

SYLLABUS: HERMENEUTICS (06ON5100) WINTER 2020, RTS DC

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

The goal of this class is deceptively simple: to learn to read the Bible well. Of course, reading the Bible well is a challenging task that covers a wide range of topics. What attitudes and skills make for good reading? What is the goal of reading? Should the Bible be interpreted like other great works or does its divine character require special procedures for interpretation? How does the Bible fit together, and how does that affect how we approach a particular book or passage? How should knowledge of the original languages affect the interpretative process? How do we appropriately move from what the text meant in its original context to its modern-day application? All these questions, and more besides, get at the complexity of our stated goal, but the goal is nevertheless a good and necessary one (1 Tim 3:16), and it is my hope that at the end of our time together we are better prepared to hear the word of Christ in all the Scriptures.

B. LEARNING GOALS

Upon conclusion of this course, the student will:

- Be better able to interpret a text within its literary, historical, redemptive, and canonical contexts.
- Appreciate the Christocentric focus of the Old and New Testaments in all their variety and diversity.
- Apply a variety of linguistic tools to the interpretation of words, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses, with a particular focus on the use of the original languages in exegesis.

C. TOPICS COVERED

We will attempt to accomplish the stated learning goals by comprehensively addressing the central issues in biblical interpretation, including the following:

- The history of hermeneutics as an independent discipline (with a particular focus on biblical hermeneutics)
- The unity of diversity of the Old and New Testaments
- Biblical theology as an interpretative method
- The nature, character, and limits of human language and their application to exegesis
- Lexical semantics, discourse analysis, genre criticism, and other tools for unpacking the meaning of biblical texts, with an emphasis on the original languages.

D. INSTRUCTOR

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E. CLASS TIME

Class will meet on Mondays from 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM, February 4 - May 10. All assignments are due by 11:59 pm on Monday May 17.

F. COURSE WEBSITE

The RTS course website will contain the latest version of this syllabus, selected course readings, and outlines, slides, and notes related to the course.

II. CLASS PROCEDURE

Our class time together will be comprised of lecture and discussion. The intensive nature of our time together will require us to move quickly, but learning how to read well does not occur in a vacuum. It arises as we dialog and reason together. So please ask questions, make comments, throw out case studies or problem passages. I will be asking you questions as well. In all this your active engagement (attendance and ongoing participation) is not only appreciated but required!

Overall, the class will move from the general (and philosophical) to the specific (and concrete). (1) We will begin by asking some overarching questions about the nature of meaning. What does “meaning” mean? How does one determine the meaning of any text? (2) While these questions are important for reading any text, the Bible presents special challenges that need to be addressed, and so we will then turn to specifically biblical hermeneutics. What is the Bible? Does divine authorship change how we should approach *this specific* text, and if so, how? Is there a unity to the Bible and how does that affect interpretation? (3) These “macro-hermeneutical” issues will then bring us to more “micro-hermeneutical” questions. How do authors use words, sentences, and paragraphs to communicate? Where do I go to find out what a word means? What tools are there for figuring out the “main point” of a book? (4) There will be a heavy emphasis throughout the course on concrete biblical (and pastoral/practical) case studies, attempting to apply what we have learned to specific (and sometimes problematic) passages in the Old and New Testaments.

III. TEXTS AND MATERIALS

The following list is organized topically and then alphabetically to assist you in reading in related chunks. While all the items on this list are required, most are short articles in journals or a chapter in a book, and therefore need not be purchased (a reading packet will be made available). I have used a star (*) to indicate books (or articles in books) that you will need to either purchase or borrow (they will not be in the reading packet). I will make further remarks on this reading list on the first day of class, but students eager to get ahead should consider reading Poythress and Goldsworthy.

There are a number of optional readings. They will be included on your reading list, and for each one you complete you will be rewarded with an additional 1-5 points to your “reading and participation” grade (depending on the length of the reading).

A. GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

*Porter, S. E., and B. M. Stovell, eds. *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views (Spectrum Multiview Book Series)*. Downer's Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2012.

Poythress, V. S. "Dispensing with Merely Human Meaning: Gains and Losses from Focusing on the Human Author, Illustrated by Zephaniah 1:2-3." *JETS* 57/3 (2014): 481-499. <http://www.frame-poythress.org/dispensing-with-merely-human-meaning-gains-and-losses-from-focusing-on-the-human-author-illustrated-by-zephaniah-12-3/>

B. BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL METHOD

OPTIONAL: Bartholomew, C. G., and W. G. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004. Pages 15-27. A good place to start for the uninitiated; recommended if the term "Biblical Theology" means nothing to you.

Beale, G. K. "Positive Answer to the Question Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?." Pages 387-404 in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*. Edited by G. K. Beale. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

Dillard, R. B. "Harmonization: A Help and a Hindrance." In *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, 151–164. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.

OPTIONAL: Dodd, C. H. "The Old Testament in the New." Pages 167-81 in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*. Edited by G. K. Beale. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

Gaffin, R. B. "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology." *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1976): 281-299.

*Goldsworthy, G. *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006.

OPTIONAL: Longenecker, R. N. "Negative Answer to the Question "Who is the Prophet Talking About?" Some Reflections of the New Testament's Use of the Old." Pages 375-86 in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*. Edited by G. K. Beale. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

McCartney, D. G. "The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament." In *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.

Vos, G. *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948. Pages 3-40. Another great orientation to Biblical-theological method.

C. TEXTUAL EXEGESIS

You can read either (1) *Carson, D. A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. 2nd ed. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1996. OR (2) *Silva, Moisés. *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*. Rev. and expanded ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1994.¹

Cotterell, Peter, and Max Turner. *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1989. Pages 188-256.

¹The Carson reading is the easier and more practical of the two. The Silva is for those who want to delve more deeply into the linguistic side of hermeneutics and exegesis.

D. EXEGESIS AS APPLICATION

Baldwin, Bill. "Biblical Theology and Counseling." *Kerux* 16, no. 1 (2001): 41-60. Available online: <http://www.kerux.com/doc/1601A3.asp>

Bettler, J. "Application." In *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, 331–49. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986.

Gaffin, R. B. "The Usefulness of the Cross." *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1979): 228-46.

IV. ASSESSMENT AND ASSIGNMENTS

A. READING AND PARTICIPATION: 20%

There is a lot of reading. I am not requiring you to turn in notes or digests or "book-reports," but I do expect you to engage the readings. To that end I will require you to fill out a form listing the percentage of reading that you completed. This is really to help you—I want you to get credit for the work you put into this material.

There will also be occasions throughout the class when you are given a homework assignment. Your preparation and discussion of these assignments is assessed here.

B. POSITION PAPERS (FINAL EXAM): 40%

There will not be a traditional final exam for this class. Instead you will be given the opportunity to respond to four technical or controversial matters related to Hermeneutics. The responses should be no more than three pages in length and should follow all of the ordinary expectations for academic paper writing. The intent is to give you an opportunity to carefully work through some of the knotty problems we will encounter along the way.

You can approach this assignment as an "open note, open book, take home exam," though, as mentioned above, it should be formatted like an academic paper. Good answers will reflect an integration and appropriation of material derived from lectures, course readings, primary sources, and personal reflection and critique. Great answers will additionally utilize independent research, and to that end a Bibliography of helpful resources will be provided for each topic above. The use of independent research is not required, but it will assist you in working through the issues.

Note: Sync students will submit their answer to these questions using the online forums (see below).

C. PAPER: 40%

You will also be required to write a 10-15 page (double-spaced) **biblical-theological paper** on a passage of the Bible. The goal of this paper is to give you some experience interpreting an individual passage within the overall framework of the Bible.

This is a "biblical-theological" paper, which means you are doing at least two things. First, you need to explain the meaning of the text in its *immediate context*. Second, you need to place your text within *the overarching history of redemption as that history culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus*. This is difficult to do, and we will discuss it more fully during class, but here are some pointers to get you started.

Your first task will be to pick a passage in the Bible that you want to talk about. This passage should be a "chunk" of Scripture. By "chunk" I mean it should be long enough that it is coherent all on its own—it

tells one story, or addresses a singular point, theme or dogma—and yet short enough that it is manageable to discuss within your page constraints. So John 3:16 is too short—one verse typically does not give enough context to be treated by itself—but John 3:1-36 is too long—it contains two independent stories that cannot be handled in so short a space.² John 3:1-21 is pretty long, but since it contains the record of one coherent dialog it could possibly be discussed within the page constraints, provided the student properly focuses that discussion (i.e. doesn't write a verse-by-verse exposition of the passage). John 3:16-21 would be an ideal selection as it is one paragraph with its own internal integrity. In other words, you are aiming for a “paragraph” of Scripture—a unit of text that is *about one thing*. Text selection is critical in teaching, preaching, and writing, so if you are having problems please ask me.

Your second step is to start researching and writing. Ask yourself: “what is my text *about*?” What is the author trying to say? How does this paragraph fit within the overall book?³ What does it add to the whole? What would be lost if this paragraph were not here? How does it *flow* with the surrounding paragraphs and in the book as a whole? How is it a part of the one overall story of Scripture? How is it unique within that story? Write down a bunch of questions about your passage. Write out obvious questions. Write out difficult questions. Pick up a commentary or two. Start doing some research and start getting some answers (and some more questions!).

Now it's time to filter and to start writing. Your biblical-theological paper needs to do a couple of things:

1. It needs to explain what this passage is about in its original context. What is the main point of this paragraph and how do you know? For this you need to do some *exegesis*. I don't want a verse-by-verse commentary. What I want is a description of the *main point* of the passage and how the various parts point to and develop that main point. You'll need to look at the Greek or the Hebrew (if you know them), perhaps explain some significant or problematic words (but be careful to avoid some of the problems we discuss in class), and work through the grammar. But you do all of this as a means to an end: what is this paragraph *about*?
2. It needs to show how the passage fits into the book within which it is an indispensable part. How does the story presented or the issues addressed further the overall story or argument? What would be lost if the passage wasn't in the book? How does the main point of this paragraph fit within the main point of the entire book?
3. It needs to show how the passage fits within the overall framework of Scripture. How does this passage fit within the story of redemption? What OT and NT themes and trajectories does it develop? *How is it fulfilled in Jesus Christ?*
4. And here's the kicker: while doing the three things described above, your paper needs to be *about one thing*. (And I suggest it be about how the person and work of Christ fulfills whatever

²There are exceptions to this. You can handle a short text provided it contains enough interest in and of itself, and provided you spend sufficient time looking at its immediate context. Similarly you can pick a long text, provided you focus in on a verse or two.

³This does NOT mean you should give me an extended discussion of “special introduction” issues like authorship, date, etc. Only bring in that material as it is relevant to your thesis. What I am looking for is more about the “flow” of the book—how does it fit within the agenda or logic or style or purpose of the book as a whole?

your passage is about). This is not a commentary, it is a paper with a *main point*. Make your main point obvious and stick it up front. Make sure I know what it is. Make sure that everything else in your paper supports it in one way or another. Then bring it all together for me in the end in such a way that I see your main point all the more clearly and dramatically and am glad I read your paper. That is: tell me what you are about to tell me, then tell me, then tell me why what you told me was valuable for me to know.

You can also check out my guide to writing a seminary paper, part 1 of which you'll find here:

<http://www.signandshadow.com/2017/11/02/how-to-write-a-seminary-paper-part-1-the-thesis/>

More will be said about this in class, and if you need direction or have questions do not hesitate to ask. This is not an easy task, and so I suggest you start thinking about it early.

D. SYNC STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Sync students will additionally be required to participate in the online forums (it is optional for residential students in most cases). Students will need to post at least **seven** times in the "Professor to Student" forums, and at least **five** times in the "Student to Student" forum.

1. PROFESSOR TO STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Four of the seven forum questions are reserved for posting answers to the exam questions above. Sync students will not submit their final exam as a separate document, but rather via the discussion forums. The posts should follow the same guidelines as the exam guidelines for residential students. These will be graded for quality and not just completion (as per the final exam).

The remaining interactions will be related to the primary source background readings interspersed through the class. These will be graded for completion.

2. STUDENT TO STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Students should interact with one another at least five times in the student to student forum. This forum is open-ended; any student can post about any issue related to gospels. Posts here should be of the "raise your hand in class to ask a question" variety.

V. GRADING

94-100%: A	90-93%: A-
87-89%: B+	84-86%: B
80-83%: B-	>60%: Fail