*Session 6*

*Modern Methods of Interpretation*

1. **Nineteenth Century**
   1. The Influence of the **Enlightenment**
      1. Evolutionary thinking, separation of Bible and theology
      2. Interest in science led to the historical-critical method
      3. Philosophical presuppositions
         1. Human reason is the best tool to interpret the Bible
         2. A naturalistic worldview
         3. History is a result of the evolutionary process.
         4. The truths in the Bible are time-bound to the period described.
         5. Challenges to authorship and historicity, led to Source Criticism
   2. **Source Criticism**
2. Parts of the Bible relied on different written or oral “sources” for their content
3. Focus on the Pentateuch, the Documentary Hypothesis: JEDP (Wellhausen)
4. Israel’s religion developed from animism, prophetic, to priestly
5. Used OT Prophetic books, like Isaiah 1-39, 40-55, 56-66
6. Applied to the Gospels and questions on finding the “historical Jesus”
7. Rarely helpful for the church today
   1. Responses and Other Approaches
      1. Traditional views supported by historical research
      2. The Salvation History approach, historical reliability of the Bible, developed biblical theology
      3. History of Religions School: how religions developed, influence of other religions on Israel, discovery of ancient religions
      4. Textual and Philological Advancements: discovery of ancient manuscripts, development of “textual criticism” advancement in biblical languages
      5. Scottish Common Sense Realism: everyone can understand the Bible for themselves
8. **The Twentieth Century**
9. **Form Criticism** (beginning of 20th cent.)
10. What it is
11. Identify and analyze different literary forms in the Bible
12. Forms developed from oral before written
13. Showed the cultural or religious setting of the original saying

Raised doubts about historical reliability of the words of Jesus in the Gospels

1. How to Use It
2. Problem: Be aware of the skepticism of the scholars
3. Positive: find “the setting in life” when the saying was spoken
4. Questions:

* Can you determine the original setting?
* What was the impact in this original setting?

1. **Redactions Criticism**
   * 1. What it is

the study of how an author has **edited** his sources for use in a new context and book

may show style and theology

* + 1. How to Use it

Use a Gospel Parallels (see <http://www.gospelparallels.com>)

Note similarities and differences

What can be determined from these?

1. **Composition Criticism**
2. What it is

Redaction criticism examines the structure, editorial comments, beginning, and ending

1. How to Use it

Helps with literary context

1. **Biblical Theology Movement**
2. What it is

Examines the faith of Israel and the church.

Seeks to understand the whole theological message of the Bible in order to understand smaller units.

Five emphases: To discover . . .

a. The Bible’s theology

b. The unity of the whole Bible

c. The revelation of God in history

d. The distinctiveness of the Bible’s thought structure

e. Contrast of the Bible to its ancient environment

1. How to Use it

Helps ask the big questions about the Bible as God’s revelation in history and his plan of salvation

Requires understanding of the whole Bible and not just its parts

1. **The Influence of Archaeology**
2. Many discoveries in the 19th and 20th centuries
3. Remains of cities found in mounds (“tels”), helped with dating
4. Pottery evolved over time and can be dated
5. Confirms the Bible’s history but has limitations
6. **Influence of Post-modernism**

Knowledge and interpretation of truth depend on context

Led to questioning if history is the right approach to the Bible

1. **Literary Methods of Interpretation**

Studying the Bible as literature without history or regard to time

1. **Canonical Criticism**
2. What it is

Interpret the present, completed form of the Bible and how it influences believing communities

Theology is priority over history

The Bible is interpreted as sacred Scripture

1. How to Use it

Limited value for exegesis

Helps make the Bible the document of the church. How can the church use it?

1. **Rhetorical Criticism**
2. What it is

Looks at how the author constructed his message to communicate effectively in order to understand his purpose and message

Two approaches:

1. Using ancient methods or classical rhetoric, especially from Greco-Roman world
2. Using modern rhetorical theory
3. How to Use it

Especially useful in NT letters

Look at structure, sequence, repetitions, beginnings and endings, transitions, exhortations, and the implied effect of words

Builds on grammatical study

1. **Reader Response Criticism**

Recognizes that a text has no meaning unless a reader is involved.

Some meaning of a text is created by the reader

Reminds us that we as readers are involved in interpretation.

1. **Genre Criticism**

“Genre” means type of literature

Knowing the type of literature will help in interpretation

We ask different types of questions based on genre

1. **Narrative Criticism:**
2. What it is

Interprets the stories of the Bible

Plot, conflict and resolution, setting, characterization, impact on audience

1. How to Use it

Ask careful questions related to the elements of the story, especially plot structure and characters

1. **Intertextual Criticism**
2. What is it?

how one text quotes or alludes to another text, especially how NT uses OT

1. Direct Quotation
2. Allusion: not a direct quotation but the idea
3. How to Use it
4. Determine what passage the author is using.
5. Study the original passage, its context, and its meaning.
6. How does the author use this passage to support his message?
7. **Social Scientific Criticism**
8. What it is

Looks at the social and cultural contexts

purity codes, honor-shame societies, family and friendship relationships in the ancient world, and patron-client codes.

Four tracks:

1. Social Description: gathers data from artifacts and literature to determine the social context of a text; Cultural Anthropology
2. Social History: attempts to understand the social movements, conflicts, and development of the early Christians in the Greco-Roman world
3. Sociology of Knowledge: explores how differing groups organize themselves and how they interpret their experiences within the larger society
4. Applying Contemporary Models from the social sciences: considers rituals, kinship relations, purity-pollution taboos, and economic systems

Two variations

1. Socio-rhetorical Criticism uses both rhetorical criticism and social scientific criticism; shows how the words of Scripture affect social relationships
2. Ideological Criticism: philosophy of life or world view

* Marxist: the exercise of power by one class over another
* Feminist: patriarchy and gender suppression
* Post-colonial: third world oppression by first world powers
* Socioeconomic: race, gender, and economic divisions in a society

1. How to Use it

Raises many questions for interpretation with good results

1. **Theological Interpretation**
2. What it is

Renewed interest in the Bible is the Church’s book of faith

Uses many other methods

Interpret within the Christian community

Looks for how both the OT and NT reveal God

Assumes unity in purpose of the OT and NT

1. How to Use it

Helpful for the church

Provides a basis for doctrine and theology

**Conclusion**

Value in using many methods

Choose which ones serve your purpose

They make exegesis more complicated

Focus on the types of questions the methods ask

***Remember that the key to interpreting the Bible is asking good questions.***

1. **Where is the Future Going?**
2. Cultural Exegesis
3. “Agenda” Exegesis:
4. Return to Mission Exegesis (Matthew 28:19-20)

**Big Ideas**

1. The 19th century raised questions about the history of the Bible.
2. The 20th century moved past history to ask literary questions.
3. There are many approaches to the Bible today. Learn especially about these key methods:
   1. Historical and Social-scientific Criticism: What can we know about the people, events, and places from the world of the Bible?
   2. Rhetorical Criticism: How did the authors try to persuade the readers of their ideas through their writing?
   3. Theological Criticism: What is the message of a passage and how does this relate to the rest of the Bible?
4. Asking good questions is the key to interpreting the Bible.
5. As the church grows around the world, many new insights and methods will be developed.