

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

Biblical Studies 110, Hermeneutics II

As promised last month, here is our discussion of the ministerial hermeneutical method. I cite a lot of texts in this article, so you may want to have a Bible handy. The main method in this category is called the “Historical Grammatical” method. This method also employs human reason, but only as far as we finite beings are able (acknowledging that we cannot fully comprehend the infinite) and lets God's word have the final say especially when it says things that are illogical to us. This method acknowledges that God is all-powerful and can reveal his truth to us in any way he chooses, and that happens to be his inerrant written word, clearly defined through history and grammar, the Bible. As such, this method produces interpretations that are clear confessions of biblical truth. If your ultimate authority is God's word, then you will acknowledge that all human life is created in his image and is intrinsically valuable. All races, locations, sizes, and conditions of humans are therefore worthy of the highest respect and protection we can provide. We also have the freedom to function within the gifted order of his creation. He put “norms” in place for our benefit and we let his word have the final say no matter how politically incorrect or illogical it may sound.

God gives men and women different roles, like mother, father, husband, wife, or pastor. Scripture attaches gender to each of these roles (see 1 Tim 3:1-13, Titus 1:6-9, 1 Cor 14:33-35, Eph 5:21-26, Col 3:18-19, 1 Tim 2:9-13, 1 Cor 11:3-10, and 1 Peter 3:1-5). History and grammar can help us better understand these things but we cannot redefine what the words mean. To be a pastor, one must be male, rightly called, and ordained. Marriage is defined for us in Genesis as being between one man and one woman. Other scriptural mandates are chastity for all, celibacy for the unmarried, and monogamy and fidelity for the married. These are the gifts of a loving God to us all regardless of our fallen sinful condition.

To say that only God can forgive sins is most certainly correct, and he can do so however he wishes. To that end, he has established means through which forgiveness can be given, including through words spoken in his stead, by his command following confession (see John 20:22-23).

Baptism is a gift from God, even if it does not seem logical. Water and word certainly cannot normally save and give faith miraculously, but scripture tells us that God's word combined with water does just that (see Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38-39; 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5-6; Heb 10:22; John 3:5; Rom 6:3-6; Col 2:11-12, and Gal 3:27-29).

The Lord's Supper is a gift from God, even if it does not seem logical. Bread and wine normally cannot also be flesh and blood and give forgiveness when consumed, but scripture tells us that they can, and they do (see Matt 26, Mark 14 Luke 22, and 1 Cor 11).

As you can see, the “leaves” on these two hermeneutic trees are very different. So, the next time you are sharing your faith with someone and they argue against your “interpretation”, you can politely tell them “yes, and it is also the confession of the universal, historic, Christian faith, so your disagreement is not with me, but with the plain, clear, historic, apostolic exposition of God's truth”. Or perhaps you could just say, “your disagreement is not with me, but God's word”; that might be simpler.

There are much more thorough treatments of this topic available, but this will help define the two main schools of thought which will appear in our discussion of American Trinitarian Christian church bodies. Next month we will begin discussion of the “three ladders” or the “three ditches” we often find ourselves falling into, regardless of our church's confession. We all struggle with these, but some church bodies have them as part of their public confession of faith.

In Christ,
Pastor Portier