

HERMENEUTICS

THE HISTORY OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION (PART IV)

THE REFORMATION. The Reformation basically brought forth reforms in reference to the Bible. People broke from the authority of the Church of Rome and looked to the Bible as their sole authority. We could say it was a hermeneutical reformation. The Reformation began with Martin Luther in 1517, who moved Bible interpretation away from allegory and back to a literal approach to understanding it. Luther stressed the need to study the Bible in its original languages. He insisted that obscure passages are to be understood in the light of clear passages. He often stated, "Scripture is its own interpreter." Luther believed that any Christian that wanted to could understand the Bible. He believed that Christ is the central theme of the Bible, and he saw Christ in the Old Testament as well as the New. He recognized that allegorizing becomes arbitrary, and it has no objectivity. He could see how allegorizing obscured the true meaning of Scripture.

John Calvin (1509-1564) was the leader of the Reformation in Geneva, Switzerland. He rejected allegorical interpretations. He was considered one of the great Bible interpreters of his time. Calvin revived the historical-grammatical method and stressed Christology in Scripture. He wrote commentaries on all the Old Testament books except three. He, like Luther, believed that Scripture interprets Scripture. Calvin was considered the "first scientific interpreter" in the history of the Christian church.

William Tyndale (1494-1536) is best known for his translation of the New Testament into English in 1525. Tyndale stressed the literal meaning of the Bible. "Scripture has but one sense, which is the literal sense." William Tyndale was martyred for his allegiance to the Scriptures.

THE COUNTER REFORMATION. In response to the Protestant Reformation the Roman Catholic Church convened the Council of Trent. The reforms of the Catholic Church were known as the Counter Reformation. The Council of Trent stated that the Bible is not the supreme authority and affirmed their belief in unwritten traditions as equal authority to the Bible. Those authorities include the church fathers of the past and the church leaders of the present. The Council of Trent also affirmed that accurate interpretation is possible only through the Roman Catholic Church.

Next time we will look at the post reformation and the modern era.