

# Calling for a New Hermeneutic

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## Introduction

*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines *hermeneutic* as an adjective “concerning interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts.” The English word comes from the Greek *hermēneutikos*, which is derived from the verb *hermēneuein*, meaning “to interpret.”

Change agents in the church say we need a new hermeneutic. In other words, they say we need a new approach to interpreting Scripture that does not focus upon the need for Bible authority. However, the question arises, if we set aside the old hermeneutic, with its emphasis on command, examples and inferences, how then will we interpret the Word of God, and make application of the same?

## “We Need to Focus on God”

Some say we need a greater focus on God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. Start with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. Preach piety, not a pattern; commend Christ, not the church; spotlight the Spirit, not the letter of the law. However, we cannot know God apart from divine revelation (Ps. 19:1-11; 1 Cor. 2:6-16). Furthermore, if we love God, we will keep his commandments (Deut. 11:1, 13-15, 22-28; John 14:15, 21-24; 15:10).

*Psalm 19:1-11 ... 1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. 6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. (NASB95)*

*1 Corinthians 2:6-16 ... 6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined*

*before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. (NASB95)*

*Deuteronomy 11:1 ... 1 "You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments. (NASB95)*

*Deuteronomy 11:13-15 ... 13 "It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, 14 that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. 15 "He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. (NASB95)*

*Deuteronomy 11:22-28 ... 22 "For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him, 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. 24 "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your border will be from the wilderness to Lebanon, and from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea. 25 "No man will be able to stand before you; the Lord your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you. 26 "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known. (NASB95)*

*John 14:15 ... 15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (NASB95)*

*John 14:21-24 ... 21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." 22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" 23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father*

*will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 24 “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me. (NASB95)*

*John 15:10 ... 10 “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. (NASB95)*

## **“We Need to View Scripture as Narrative and Story”**

Some say we need to view Scripture as narrative and story. According to Michael Casey, "The church is a story-formed community or a community of character that lives by the story of Christ and the early church. That story has been given to all Christians to live by." However, this approach is strikingly similar to Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch (J.E.D.P.). Stripped of its divine authority, Scripture becomes as inconsequential as a tale that is told (cf. Ps. 90:9-10), closely akin to Shakespeare’s description of life’s vanity:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

[William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5]

*Psalm 90:9-10 ... 9 For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. 10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away. (NASB95)*

Nevertheless, Luke provided a precise historical accounting of the life of Christ and the history of the early church (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3). In his defense before King Agrippa, Paul affirmed the integrity of the gospel message, saying “For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner” (Acts 26:1-3, 24-29). In like manner, Peter said, “We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Pet. 1:12-18).

*Luke 1:1-4 ... 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (NASB95)*

*Acts 1:1-3 ... 1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented*

*Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (NASB95)*

*Acts 26:1-3 ... 1 Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. (NASB95)*

*Acts 26:24-29 ... 24 While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad." 25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 26 "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. 27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." 28 Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." 29 And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains." (NASB95)*

*2 Peter 1:12-18 ... 12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. 13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind. 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (NASB95)*

### **"We Need to Read the Bible like Jesus"**

Some say we need to read the Bible like Jesus. Gary Collier said, "So, not only is Jesus the authoritative interpreter for the church, his church is to follow his lead! ... Jesus draws us to interpret the instructions of God in the brighter light of the desires of God's heart: justice, mercy, faith, righteousness, love... See Scripture as reflecting the heart of God rather than a book for its own sake... Seek to establish as authoritative what is central to the desire of God's heart."

Nevertheless, many misinterpret Jesus' statement, "I desire compassion, and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:9-13; 12:1-7), falsely inferring a divine disinterest in man's obedience (cf. Hos. 6:4-7). In like manner, they misunderstand His pronouncement regarding detailed duties versus the weightier provisions of the Law (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42).

*Matthew 9:9-13 ... 9 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. 10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. 13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (NASB95)*

*Matthew 12:1-7 ... 1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. (NASB95)*

*Hosea 6:4-7 ... 4 What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud And like the dew which goes away early. 5 Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; And the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. 6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. 7 But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me. (NASB95)*

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*Matthew 23:23 ... 23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (NASB95)*

*Luke 11:42 ... 42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (NASB95)*

Those who discount the old hermeneutic by saying, "We need to read the Scripture like Jesus," forget that the Lord was concerned with Biblical commands (Matt. 8:1-4; 15:1-9; 22:34-40), examples (Matt. 12:1-7; Luke 6:1-5) and inferences (Matt. 19:3-9; 22:23-33; Mark 12:24-27).

*Matthew 8:1-4 ... 1 When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him. 2 And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." 3 Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him,*

saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and **present the offering that Moses commanded**, as a testimony to them." (NASB95)

Matthew 15:1-9 ... 1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 And He answered and said to them, "**Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?** 4 "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.' 5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God," 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 9 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' " (NASB95)

Matthew 22:34-40 ... 34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (NASB95)

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Matthew 12:1-7 ... 1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. (NASB95)

Luke 6:1-5 ... 1 Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain. 2 But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 3 And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, 4 how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?" 5 And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (NASB95)

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*Matthew 19:3-9 ... 3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (NASB95)*

*Matthew 22:23-33 ... 23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, 24 asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.' 25 "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 "Last of all, the woman died. 28 "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." 29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (NASB95)*

*Mark 12:24-27 ... 24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken." (NASB95)*

## **Conclusion**

God has always rewarded obedience (Deut. 4:1-2; John 8:51) and punished disobedience (Matt. 7:21-23; Gal. 1:6-9).

*Deuteronomy 4:1-2 ... 1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2 "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. (NASB95)*

*John 8:51 ... 51 "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death." (NASB95)*

*Matthew 7:21-23 ... 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' (NASB95)*

*Galatians 1:6-9 ... 6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (NASB95)*

Acknowledging the authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:17), let us abide within the parameters of divine revelation (2 John 9) and speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11).

*Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (NASB95)*

*Colossians 3:17 ... 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (NASB95)*

*2 John 9 ... 9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. (NASB95)*

*1 Peter 4:11 ... 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB95)*

Note: This lesson is an adaptation of the second section of Chris Reeves' booklet "*Out With The Old, In With The New*," which is published by Truth Bookstore and available online at <http://www.truthmagazine.com/>



### **Out With The Old, In With The New**

The Cry of the New Hermeneutic. Hermeneutics is the practice of interpreting the Scriptures. Recently, some brethren have been calling for a new way to practice Bible interpretation. They claim that our present practice of Bible interpretation is based upon the faulty ideas of the Restoration Movement, but now it is time for a New Hermeneutic. According to them, we need to get rid of the old hermeneutic of commands, examples and inferences, and practice a New Hermeneutic. This book argues that we do not need a New Hermeneutic. The only hermeneutic we need today is the one practiced by Jesus, the Apostles and New Testament evangelists. Part One of this book discusses certain practices that New Hermeneutic brethren want to abandon, and the

Bible defense of such practices. Part Two of this book reviews some of the New Hermeneutic proposals offered by some brethren, and a Bible critique of such proposals. 49 pages.