

# 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).

## “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]

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).

### **“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).

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).

### **Conclusion**

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

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.