Four)

Opener
Discuss the pros and cons associated with emailing or texting an important message verses an actual in person conversation.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15. Biblical hermeneutics is the science of knowing how to properly interpret the various types of literature found in the Bible. For example, a psalm should often be interpreted differently than a prophecy. A proverb should be understood and applied differently from a law. This is the purpose of biblical hermeneutics - to help us to know how to interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.

The most important law of biblical hermeneutics is that the Bible should be interpreted literally. Literal Bible interpretation means you understand the Bible in its normal and plain meaning. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. Many make the mistake of trying to read between the lines and come up with meanings for Scriptures that are not truly in the text. Just because there are some spiritual truths behind the plain meanings of Scripture that does not mean that every Scripture has a hidden spiritual truth. Biblical hermeneutics keeps us faithful to the intended meaning of Scripture and away from allegorizing and symbolizing Bible verses and passages that should be understood literally.

A second crucial law of biblical hermeneutics is that a verse or passage must be interpreted historically, grammatically, and contextually. Historical interpretation refers to understanding the culture, background, and situation which prompted the text. Grammatical interpretation is recognizing the rules of grammar and nuances of the Hebrew and Greek languages and applying those principles to the understanding of a passage. Contextual interpretation involves always taking the surrounding context of a verse/passage into consideration when trying to determine the meaning.

Exegesis and eisegesis are two conflicting approaches in Bible study. Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis. The word exegesis literally means “to lead out of.” That means that the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text. The opposite approach to Scripture is eisegesis, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading. The word eisegesis literally means “to lead into,” which means the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants. Eisegesis is a mishandling of the text and often leads to a misinterpretation. Exegesis is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its grammar, syntax, and setting. Eisegesis is concerned only with making a point, even at the expense of the meaning of words.

The process of exegesis involves:
1) Observation: what does the passage say?
2) Interpretation: what does the passage mean?
3) Correlation: how does the passage relate to the rest of the Bible?
4) Application: how should this passage affect my life?

Eisegesis, on the other hand, involves:
1) Imagination: what idea do I want to present?
2) Exploration: what Scripture passage seems to fit with my idea?
3) Application: what does my idea mean?
Notice that, in eisegesis, there is no examination of the words of the text or their relationship to each other, no cross-referencing with related passages, and no real desire to understand the actual meaning. Scripture serves only as a prop to the interpreter’s idea.

**Discussion**

We must be careful to avoid seeking truth by our own human efforts. How should we seek help?
Why is it important to read the whole bible and not just bits and pieces that we “feel” are more important?
Why is it dangerous to seek out scripture “to prove your point”? What are some bad end results of misinterpreting scripture?
How can you avoid reading scripture in a way that supports your preconceived ideas of what is true?

**Prayer**

Lord, please help us to read your word with an open mind and willing heart. Help us to seek out through and wisdom in your word and allow your spirit to teach us. Help us to be humble and apply your words to our lives. Thank you Lord for giving us the bible and all the wonderful resources to read it daily. All these things we ask in Jesus name, AMEN.

**Further Study**

Read through the study notes and then read Matthew 18:15-19

Does this passage refer to normal church or social gatherings or are these believers meeting for another purpose?
How have you yourself or others misused this verse in the past?

Now read 2 Chronicles 27:1-2

“Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. . . . He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the LORD.”

One interpreter reads this passage and sees that King Jotham was a good king, just like his father Uzziah had been, except for one thing: he didn’t go to the temple!

Another interpreter reads the passage and, to fully understand the context, he reads the histories of both Uzziah and Jotham (2 Chronicles 26-27; 2 Kings 15:1-6, 32-38). In his observation, he discovers that King Uzziah was a good king who nevertheless disobeyed the Lord when he went to the temple and offered incense on the altar—something only a priest had the right to do (2 Chronicles 26:16-20). Uzziah’s pride and his contamination of the temple resulted in his having “leprosy until the day he died” (2 Chronicles 26:21).

Only after understanding the full context through exegesis can you can clearly understand the meaning of the passage. When it says Jotham “did not enter the temple of the LORD,” it means he did not did not repeat his father’s mistake. Uzziah had proudly usurped the priest’s office; Jotham was more obedient.