

2018 FIRSTLOVE BIBLE CONFERENCE
September 29, 2018
CONFERENCE THEME: “Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth”

“WHY HERMENEUTICS IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE PASTOR”

My assignment is to effectively bridge the *work* of hermeneutics to the *end* of hermeneutics, which is somewhat more than Grant Osborne identifies it to be in *The Hermeneutical Spiral*.¹ More than the pastor’s sermon, I would suggest that the end of Biblical hermeneutics should also include Bible lessons, formulating plans for witnessing to the lost, and personal life applications. I think it unlikely anyone will disagree with me about that. I presume that we are agreed that hermeneutics ought to be seen as broader in scope than many believers grant it to be, certainly more important than it is recognized by most to be. Therefore, perhaps I might be given a bit of leeway in my introductory remarks to suggest common ground concerning something that is in one respect preliminary to hermeneutics.

Granted, one aspect of the goal of hermeneutics is personal growth and development as God’s truth in His Word is first unearthed, is then situated in (so as to refine) one’s broader system of theology, and is finally applied to the living of the Christian life. But the other aspect of the goal of hermeneutics is communicating not only the discovered truth but also the application of the discovered truth to others. For now, let me refer to them, to our audience (be they auditors or readers), as learners. To that end, on my way to addressing why hermeneutics is essential for pastors, I would like to briefly mention some simple tools that enable the students of God’s Word to effectively communicate what has been learned with those to whom it is to be imparted, the learners. Those tools were clarified by a Baptist preacher named John Milton Gregory in the 19th century in a work titled *The Seven Laws of Teaching*.²

Have you ever sat under a teacher at a university or in seminary or, heaven forbid, in a church service who was as dry as dust? I think with each one of us someone’s name immediately comes to mind in that regard. Forever in your memory is how tragically boring that one person was to not only you but to everyone else in the class. To be generous, it must be admitted that some topics and courses of study are so ponderous that it is incredibly challenging to acquire and then maintain the interest and attention of the learner. That said, it is generally true that boring anyone with the truth is a sin that ought to be repented of and corrected by not only a greater mastery of the subject matter but also a more insightful consideration of the nature of those who are to be learners.

One particular fellow comes to mind who delivered a message from God’s Word to our congregation many years ago, who I then determined would never again be given an opportunity to so bore people with the truth. Though standing upright and seeming to look at those of us sitting in front of him, it was very clear to us all that he took no note of the physical signs that should have provided important feedback information to him to adjust his presentation somehow so the time he had would not be completely wasted. He was a lovely Christian man. I enjoyed his social company and counted him a faithful brother. But what he had acquired from God’s Word via his hermeneutics he simply could not pass on to others.

I am thrilled this conference topic is about hermeneutics. Truth be told, more such conferences on this topic are warranted. However, of what benefit to the *learner* is the teacher’s mastery of Bible truths gained through hermeneutics unless he can effectively convey those truths to those we identify as learners? This is the pastor’s question, and I am of the opinion that far too many pastors these days do not resolve the issue in a manner that honors God, but rather resort to manipulative methods to hold an audience’s attention.

¹ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), page 12.

² John Milton Gregory, *The Seven Laws Of Teaching*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, Revised 1954), page 7.

How can pastors engage the weapons of our warfare that are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds? How do pastors succeed in casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God? To what degree can pastors, by God's grace, bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, if we only succeed in creating disinterest or distraction in our topic by failing to reach learners with the truth?³ A disinterested learner or one distracted by manipulation contrived to hold his attention using entertainment, is not a learner at all, is he? The result is a skirmish in the spiritual warfare that is a loss and not a gain for the cause of Christ. Thus, the reason Paul reminded Timothy of the need to be apt to teach.

Biblical hermeneutics is profoundly important, wonderfully useful, opening up the mine of God's treasure house to the discovery through hard work of truth. But we must have a cart at our disposal to transport the ore from the mine where God has stored it to the smelter, so to speak, of the learner's mind. We must cultivate the skill of imparting what we learn to those we seek to teach, so learners might want to grasp the doctrine, embrace the application, and then respond with obedience to the revealed will of God. Psalm 119.11 reads, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." I reckon this verse suggests more than someone hearing with understanding. But for the learner to hide God's Word in his heart, the process must at least *begin* with understanding, which is connected to the learner's interest.

So, allow me to quickly rehearse the seven laws of teaching that the pastor or Bible teacher can ignore at his peril, having become a veritable storehouse of Bible truth through study, that he cannot successfully convey to learners because he violates well-established principles of communication between teachers and learners. I will paraphrase the seven laws with comment but without explanation.⁴

- (1) The teacher must be the one who knows what is to be taught. I suspect this is the most common deficiency of the 21st-century pastor.
- (2) The learner is one whose attention must be acquired and held to learn what is taught. Perhaps this is the most common deficiency in connection with the 21st-century learner.
- (3) The language employed between teacher and learner must be common to both. Is the language common to teacher *and* learner if what is being said focuses on the fact that the verb is Aorist Middle Imperative?
- (4) The lesson to be taught must be explained regarding truth already known by the learner. Was it Dwight L. Moody who spoke of cookies being placed on the low shelf?
- (5) Teaching occurs when the learner's mind is aroused to grasp the truth being taught. Interest is crucial, but so many speakers resort to entertainment when they notice their audience is inattentive.
- (6) Learning occurs with an understanding of the new idea or truth to affect future conduct. Application of the truth taught is paramount.
- (7) The test and proof of teaching and learning come with reviewing, rethinking, reknowing, reproducing, and then applying what has been taught. I have heard it said by old southern preachers many times that you must tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them.

Forty years of teaching, preaching on average four times each week, explaining, discipling, and counseling have more than persuaded me that these seven laws form an intellectual chain of principles, with the absence of a single one guaranteeing that actual learning *will not* occur, meaning actual teaching has not been accomplished, with the goal of hermeneutics then being *unrealized* in anyone's life but one's own. How very sad that such egregious failures occur so often. Of what use is the pastor's diligent study to his congregation if he speaks to them in the unknown tongue of the sophisticated scholar and fails to recognize the importance of attracting and then holding the attention of auditors as Whitefield, Edwards, and Spurgeon were so careful to do? Let us redeem the time on the platform and not just in one's library, by implementing tried and proven tools for communicating divine truth to both the learned and the unlearned who have come to hear us.

³ 2 Corinthians 10.4-5

⁴ Gregory, pages 18-19.

How important it is for the preacher to develop such intimacy with his audience that he becomes familiar with their level of knowledge, so his message from God's Word does not exceed their grasp from the outset? Should he be like a thoroughbred eager to run like the wind who bolts from the starting gate while leaving his audience behind? Folks may have arrived for worship eager to learn. They may sing energetically and then sit ready. But then the preacher leaves them behind.

The cessationist pastor may one day give an accounting to the Savior and there learn that he unwittingly spoke to audiences in an unknown tongue and there was not one present to interpret.⁵ As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air."⁶ Granted, Paul refers to the gift of tongues, while I speak of language that is just as unintelligible to the first-time visitor.

In the end, it doesn't nearly as much matter what the teacher says to the learner as what the learner *thinks* the teacher has said, which was why Asahel Nettleton⁷ and Charles Spurgeon⁸ carefully interviewed individuals after preaching to them. It was not physicists and electrical engineers who developed the concept of feedback, but men of God. This is verified by Solomon Stoddard's *A Guide To Christ*,⁹ which was a handbook to teach preachers how to discover from those who heard them what listeners thought they had said in the sermon. This is far more useful to maintaining a preacher's relevancy than conducting ministry by market research.¹⁰

As well, one might ask if the *product* of hermeneutics demands a rehearsal of the *process* of hermeneutics. Does every Greek word need pronouncing and explaining? Does every Hebrew word need pronouncing and explaining? Did da Vinci or Rembrandt insist on describing to their patrons the process of mixing the pigments in the paints used in their portraits? Did Michelangelo demand that his patrons accompany him to the quarry to select his raw materials for sculpting? Does the visitor to a worship service or a Bible study need to be shown that the methods used to arrive at the truth are so far out of his present reach that there is a risk he will be discouraged by the gulf you have spanned rather than him being edified by what you have privately learned in your labors?

A personal illustration might serve us at this point. Almost forty years ago I took a young Christian with me to visit someone in his home. Though I had reason to expect the person we were visiting to be somewhat receptive, it turned out that he was very combative, throwing at me Jehovah's Witness arguments, Adventist arguments, and some Mormonism for good measure. He had a smorgasbord theology that proved useful to his pride as an effective barrier to him receiving the truth.

Here was my terrible error. I felt at the time I had dealt with each argument thrown at me expertly. I parried and thrust with precision and skill. There was not a single objection that I did not meet with Scripture, leaving the man silent in the end, but unmoved and still unyielding. The visit drew to a close, and my young companion and I thanked him for his hospitality, and we parted company after shaking hands. It was when I dropped off my young companion that I came to realize my terrible blunder. Unrecognized by me was the fact that my audience numbered two individuals and not one. And the only thing I accomplished during that visit, besides shutting the mouth of the unconverted man we visited, was to discourage my companion so that he

⁵ The cessationist does believe sign gifts such as the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues are operative at present.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:9

⁷ Bennet Tyler and Andrew A. Bonar, *Nettleton And His Labours*, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975 reprint of 1854 publication), pages 301-303.

⁸ R. L. Hymers, Jr. and Christopher Cagan, *Preaching To A Dying Nation*, (Los Angeles, CA: Fundamentalist Baptist Tabernacle of Los Angeles, 1999), pages 201-203.

⁹ Reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria Publications, Ligonier, PA in 1993.

¹⁰ It is sad that the practice of elicitation, so the preacher might learn from the listener following the sermon, has been discarded by most preachers (or rather not taken up because of ignorance). What was a rather common 18th century ministry practice has become a 21st century rarity among gospel ministers. Presently, elicitation is widely used in many professions (law enforcement, medical professions, legal professionals, human resource specialists, engineers) to gather important information, but only rarely by ministers. This is a dramatic reversal of practice over the span of two centuries.

concluded he would never be able to deal with individuals the way I had and therefore he would never engage in such an activity again. I dominated the meeting with my superior learning and thereby lost on two fronts.

What should I have done instead of what I did? I should have known my audience better than I did. I should have considered the unintended consequences of the approach I used. On that occasion, I should have recognized that less might have proven to be more. And I should have demonstrated considerably more humility by displaying markedly less learning. Perhaps a somewhat different approach might have been less challenging to our host while being an encouragement to a young Christian rather than sending him into a pit of despondency.

Having rehearsed (by way of introduction) some of the cautions to be exercised with the product of our hermeneutics, I now move to address why hermeneutics is so important a matter for pastors, under three very broad headings:

First, HERMENEUTICS IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE PASTOR BECAUSE THE PASTOR IS A CHRISTIAN

At least that is the assumption for my consideration, though I am quite sure there are many occupying the pulpits of America in our day who do not fit that description. Why is hermeneutics important for me as a believer in Jesus Christ, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, and as a child of God? You mean besides corroborating my understanding of the Gospel when I was converted to Christ?

I well remember reviewing my understanding of the Gospel again, and again, verifying that my experience was in agreement with what the Bible declares to be so about the salvation of a sinner. Every Gospel sermon I heard during those first months of my new life in Christ drove me to an investigation of what I had recently heard preached, what I had learned from my study of God's Word, and upon reflection of my own response to the Gospel brought home to me in a powerful way by the Spirit of God after reading the Word of God.

How thankful I was that the conflict I faced when confronted by Charismatic Bible studies at work and solid Gospel preaching at a small Baptist Church on Sunday was rather easily resolved in my thinking by a member of that Church. It was when he responded to a question about his opinion by saying to me, "My opinion is unimportant. Let's turn to God's Word to see what the Bible has to say." Then and there it was crystallized in my thinking that I was exposed to two opposed approaches to discovering the truth. Do I examine the Bible in light of my own experience? Or do I examine my experience in light of God's Word? That was the first hermeneutical decision I consciously remember making. My experience is not the final authority. God's Word is the final authority.

There are three reasons that I want to set before you in as simple a fashion as possible why hermeneutics is essential for the believer in Jesus Christ. The reason for stressing simplicity is my past experiences with some extremely bright men and women. Though I am not an exceptional man by any means, God has providentially given me opportunities to observe people of real brilliance in the political realm, in the legal arena, in the scientific realm, in the business world, in the engineering profession, and in broadcasting. My observations of some individuals who were very prominent in their fields have surprised no one more than me. I have been astonished at such people's return, whenever practical, to the basics, to the simple things. I seek to emulate them now.

First, to know God's will, one must know God's Word. This might seem to be so basic a concept that it does not need to be stated. But there are many in our day who have such a view of divine inspiration, revelation, and illumination, coupled with their wildly inaccurate view of their capacities, that they feel very confident that they know God's will without paying much attention to God's Word. One man, who was for a year my pastor when I was very young in the Lord, frequently told those who would listen that the most beneficial course of study he ever pursued was when he obtained permission to enroll in the General Motors Corporation management training course. It was only later that I realized that he looked upon ministry and the pastorate as a business enterprise, so of course business practices would be of more value to him than the study of God's Word. He is by no means an isolated example of this approach. Sadly, it has proved to be the case for him, and

for so many others including those who are not pastors, that the Christian life is not intuitive as they had presumed, and implementing best business or marketing practices is not always the way to proceed. Solomon warns in Proverbs 3.5, where he cautions, “lean not unto thine own understanding.” Cleverness and reliance on intuition invariably lead to catastrophe in the Christian life. How many times in Scripture does God make mention of His “ways” in contrast to men’s ways? Where else will someone learn God’s will but in God’s Word? Unless, of course, you are a mystic or a continuationist.¹¹ Do I repeat myself?

But to know God’s Word one must study God’s Word. Of course, there is a place for the reading and rereading of Scripture. I seem to remember Graham Scroggie’s pattern of reading a book of the Bible straight through without interruption no less than fifty times before he would embark upon a careful study in preparation for expository sermons through that book. There is great value in reading God’s Word, for devotional purposes as well as to gain familiarity with the ebb and flow of Scripture. That said, I remember hearing a pastor who had read God’s Word so many times that he had committed major portions of Scripture to memory, which resulted in him citing long passages throughout his time on the platform. He thought what he was doing was preaching. He was not preaching, which must involve explaining the text. Rather, he would instead quote a chapter here and then a lengthy passage there, and on he would go until time had run out. His practice showed that he did not know how to study God’s Word. How does one study God’s Word? That is the question Dr. Downing wonderfully addresses in his book, is it not? That is the question Milton Terry and Patrick Fairbairn also address, is it not?¹² The answer to that question is outside the scope of my assigned topic this morning, though it is an answer which must be sought and grasped by the faithful expositor.

The study of God’s Word requires a sound hermeneutic. Has it not always been God’s will that His own honor Him by seeking a right understanding of the truth He has entrusted us with? How else are we to know so that we might obey Him? Every child of God must be brought to realize God’s plan for learning to become a more proficient student of God’s Word. And what are those certainties upon which we must agree so as not to diverge from the straight path? God is. God has communicated to us. God’s Word is true. And facts are things. Psalm 119.105 reads, “Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” One might imagine the nighttime never being completely dark in the psalmist’s part of the world. But my experience in that region is that sometimes “the dust before the wind” lingers after the gale has died down, leaving you in utter pitch blackness after sundown, with no moonlight and no starlight piercing the still dust.¹³

How important it is, then, to employ a sound hermeneutic to make your way through such spiritual darkness by the light of God’s Word correctly understood. Therefore, for our spiritual well-being, we *must* work to have a sound hermeneutic. To give one illustration, we live in a world in which a great political clash pits the individualists against the collectivists. Some might think they are apolitical, but there is no escaping something when it is in the air we breathe. And since where two or three are gathered together, you have politics, the child of God finds himself immersed in a political environment whenever he is not isolated. It is one’s sound hermeneutic that enables the believer to know God’s will. What must I do when I am in isolation? When I am in a group setting? When I am with the congregation during worship? And when I am with the congregation engaged in service and ministry? And to what extent have I and others around me been influenced by the prevailing trends of our culture?

Because of such influences, we so often see those professing to know Christ who seems to get everything backward. They envision something akin to group conversion followed by a solitary Christian life because their hermeneutic does not correct their warped notions about such things as individualism and collectivism and the rest. Too many people once obtained their views on how to live from billboards showing the Marlboro Man.

¹¹ The mystic believes he has a direct connection with God by which means he receives information and guidance apart from the revelation of God’s Word. The continuationist views all spiritual gifts as being operative, including the sign gifts.

¹² Works on hermeneutics for your consideration: W. R. Downing, *An Introduction To Biblical Hermeneutics*, Patrick Fairbairn, *Opening Scripture*, Scot McKnight, ed., *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, D. A Carson and John D. Woodbridge, editors, *Hermeneutics, Authority, And Canon*.

¹³ Psalm 18.42

Secular politics exert influence on all to some degree, but poor hermeneutic leaves so many susceptible to such influences that are uncorrected by God's Word. I think we would agree that the views of many these days about their commitment to and involvement in their church congregation is appalling, leaving them deprived of the encouragement that God provides for us in no other circumstance. This applies to pastors as much as it does to any other believer. How we should benefit from a sound hermeneutic so that we prepare for and expect from God's Word, God's people, and God's church, the grace that is ministered to us as needy children by these various means.

Then, HERMENEUTICS IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE PASTOR BECAUSE THE PASTOR IS A TEACHER, A GUIDE, AND AN EXAMPLE

It is not necessary to take you to God's Word to relate to you what you already know as well as I do. Therefore, I would like to present to you three real-life examples of godly pastors of formidable reputation whose surprising (to me at least) deviation from Scriptural truth despite their orthodoxy serves as an example to each of us why a sound, Biblical hermeneutic is so crucial:

The first example is Solomon Stoddard. I read John Gerstner's introductory remarks from Stoddard's *A Guide to Christ*.¹⁴

Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), called the "pope of western Massachusetts" in his own day, is usually known today only as the grandparent of his assistant pastor, Jonathan Edwards. Moreover, it is his unique and original ecclesiastical ideas, that deviated drastically from traditional reformed patterns, that were to cause Edwards' dismissal after twenty-three years of remarkable ministry in Northampton.

Because "Stoddardianism" was so famous historically, let me detail the steps of his theological thinking.

1. In 1679, the Reforming Synod was shocked to hear Stoddard not only defend "Half-Way Covenant" thinking, but advocate what came to be called "Converting Ordinances."

2. This doctrine stated that persons who confessed faith in Christ and were free of scandalous living (without necessarily relating their "experiences") were to be admitted to communion. Those who could not confidently relate their experiences had previously been denied communicant membership, though their children could receive baptism. Stoddard would admit their parents to the Lord's Supper.

3. Though the Synod was shocked, it went reluctantly along, Increase Mather dissenting.

4. In 1700, Stoddard's *Instituted Churches* spelled out the "Converting Ordinances" doctrine. By 1704, Stoddard was avowing it fully to his congregation; and by 1709 he explained things to Increase Mather's satisfaction.

5. Later works solidified Stoddardianism. In 1729, his *The Safety of Appearing in the Righteousness of Christ at the Day of Judgment* was his final statement before his own appearing before his Lord at death.

6. In July, 1750, Jonathan Edwards preached his farewell sermon at Northampton, dismissed because of his break with "Stoddardianism."

7. By the end of the century, "Converting Ordinances" became virtually extinct.

This *Guide to Christ* shows Solomon Stoddard at his very best. He may have been in error on "Converting Ordinances," but this little book is a guide to the finest Reformed theology. He may have been wrong in guiding to the Lord's Table, but not in guiding to the Lord Himself.

The only trouble with this *Guide* is that it is too good! Our century is not worthy of it or its author. Even in its advanced day (nearly 300 years ago), it was written for "young ministers,"

¹⁴ Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide To Christ*, (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications reprint, 1993), pages vii-viii.

and not for those they guided. Today, even our ministers are hardly equal to it. Yet they and we all must become so. It is a classic.

If “young ministers” (and old) are Christ’s appointed guides to Christ, they would do well to take and master this seminary course by Professor Stoddard. If they do so, multitudes of their parishioners are going to find it “SERVICEABLE TO PRIVATE CHRISTIANS WHO ARE ENQUIRING THE WAY TO ZION.”

John H. Gerstner
Ligonier, PA
November 1992

I suggest the cause of Solomon Stoddard’s error by acknowledging that he was a godly man, with a Biblical hermeneutic over most of his ministry, until he faced a prolonged dry spell in which he saw very few conversions. Abandoning the Scriptural assertions that there are “out of season” periods of every ministry, Stoddard contrived an approach to evangelism that he hoped would produce fruit that remained. It did not. I may be wrong about the reason for Stoddard’s departure from the straight and narrow, but I am not mistaken about the fact that he did depart. His grandson, Jonathan Edwards, lost his pastorate at the same church attempting to correct his grandfather’s error, even after the great revival God sent during his tenure. Stoddard’s is an error that each of us must strive to avoid in our own ministries.

The second example is Roger R. Nicole. The late Roger Nicole seems to have been a theologian of a long-standing good reputation as a Reformed theologian and credibility as a godly man. Clearly an inerrantist, he was remembered with fondness after passing by such notables as D. A. Carson and Mark Dever.¹⁵ That said, he was an egalitarian, which is to say that he stood with evangelical feminists against the functional hierarchy in the home and in the church that I am persuaded is so undeniably advocated in Scripture. Of course, the theological implications of such a view of the roles of men and women in marriage and the church are incredible. On what basis did Dr. Nicole adopt his egalitarian stance? I do not know. Was he influenced by feminist ideology in the culture at large? I am not sure. However, I am not persuaded that Biblical manhood and womanhood is well-served by egalitarian notions.¹⁶ By way of honoring our departed brother, I have prepared an eighteen-page handout that he wrote titled “Polemic Theology: How To Deal With Those Who Differ From Us.”¹⁷ I hope you will take a copy, read it, embrace what Dr. Nicole advances in his article, and be warned that the very best among us, but for God’s wonderful grace, cannot only fall into grievous sins, but can also commit tragic hermeneutical errors that result in harm to those we intend to bless.

The third example will remain nameless because he is still my friend and he is still with us. A well-trained man who I am confident Dr. Downing either knows or would recognize from years gone by, he was successful as a church pastor and as a gifted communicator of God’s truth. Interesting, accurate, persuasive, and memorable in his very appropriate delivery style, he was wonderfully blessed of God. He preached for our church many years ago, and the people were informed and spiritually lifted by his preaching and teaching ministry. Living in a different part of the country, to begin with, he then accepted the call to a congregation even farther away, resulting in even less contact with him. However, after three years he did speak once more at our church.

Surprising to me, not only was his approach to preaching markedly different in both content and delivery style, he was so different that I was alone in the congregation who realized he had preached for us before. Our deacons did not recognize him. The man in our church who is the best at listening and following sermons I have ever known did not recognize him. My wife did not recognize him. After the service, as we dined together, I

¹⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/carson-keller-and-dever-remember-roger-nicole/>

¹⁶ See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Editors, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response To Evangelical Feminism*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991) and Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis Of More Than 100 Disputed Quotations*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012)

¹⁷ Available from ClassicalBaptist.Press

remarked that his current preaching bore no resemblance to the preaching he had employed for more than thirty years. He acknowledged that to be true. And when I asked him how that came to be, he said: “My wife didn’t like the way I preached before.” I was stunned into silence. He was not in any way rude before. He was not at all loud and boisterous before. He was not a brutish fellow before. But he did exhibit a spiritual manliness in his demeanor before, without any wanting of humility. Our conversation led me to conclude that over the years his wife’s views had so changed, and she, in turn, had so influenced him, that he had transformed into a perfectly metrosexual man. That belies a deeply flawed hermeneutic. I have no issue with a godly wife having a profoundly influential and beneficial role in a man’s development as a Gospel minister. However, there is a difference between the godly influence a wife ought to rightly have and a flawed hermeneutic that allows for the influences of feminism to seep into one’s ministry through the spouse one is supposed to lead rather than follow.

Third, A CAUTION FOR THE DILIGENT STUDENT OF GOD’S WORD

We must be careful. We must ever strive to stay on the straight and narrow path of God’s will and God’s way. That can only be done with any certainty if we are diligent to attend to the hermeneutic we employ to discover and then to implement God’s will and way. A good hermeneutic should lead to an even better hermeneutic over time.

Solomon Stoddard was a towering figure in his day. Imagine New England Puritans of that day nicknaming him the pope of New England. Such was their regard and admiration for him. Roger Nicole had a significant influence on many of our contemporaries, particularly on the Eastern seaboard. Both of those men left behind what I would characterize as egregious errors, perhaps brought on by a flawed hermeneutic.

Perhaps Stoddard’s notion of “Converting Ordinances” has gone out of fashion, but his practice of admitting to the Lord’s Supper those with no credible testimony of a conversion experience has won the day in evangelical circles. And the tragic consequences of evangelical feminism’s egalitarianism can be seen all around us.

Pastor, your ministry is incredibly important. Not only are you set aside for the diligent study of God’s Word, but you are also the primary individual responsible for setting the doctrinal course for your congregation and providing the most significant preaching and teaching leadership.

The example you are called upon to set. The instruction you are called upon to provide. The role in evangelism in listening to inquirers, evaluating conversion testimonies, and establishing the approach your congregation uses to authorize the baptism of believers, demands your hermeneutic be Biblical and mature.

Can anyone doubt that when Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders for the last time, telling them to “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers,” included in the application of his instruction would be a concern to maintain a good hermeneutic?