

COURSE OUTLINE: ST 501 Hermeneutics
David G. Dunbar

I. Introduction

A. Definition of terms

1. Exegesis--the process of interpretation. Etymologically this term is derived from ἐξηγεομαι, to explain, interpret, tell, describe.
2. Hermeneutics--the principles of exegesis. Etymologically derived from ἑρμηνευω, to explain, interpret, translate. Here we are concerned not just with interpretation but the theory which guides our interpretation. Frequently the distinction is made between general and special hermeneutics. General hermeneutics are those principles which apply to the interpretation of any type of literature. Special hermeneutics are those which relate specifically to the biblical literature or to particular forms within the Bible, e.g., poetry or apocalyptic.

B. The Necessity of Hermeneutics

1. In view of the Protestant principle of sola Scriptura. The Reformers stressed the final authority of the Bible over reason, the Church council, the Pope, or tradition. But the Scriptures can exercise their authority only if we know what they say. Hence, the area of hermeneutics has been a central concern for Protestant theology.
 - In the Reformation, there was the material principle: justification by faith alone (*sola gratia*) and the formal principle: *sola Scriptura*
 - If the Bible is our source of authority, we must know what it says, and to know that we need the principles of interpretation
 - From the beginning, the reformers talked about Hermeneutics
2. In view of widespread faulty exegetical procedure: Scripture twisting (in cults, but not only there!); "proof-reading" (what Grant Osborne calls "the current Evangelical heresy"); "good sermons" preached on texts that teach something quite different.
 - Often, sermons or studies use a text to go off on something else without talking about the text
3. In view of the need to give reasons for what we teach and preach, as opposed to merely expressing opinions.
 - This tendency is part of our culture, which is moving from rationality to irrationality and feeling
4. In view of the special difficulties of interpreting the Bible. Specifically we have in mind the need "to bridge the gap between our minds and the minds of the biblical writers" (Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, p. 4). Actually, the problem of the gap encompasses a number of sub-problems. The first is the difficulty of understanding what