

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

Luke 24:25-27 (NKJV) 13Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.

14And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.

16But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

17And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"

18Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"

19And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

20and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.

21But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.

Cleopas had his facts right.

22Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us.

23When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.

24And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

25Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

26Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

27And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Introduction

All these questions have the same answer: "What gives a widow courage as she stands before a fresh grave?" "What is the ultimate hope of the cripple, the amputee, the burn victim? How can the parents of a brain damaged or physically handicapped child keep from living their lives in total despair? Why would anyone who is blind or paralyzed be encouraged when they think about life beyond the grave? Where do the thoughts of a young couple go when they finally recover from the grief of burying their baby; or when a family receives news that their daughter has been found dead or their dad killed or the son murdered? What single truth becomes their

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

whole focus? What is the final answer to pain, mourning, senility, insanity, terminal diseases, sudden calamities, and fatal accidents? By now I hope you have guessed correctly; the hope of a bodily resurrection.

In my youth my days were divided between New Orleans and the Mojave Desert of Southern California. Few contrasts are so stark. Water. Desert. Not far from the High Desert of Apple Valley lies a place called Death Valley. It is about 200 miles northeast of Los Angeles. It is a baked out gorge that drops some 276 feet below sea level.

It is the hottest place in North America reaching temperatures of 134 degrees. Streams flow into Death Valley and disappear. The barren wasteland gets barely 2 and 1/2 inches of rain per year. But something when I was young. For 19 days it rained and rained on the bone dry surfaces of the Desert. Suddenly seeds, which lay dormant for years burst into life! The Valley of Death became a wondrous valley of Life. That is the story of Jesus' resurrection! A desert becomes a garden. Life outwits death. Love outlasts hatred. Hope prevails over despair. A tomb is empty.

For the two men walking the road to Emmaus the hard cruel facts of Jesus' execution were fixed firmly in their memory. Upset? That's an understatement. The suffering and death of Jesus convinced them that he was disqualified from being God's Messiah.

The fact that they did not immediately recognize Jesus appears to be that Jesus does not want to be recognized. **Jesus was going to prove from the Scriptures that He was alive!**

On the day of the Resurrection Jesus could have done anything! What does He do? He walks on a road away from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The road was dusty and a desert, just west of town. He shows up to provide hope for two men whose hopes and dreams were shattered. He shows up and confirms the most amazing promises, the Bible, the Word of God was right all along and that its promises can be completely trusted.

Have you ever received news that was too good to be true? You aren't getting a D in Calculus after all! The test has come back and it is not cancer. This year you don't owe the IRS anything; as a matter of fact the IRS sends you a letter and an apology for taking your money all those years!

In Luke 24:41 we see the disciples reaction to the fact that Jesus was alive; "But while they did not believe for joy, and marveled"; they could not contain their joy when they discover the truth; Jesus is truly, unmistakably alive! Jacob experienced the same feeling when he got the news that his son Joseph was alive in Egypt; the whole nation of Israel experienced the same thing when they marched out of slavery and bondage in Egypt. When the disciples discover that Jesus is alive they explode with joy!

But some are still struggling, discouraged, doubting, asking, whether or not the Bible is really true.

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

Jesus: The Promise In All The Scripture (v.27)

The Bible is the most loved, published, studied, translated, quoted, book in human history. The Bible is also the most hated, burned, abused, misused and misinterpreted book in human history.

Cults and false religions are not the only pranksters and perpetrators of abuse.

In verse 27 the verb translated “expounded” or “explained” is *diermeno or hermeneuo* and simply means to explain meaning. The root word is derived from the Greek god Hermes; who was the messenger and herald of the gods and the interpreter of Jupiter.

Theologians use the word hermeneutics to describe the art and science of Biblical Interpretation.

Robert Stein in his book *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible--Playing By the Rules*, Baker Academic:1994,2011 writes:

Now in all communication there must be present three basic components. There has to be an author, a text and a reader. Various people have argued for each of these three components to determine the meaning. Some argue for the author being the determiner of meaning, others for the text itself, and still others for the reader.”

How do we determine meaning of the Biblical text? The debate broadly incorporates two views:

The Traditional View

The traditional view broadly claims the key to understanding any literature whether Biblical or Secular was to assume that the author determines meaning and the reader’s job is to discover the author’s meaning.

The fundamental principle in hermeneutics is the author’s meaning is to control the reader’s interpretation.

The Bible teaches that God the Holy Spirit inspired human writers of Scripture, who used their own languages in their historical setting to convey meaning.

The job of the interpreter is to come to a clear understanding of the meaning.

In order to do that--we must of necessity love the truth.

But what if the truth is not what we hoped or expected?

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were walking away from Jerusalem; away from the empty tomb; away from the evidence; away from the testimony of the angels and the women.

The disciples were either unwilling or unable to accept that the Messiah must suffer and die (Luke 24:26)

The Contemporary View

Critics now argue that the reader not the author determines meaning.

Literary criticism has in some cases invaded the field of Biblical Interpretation and caused some to revisit the question “What is the meaning?”

The critic argues that meaning only applies as the reader interacts with the text--and that it takes both reader and text to produce meaning--excluding the author’s involvement.

The fact that Jesus cites the Prophets as credible sources for information concerning the identity and mission of the Messiah lends credence to the idea that understanding the meaning of the text is critical (Luke 24:25).

*2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NKJV) 16All **Scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*

17that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

*Romans 15:4 (NKJV) 4For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the **Scriptures** might have hope.*

*2 Peter 1:20 (NKJV) 20knowing this first, that no prophecy of **Scripture** is of any private interpretation,*

The Bible can never mean what it never meant.

The ability to find false meaning in a Bible text is limited only by our perverse imaginations.

A strong case can be made that the Bible is the most loved book on the planet earth.

An equally strong case can be made that the Bible is the most hated book on the planet earth. Errors in Biblical Interpretation have given rise to huge movements.

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

The allegorical method made popular by Origin (who taught many errors) provided the interpretive fuel that gave birth to what would become much of the teachings of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches.

At the other extreme is the hyper-literalism that gives fuel to the Mormon belief that God has a literal body and lives on a literal planet in space.

Other errors include a failure to consider the context, failure to acknowledge that the Old Testament contains Jewish books with Jewish idioms, a failure to incorporate geography, history, customs, political structures. . .etc.

Yet the Bible is unified, it is a singular revelation, written by dozens of authors over centuries under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible has an amazing and clear and consistent message.

That clear and consistent message serves as one of the most compelling evidences for its inspiration.

Allegorizing Scripture has a rather long and destructive history.

Philo

Allegory became the method of choice to integrate the Scriptures with Greek Philosophers (Plato; Aristotle)

How did people come to embrace the allegorical method so easily? They reasoned the Bible is a spiritual book with a spiritual author (the Holy Spirit) and therefore contains hidden or secret highly spiritual meanings!

The conclusion was that a truly spiritual person could discern the spiritual meaning; and of course to appeal to Bible passages that seem at first glance to support the idea (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Please note: “things of the Spirit of God” that the natural man cannot receive or cannot understand are clearly revealed in the context of the passage.

They concern the fact that central to God’s plan of salvation was a crucified Messiah, foolishness to the Gentiles; an offense to the Jews (I Cor.1:18-29).

The problem was not that an ordinary person could not grasp the words that Paul preached; Jesus Christ crucified, died and risen from the dead; the claims of the gospel are rather clear; the problem was that the natural man refused to accept God’s wisdom.

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

The passage does not teach that a secret meaning of Scripture can be extracted by the person wanting to employ clever allegory.

To the person who loves allegory;

Jesus can be seen as teaching the power to think and grow rich.

Jesus can be seen as teaching positive confession.

Jesus can be seen as teaching liberation theology (Marxism)

Jesus can be seen teaching New Age or Billions of years.

If the Bible can mean anything--it winds up meaning nothing.

Remember--the key reason the allegorical method was adopted and embraced was to provide a meaningful way to integrate Greek Philosophical Concepts with Biblical Revelation.

In the early church and today--people who think, people who research, people who want to incorporate the wisdom of men with the revelation of God are sometimes willing to abuse the Bible.

This is not to say that the Bible never uses allegory or metaphor or non-literal figures of speech.

What I am addressing are those passages where the author's intent was neither mystical or allegorical in order to transport the reader's opinion into the text.

There are antidotes to errors in interpretation; humility, love of the truth and the golden rule of interpretation.

The Golden Rule

"If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense."

"God says what He means and means what He says. We are to read the Bible just as we read any other piece of writing, not trying to force some allegorical, mystical, or figurative meaning into its plain statements. That does not mean that spiritual lessons can not be derived from a passage of Scripture, even from a passage largely dealing with narrative. Nor does it mean that a passage has no deeper lessons than those lying on the surface. The Bible is the Word of God and is therefore inexhaustible" (John Phillips; *The Bible Explorer's Guide*; p.15).

The Devotional Rule

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

In his book *The Importance and Value of Proper Bible Study* R.A. Torrey speaks of the need of the Christian to get right with God by the absolute surrender of self and self will to Him.

It would seem odd to begin a discussion of the principles of Biblical Interpretation by a challenge to the reader or listener to get right with God.

Is it possible to understand the meaning of a given passage and even draw helpful application from a text while the reader is far from God?

I think the answer is yes. Yet Paul writes in Corinthians 2:14 ‘But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’

A.W. Tozer in his book *That Incredible Christian* writes;

The teaching of the New Testament is that God and spiritual things can be known finally only by a direct work of God within the soul. However theological knowledge may be aided by figures and analogies, the pure understanding of God must be by personal spiritual awareness. The Holy Spirit is indispensable (see John 14:1-16:33 and I Corinthians 1:18-216).

When we attempt to interpret the Bible and ignore the Bible’s demands; repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the new birth, regeneration and the beginning of sanctification on our journey to glorification; interpretation of Bible passages and their application become the least of our worries.

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul; and what does it profit a man to have an eidetic memory or what some call a photographic memory; the ability to instantly recall every portion of Scripture with complete accuracy and no life changing soul changing guilt changing sin cleansing experience of trust and faith in Christ?

Are you devoted to Christ?

Let me in brief issue a warning to those who read the Bible with a view towards personal devotion. By all means read your Bible. Read the Bible methodically. That is take a book in the Bible and read it. Read it from beginning to end. Or read a portion. Or read it with a view towards meditation. Read it. Digest it. Read the Bible in a year. Or read the Bible in more than a year. But meditation calls you to consider what your reading, digest it with patience and thought. Bible reading is not a marathon run or for the more theological rigorous; or an iron man triathlon where we read (1) everything (2) understand everything (3) apply everything.

But we can and should read with a view towards a method; meditation and meaning.

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

The Bible teacher is first and foremost a Bible student. And the Bible student is first and foremost a current follower of Jesus Christ.

Preparing a Bible Study or even Bible Sermon has become fairly easy and routine. Preparing the teacher's heart has not decreased over time but increased with the ever present conviction of personal sin, and utter personal unworthiness.

Your text will rarely be your problem. The power, authority, inspiration and application of the text will rarely be your problem.

When Paul wrote to Timothy about the inspiration and authority of God's Word it is in the context of a predicted apostasy (vv.1-9); persecution (v.10); imposters (v.13); and an exhortation to "continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (that is from his mother, grandmother, and now the Apostle Paul himself).

The knowledge of the Scriptures was to make him "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (v.15).

The Interpretation Rule

The first rule of interpretation is try and found out just what God intended to teach and not what you wish Him to teach.

When we speak of *literal* interpretation we think of the ordinary, the plain, the common, the acknowledged meaning of a word. We take words at face value unless the value is clearing expressing poetry or parable, or figurative language. When Jesus says; "I am the door" or I am the Bread that came down from Heaven; or "My words are spirit and they are life" does not mean that the words aren't real or that he never speaks words of judgment or rebuke or condemnation.

We can make much better judgments about a text if we know the culture, the geography, the climate and even the historical setting.

The Inspiration Rule (v.16)

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"

Human opinion is not inspired. Human speculation and calculation is limited, and dependent on facts and reality.

When Paul writes that the Holy Scripture is "God-breathed" (theopneustos) it includes the idea "that without impairing the intelligence, individuality, literary style, or personal feelings of the human authors, God supernaturally directed the writing of Scripture so that they recorded in

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

perfect accuracy His comprehensive and infallible revelation to man. If God Himself had done the writing, the written Word would be no more accurate and authoritative than it is” (see notes C.I. Scofield pp.1470-1471. This is an excellent definition of “Inspiration”).

The Instructional Rule

“profitable for doctrine” (v.16)

The Application Rule

“for reproof”

“for correction”

“for instruction in righteousness”

(v.17) “that the man of God may be complete; thoroughly equipped for every good work”

Conclusion

What happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus? Their hearts began to burn when Jesus explained the Scriptures to them. Why did their hearts burn?

Bad falafals? No--they loved the truth. Those who love the truth will be excited to hear the truth.

Sadly we live in a culture that has cultivated an appetite for the wicked, the superficial.

Even some churches show a distaste for learning.

Ignorance is not bliss.

Learn Biblical principles of interpretation.

Understand the historical background of the text.

Always ask-- “What did the original author want the original reader to understand?”

A Crash Course On Biblical Interpretation

We are like fishermen in God's great ocean.

Someone said, "We are like avid fishermen, knowing that there is more in the ocean of truth than can be caught in a life-time, yet everyday we venture out to sea for the joy of the day's catch."