

# Lesson Eight: Axioms of Hermeneutics

Axioms are “certain fundamental principles, which may be very briefly expressed, but which contain only the most primary and essential truths of the science.” (Clinton Lockhart, *Principles of Interpretation*, p. 18)

1. The true object of speech is the impartation of thought.
2. The true object of interpretation is to apprehend the exact thought of the author.
3. Language is a reliable medium of communication.
4. Usage determines the meaning of words.
  - a. Usage: the continued use or treatment of words by the people to whose language the words belong.
  - b. The character of the influence of usage.
    - 1) A word receives its first meaning.
    - 2) A word may have its meaning changed.
    - 3) A word may receive many meanings.
    - 4) A word or a certain meaning of a word may become partially or wholly obsolete.
  - c. The extent of this influence. A certain usage may prevail:
    - 1) Wherever the language is spoken.
    - 2) Only in a certain district.
    - 3) Only in a certain vocation, art, or science.
    - 4) Only in writings of a particular author.
5. Two writers do not independently express thought alike.
6. Every writer is influenced by his environment. “Inspiration is simply one of the influences of the writer’s environment. Inspiration did not remove the writers of the Bible from their natural surroundings, but merely enlightened them to meet the exigencies of their circumstances.” (Lockhart, 126)
7. Any writing is liable to modification in copying, translating, and the gradual change of a living tongue.
8. By one expression, one thought is conveyed and only one.
9. The function of a word depends on its association with other words. The meaning of a word that has more than one meaning depends on the words that accompany it. A lexicographer determines the meanings of words mainly by examining all their occurrences in literature and noting the associations of each word.
10. A correct definition of a word substituted for the word itself will not modify the meaning of the text.
11. One of two contradictory statements must be false, unless corresponding terms have different meanings or applications.

12. Truth must accord with truth; and statements of truth apparently discrepant can be harmonized if the facts are known.
13. An assertion of truth necessarily excludes that to which it is essentially opposed and no more. This is called the “law of opposition.” A proposition purporting to set forth a truth must not be supposed to exclude everything as false that it does not contain.
14. Every communication of thought, human and divine, given in the language of men, is subject to the ordinary rules of interpretation.

## Questions for Review and Discussion

1. What is an axiom?
2. What is the true object of speech? What is the true object of interpretation? Explain each answer.
3. What makes language a reliable medium of communication?
4. What is meant by “usage?” How is it relevant to interpretation?
5. Given that the writers of the Bible were all inspired, how were they still influenced by their environment? Give evidence to support your answer.
6. How does a word’s association with other words determine its meaning if the word has more than one meaning?
7. Why must truth harmonize with truth?
8. What is the “law of opposition?”