

The Question Of Hermeneutics

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INTRODUCTION

When discussing the topic of hermeneutics, (the Biblical method of interpretation), we should search the Bible for Biblical examples, commands, and proclamations concerning this all important question. As in all spiritual matters we should look to the infallible Word of God for our answer. If we do not look to the Word of God, but instead, employ our own ideas as to how to interpret the Bible, we will likely get the wrong interpretation.

THE BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC: COMPARING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

The basic principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture is found throughout God's Word. A few verses that demonstrate this are as follows:

(1 Cor 2:13 KJV) Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; **comparing spiritual things with spiritual.**

(Romans 7:14) "For **we know that the law is spiritual:** but I am carnal, sold under sin."

(2 Pet 1:20 KJV) Knowing this first, that **no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.**

(John 6:63 KJV) It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: **the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit,** and they are life.

The above verses tell us to use scripture (i.e. the law) to interpret scripture. We cannot and **must not** trust any information outside of the Bible. Only the Bible itself is completely trustworthy. We can be sure that the reason there are so many interpretations of various Bible passages nowadays, is because the above biblical principle is NOT being adhered to OR it is not being used as the sole method of interpretation.

USING ONLY SCRIPTURE TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

The biblical hermeneutic is not just a matter of comparing scripture with scripture, but using ONLY scripture to interpret scripture. This method is

essential because God declares in Isaiah 55:8 & 9 that our thoughts and ways are far from His thoughts and ways. The pertinency of this method is further developed when one realizes that in the flesh of mankind dwelleth no good thing, (Rom 7:18) "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."

We find an interesting note in the book of Acts regarding Bible study:

(Acts 17:11) These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **searched the scriptures** daily, whether those things were so.

Notice that there is no mention in Acts 17:11 of the Bereans searching the secular history books or other literary works. Similarly, the Gospel of Luke has another bit of information on this subject:

(Luke 24:27) And beginning at **Moses and all the prophets**, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Notice that there is no mention in Luke 24:27 of Jesus using any other material than the scriptures (i.e. Moses and all the prophets). We must be VERY careful to avoid using 'helps' outside of the Bible to interpret passages in the Bible. God repeatedly warns us not to trust in the vain ideas, opinions, and writings of man, especially unregenerate mankind:

(Psa 94:11) The LORD knoweth **the thoughts of man**, that they **are vanity**.

(1Cor 3:20) And again, The Lord knoweth **the thoughts of the wise**, that they **are vain**.

(Job 15:31) **Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity**: for vanity shall be his recompense.

Do we wish to use that which God considers to be vain, in our method of Bible interpretation?

THE OVERALL BIBLICAL THEME

A related question concerning the topic of hermeneutics is, "What is the overall theme of the Bible?" Again, we must go to the Bible to answer this question. In John 5:39 we read Jesus' admonition to, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." Here we are told that the Scriptures are about Jesus. In Luke 24:27, 44-45 we find this same truth expounded and an example of the use of

Scripture to understand Scripture, for it is God alone who opens the understanding that one may understand the Scriptures:

(Luke 24:27, 44-45) {27} And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. {44} And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. {45} Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

Hebrews 10:7 also answers the question concerning the overall theme of the Bible, declaring the Bible as an encyclopedia concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God."

IS SECULAR HISTORY TO BE USED IN INTERPRETATION?

To gain a better understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ one would not dare consider looking into any secular historical book, such as the volumes of the historian Josephus, whose writings contain approximately seventy pages concerning Jesus. Yet many readily look to these secular sources to gain greater insight into the Word of God! Keep in mind the Bible defines Jesus as the Word of God made flesh:

(John 1:1, 14) {1} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. {14} And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Therefore, let us heed the admonition of Matthew 22:29, "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." Notice that the Bible nowhere insinuates that one is in error because they are missing some type of secular historical information. Many scholars justify their utilization of secular historical information to understand difficult Bible passages by rationalizing that, "many scholars rely on such resources," however, when such a path is followed in the absence of Biblical validation, one should keep in mind Romans 3:4, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." Let us rather follow the Biblical example of the Bereans of Acts 17:11, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

WHERE DOES THE HISTORICAL METHOD COME FROM?

If the hermeneutical use of secular history to interpret the Word of God is void of biblical validation, then what must be its origin? Again we must search the Scriptures for our answer, looking for examples of those who wanted more than what God has sufficiently provided. Most would agree that the Scriptures clearly teach that God has included in His Word all that should be included and has excluded all that should be excluded. The first example (Gen. 3:1-7) is the coveting of the forbidden fruit of "knowledge" which resulted in spiritual death (Gen. 2:17). Another example (Num. 11:4-6, 13) of the discontent of man with what God has provided is the lustful weeping for something more than Manna "This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat." (Ex. 16:15b) which resulted in physical death (Num. 11:33-34). In both instances, a desire for more than what God has declared as sufficient resulted in judgment because God includes what should be included and excludes what should be excluded (Deut. 2:7; Psa. 34:10; Prov. 30:6)

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE TO INTERPRET ITSELF

The sufficiency and certainty of the Scriptures are declared in 2 Timothy 3:14-17: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; {15} And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. {16} All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: {17} That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Jesus faulted those who erroneously practiced the "tradition of the elders" in Mark 7:1-13. Various forms of this type of error are still present today through the use of additional revelation and the subtle hermeneutical use of secular history to interpret the Word of God. In many instances, the use of secular history to interpret the Scriptures has abrogated and/or neutralized the Scriptural interpretation. The Watchtower's utilization of secular history to support their denial of the tri-unity of God is an example of a grave misinterpretation of Scripture. A less evident misinterpretation is the historically based perspective of Zechariah 9:1-8 which has yielded a disposition concerning Alexander the Great and/or Jonathan the Maccabee, rather than the biblically based interpretation which would yield the implications of Christ's first and second advents (Scriptural commentary of Zechariah 9:1-8). If God desired to speak of Alexander the Great, God would have mentioned him by name as God did with the yet to be born Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

Modern day historical resources and controversies are a clear demonstration

of the deceitfulness of the heart (Jer 9:17). Presently, drastic alterations of historical revisionism has already infiltrated today's educational system, and this "revised" history will undoubtedly be accepted by the future masses. It is erroneous to think that one can utilize the words of any man-made historical document to engender proper interpretation of the pure and holy Word of God (Psa. 12:6-7), so we should shun the interpretive mingling of the adulterated with the pure (2 Cor. 6:14-17; 11:2-3)

THREE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

There are three biblically validated principles which one should always follow when comparing Scripture with Scripture. These three principles can be surmised in an analysis of the method Jesus utilizes when He explained the Parable of the Sower:

1. The interpretation centers on God's redemptive program and the Redeemer.
2. The Bible is its own interpreter.
3. Any conclusion and/or interpretation must agree with the rest of the Bible.

AN EXAMPLE OF COMPARING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE: The Parable Of The Sower

This stated hermeneutic can be implemented to understand Mark 4:3-8 so that the findings may be compared to Jesus' explanation of these verses in Mark 4:14-20. "And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark 4:13), where Psa. 78:1-7; Prov. 1:5-6; Eccl. 12:9; Mt. 13:10-18, 34-35; Mk. 4:30, 34; Luke 8:4, and Heb. 9:9; 11:19 clearly indicate the parabolic implications of both Old and New Testaments.

Verse being interpreted:

(Mark 4:3 KJV) Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

Interpretive scriptures:

(Isa 55:10-11) For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: {11} So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Verse being interpreted:

(Mark 4:4) And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

Interpretive scriptures:

(Psa 79:2) The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth.

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(Gen 15:11) And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

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(Isa 18:6) They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.

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(Psa 140:5) The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah.

Verse being interpreted:

(Mark 4:5) And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

Interpretive scriptures:

(Hosea 10:12) Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

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(Ezek 36:25-26) Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.
{26} A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

Verse being interpreted:

(Mark 4:6) But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

Interpretive scriptures:

(Mal 4:1) For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

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(Isa 11:10) And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

Verse being interpreted:

(Mark 4:7) And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

Interpretive scriptures:

(Gen 3:18) Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

(Isa 10:17) And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day;

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(Ezek 2:6) And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.

Verse being interpreted:

(Mark 4:8) And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

Interpretive scriptures:

(Psa 1:3) Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. {2} But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. {3} And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

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(Isa 44:3) For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the

dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:

In counterpoint, Jesus' explanation from Mark 4:14-20:

(Mark 4:14-20) The sower soweth the word. {15} And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. {16} And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; {17} And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. {18} And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, {19} And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. {20} And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

This exegesis, Scripture defining Scripture, is accomplished without the use of external sources. No allusions were made by Christ to extra-biblical sources to unravel His words. A major difficulty in the use of extra-biblical sources is the realization that many Christians are without such sources. An excellent example, is the tribe to which Wycliffe translators come and create a written language, then translate the Scriptures for them. No other information of any sort is available.

If historical or other sources are needed, it would leave them with no ability to understand the Holy Word. Jesus said this was not possible because, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31b-32) The truth is not taught with "... enticing words of man's wisdom..." (1 Cor. 2:4) but is taught to us directly from God. " It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. (John 6:45)

SUMMARY

What or rather Who, does God use to teach us? "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26) Likewise, "For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say." (Luke 12:12)

Just the references in Psalm 119, as to the instruction available, are quite demonstrative of God's intentions to teach us through His Word. It would be evident, then, that God has made adequate provisions for our instruction without going outside His Word.

**“Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found
a liar.”**

(Proverbs 30:6 KJV)
