

Southeastern Workers' Conference  
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**An Introductory Note:**

Three subjects are allocated to me for discussion in this conference. In addition to the Canon I will also discuss Hermeneutics and Bible translation. I am not sure of the order of these subjects so the observant listener will simply have to see what is being presented and align it with the appropriate notes. These are monster subjects reduced for general comprehension with the resultant fact that nothing is carried to a complete discourse! At the close of these notes I will offer some reading suggestions for those who wish to follow items to greater resolution. I will also be glad to discuss individual features at any allowable time during the conference. The notes are skeletal, of course, but at the worst one should be able to see where we are and where we are going.

**I. THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE**

**A. Getting Started:**

1. The term: used generally and particularly
2. Essential Presuppositions:
  - a. The Bible is the Word of God
  - b. It is verbally inspired: inerrant, infallible
  - c. It is self-authenticating
  - d. It is perspicuous with this mild caveat: Not all is equally clear to all....but....
  - e. The great teacher of the Bible is the Holy Spirit and the best students are those who yield to the Spirit.
  - f. We come to study it, not to impose our preconceived ideas about relative matters, but to learn from it.

**B. The Old Testament Canon: 39 books showing the development of the Program of God in the centuries before the Lord Jesus came. (1).**

1. The arrangement: The Law, The Prophets, the Writings
  - a. Historicity
  - b. Relative importance
  - c. Authorship observations:
    - (1) Designations:
      - The Lord spoke to Moses
      - The Lord hasa said (or spoken, etc)

(2) Character: a prophet whose words came to pass,  
pointed to the Lord and agreed with the Law  
as given by the Lord. (Dt 13, 18)

2. The Languages
3. New Testament Assessment
  - a. In the words of the Lord.....
  - b. In an authoritative role in the book of Acts
  - c. In the ministry of Paul
  - d. In the analysis of prophesy
  - e. The Revelation "comma"
4. Inter-disciplinary action within the Old Testament writers:
  - a. Daniel and Jeremiah
  - b. Josiah and the Law (2)
5. The Qumran perspective
6. A very quick note on numerical values, schemes of text arrangement and other authenticating suggestions particularly in the view of miracles, etc.

#### C. The New Testament Canon

1. The age and its literary awareness
  - a. Philo
  - b. Josephus
  - c. Religious writings in abundance
  - d. The need and quest for accounts about the new community
2. The Political confusion
3. The authority of the New Testament literature
  - a. The Old Testament canon: prophecy and fulfillment, etc.
  - b. The risen Lord
  - c. The ministry of the Spirit
4. Literary challenges...other than purely secular stuff
  - Apocrypha
  - Antilegomena
  - Apocalyptic
5. The arrangement of the books: Following an apparent pattern

6. Canonical evidence
  - a. The attitudes of the writers
  - b. The early church: Irenaeus, somewhat later Origen
  - c. Athanasius
  
7. Total acceptance comes slowly and diversified views show up from time to time..many reasons behind this including the persecution of the church. the isolation of many communities, the cultural patterns

D. A very quick look at some of the canonical issues to both canons:

- 1, :The Apocryphal books: Early and Later history
  
2. Canon disagreement between Rome, Greece,. amd eventually the reformers. et al
  
3. And in our age: what about someof the recent releases? What if we found another book by Paul? Wow!

E. A rush to conclusion: We have a Bible, inspired by the Lord, used and protected by His people, and giving us instruction in every area of life. The Canon defined the limits, set the standards and gives to us calm assurance that in our hands and hearts we may hold the Word of God.

## II. HERMENEUTICS: The Science of Interpretation

A. The Aim of hermeneutics:

*It is a world of ideas and diversions where one travels carefully being aware that at every corner there may be some insinuation that is troublesome. It is certainly not an exact science but the practice of understanding communication. It deals with the reality of what is said in so many words and what is meant by them The aim of hermeneutics is clarify meaning in the study of communication so that the recipient gleans what is intended by the expression of the originator. The linguist says "What did it say?" The hermeneuticist says "What does it mean? And if that is not clear to the reader, one can immediately grasp the difficulty of the subject!*

B. Some Basic Notes:

1. The term (defining)
2. The divisions (most of which we will ignore!)
3. Relationship with the other areas of interest

C. Approaching the Bible: the challenge is that of interpreting an older document to newer ages remembering that the Bible is the Word of God and is the declared truth of God to all ages and all classes while recognizing that the immediate statements in context may be directed to a particular situation which may well lend principal at all times but not be marked with specification to all times! Well, I cannot say it more simply and I will try to work it out hermeneutically.

1. Some Biblical illustrations::

- a. Philip---Acts 8:30ff
- b. The Lord---John 5:39
- c. Paul---Galatians 4:22ff
- d. The Jerusalem Council--Acts 15:13 ff

It becomes obvious that what is said becomes potent as it is understood. There are many, many more examples

2. The character of language: You will often hear someone say that a speaker put "his tongue in his cheek" or "his foot in his mouth." I know a lot about the latter! It is obvious that such language must be understood in something beyond the mere words. The character, then, may be described with the following terms:

- a. Letterism: totality of exactness
- b. Literalism: the terms used define what is meant
- c. Allegorism: The terms have a secondary value that reveals the fuller truth.

In any given communication all three may be used so... what did Jesus mean when he called Herod a fox Luke 13:32? Observations of language usage are especially important in prophecy and typology

3. Attempts at understanding in the earlier days of Christianity with influences in the current church

- a. the influence of Philo
- b. Origen
- c. Augustine
- d. Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom

4. A general note on the progress of hermeneutics historically

D. Conditioning factors for the hermeneuticist to consider:

1. Societal concepts

- a. Culture
- b. Personal experience
- c. Theological idealism
- d. Linguistic understanding

2. Study data:

- a. The language used and the language in use  
(I will illustrate with the English preterite)
- b. The setting
- c. The harmonistic pattern of Scripture
- d. Observable linguistic phenomena
- e. The application of the text in its time and implications  
for later times

3. Thus we have some hermeneutical advice:

- a. Read and reread carefully
- b. Understand
- c. Comprehend the historical sense and setting
- d. Use a grammatical/historical approach
- e. Meet allegory when it is clearly intended...do not  
manufacture it when it is not (and this is part of my  
bias in this subject)
- f. Make your findings applicable to your situation

4. And some key points to remember:

- a. God is the author
- b. Scripture is one (unity)
- c. No doctrine is fully expounded until....
- d. Content and Culture are important
- e. Do not decide the meaning until the study is done
- f. Apply the lessons faithfully to yourself...and others!

E. Conclusion: It is easy to get lost in hermeneutics but it is hard to be a Bible expositor without it.

### III. The Matter of TRANSLATION

- A. *Translation, The Quest: What word (or words) in one language will best represent the wording of thoughts in another language. Some factors conditioning the quest are these:*
1. Language is not static...it changes with time in many aspects. Even the "dead languages" changed in their own periods and later use of them. English, native language to a lot of us, has had significant structural changes in the last two centuries. You are likely not aware of them....because you are caught with the English of today and that becomes part of the problem
  2. Words often develop and change in expressive use--it happens culturally in a slow way but it means that one might translate a particular word one way and fifty years later its meaning may have shifted greatly. A new translation would call for a new word.
  3. Often the etymology of words is not complete or the data to go with it is insufficient (I will likely tell a story at this point about my adventures with this aspect) While the **usus loquendi** may be very helpful it is difficult to deal with it exhaustively if the particular words or phrases have multiple occurrences.
  4. The mindset of the translator...it is easy to discover what one hides in a text. Nothing more need be said about this, however, none of us at this conference would do such a nefarious thing!
- B. *The Need: A message is meaningful only if one can understand it and that is most difficult if another language is involved. If the original is intended to be multi-cultural it will need to be expressed in the languages of these cultures. That is the work of the translator and the finished product is the translation, of course. The need, however, is not ended because our cultures continue to grow and change while the original culture is now fixed in time, We may know a lot about it but how to bring it into our time is not always easy*
- C. **The Biblical Field:** Translation has always been important but at times has been stifled by economies and at other times by tradition
1. The languages:
    - a. Greek: the common Greek (koine) of the world in the time of the Lord's advent. Classical Greek is not the language of the Bible but it is an adjunct of real importance.

- b. Hebrew: the language of the Old Testament and the general equivalent status of classical Greek.
- c. Aramaic: Small use in the Old Testament but it is a cognate of Hebrew and was likely the most spoken form in the time of our Lord.  
(There are plenty of arguments about these but they will be neither solved nor presented in this work)
- d. In addition to these Biblical languages, a student will do well to know German (reading: it is the language of theology!) and French (reading: the language of archaeology) and have a good background in Latin (the father of the romance languages) and his or her own native language! Ironically it is often in this last item where the greatest difficulty is met.  
**(Please do not be discouraged with this discussion...one is able to be a fine Bible scholar and teacher and not know any of these things save the native tongue! But if one is to study to maximize the transferral of the older languages to the present...these things become important. Very few of us do original work...we mostly use the books! But,....)**

## 2. Bible Translations:

- a. The Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek: the Septuagint
- b. Both Testaments from original languages to the Old Latin, and the Syriac...complete texts are non-existent
- c. Both Testaments to the Vulgate and besides this there were translations by this time into many of the "barbarian" languages, e.g. The Gothic Bible (Ulfilas)
- d. Erasmus, Luther and the Textus Receptus
- e. English, in many parts and forms
  - the Venerable Bede: fragments of both testaments
  - Wycliffe: the whole Bible from the Vulgate
  - Tyndale: the New Testament from Greek texts
  - the Reformation Bibles: especially the Geneva Bible and the Bishop's Bible
  - The Puritan Age Bible: King James Bible and since then innumerable translations. I will mention a few with various degrees of opinionism

#### D. Conclusion

1. Honor the Word of God in your life, your practice, and attitude.
2. Depend on the help of the Holy Spirit in your study and ministry
3. If you want to make notes on translated matters:
  - a. stay humble
  - b. avoid over simplification
  - c. likewise beware of generalities
  - d. guard against pedanticism (aligned with b above)
  - e. be able to identify colloquialisms
  - f. understand speech figures and the character of language

#### **IV. SUGGESTED READING**

*We are told very plainly in Eccl;esiastes 12 that there is no end to the making of books. These are suggested...it does not mean I agree with every word but I have read them and found them useful:*

##### **On the Canon:**

**Harris, R. Laird, Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures**  
*(I know of nothing better in this field)*

**Metzger, Bruce. The Canon of the New Testament**  
*(excellent reading)*

##### **On Hermeneutics:**

**Mickelson, A. Berkeley: Interpreting the Bible**  
*(have about worn my copy out)*

**In more general areas I have found the work of Spiros Zodhiates very helpful (Greek and New Testament) and Harrison's General Introduction to the Old Testament to be substantial. There are many other books and if anyone wants my opinion on one that I have read or read about, please feel free to ask. It is likely that I will often not know! But I am glad to share if able and sometimes get good ideas for things I should read.**