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The Biblical Basis of Christian Counseling for People Helpers: Relating the Basic Teachings of
Scripture to People's Problems (Pilgrimage Growth Guide)

7. Interpreting the Bible (Hermeneutics)

This chapter explains how to read the Bible correctly so counselors don't twist it. It introduces hermeneutics—the science and art of biblical interpretation—and gives a working method for getting from what a text says, to what it means, to how it applies.

Key takeaways

- Two scholars can read the same passage and reach opposite conclusions, so we need rules for interpretation, not just opinions.
- Four 'gaps' trip us up: historical, cultural, linguistic, and worldview differences between the biblical writers and us.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance first; He inspired Scripture and helps us understand it.
- Get the meaning before the significance. Exegesis draws out what the writer meant; eisegesis wrongly reads our own ideas in (e.g., using Genesis 15 as a formula for beating infertility).
- Three steps: Observation (what does it say?), Interpretation (what does it mean?), Application (how does it apply?).

- Interpretation principles: note the type of literature, read in context, compare parallel passages, and use Bible helps. Teaching (didactic) passages outrank historical events when building doctrine.
- There is one correct meaning per text but many applications; apply through knowing, relating, meditating, and practicing.
- Opening the Bible at random for guidance treats it as a magic book and dishonors it.
- When the Bible doesn't address a problem directly (e.g., wife-beating): approach humbly, look for direct instructions, then related principles, then decide by a biblical worldview.
- Good counseling teaches both biblical content and practical skills.

Passages worth keeping

"If a blessing is derived from an improper interpretation of Scripture, the blessing has come not because of improper interpretation, but in spite of the misinterpretation."

Ramm's warning against treating the Bible as a magic book to open at random.

"Yes, the Bible is sufficient to answer every question about life, but not because it directly responds to every legitimate question."

Crabb's key point: Scripture guides through principles, not a direct answer to every problem.

How it connects

The chapter models its own method on the final verses: Isaiah 48:17 and Jeremiah 29:11 were written to Israel and the exiles, not to us directly—yet, read in the whole context of Scripture, they still reveal a God who guides His people.

Scripture referenced

- **John 16:13** -- the Spirit guides us into truth as we interpret
- **Genesis 15:2-4** -- the example of correct meaning vs. reading in our own agenda
- **2 Peter 3:16-17** -- even Paul's letters are hard to understand; guard against error
- **2 Timothy 3:16** -- all Scripture is useful for teaching, correcting, training
- **Joshua 1:7-8** -- meditate on God's Word and act on it
- **James 1:22-25** -- do what the word says, don't merely listen