

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Allowing the Bible to Interpret the Bible (Part 2)

By Brian R. Kenyon

“Can we all understand the Bible alike?” is a very important question. If we answer “No,” then does that not impugn God? That is, how can God be so great if He can’t even write a document that accountable human beings can understand? If we answer “Yes,” then there is no escaping the accountability all humanity has to the one true standard, the Bible! Obviously, we can understand the Bible alike ... if we allow the Bible to interpret itself! In last month’s Harvester, Part I of this study examined the importance of allowing the immediate and remote context of a passage to interpret the passage. Consideration was also given to the consequences of failing to respect the context of any given passage. This article continues showing how to let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Explicit Statements

The most obvious way that the Bible interprets the Bible is by explicit (word for word) statements indicating an interpretation. First, all explicitly stated fulfilled prophecies are instances of the Bible interpreting the Bible. Whenever the Bible explicitly describes a fulfilled prophecy, whether an Old Testament fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (Dan. 9:11-13), a New Testament fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (Matt. 3:3; Acts 2:16; et al.), or a New Testament fulfillment of a New Testament prophecy (Acts 11:28), we must accept the Bible’s interpretation of itself. Some New Testament declarations of fulfilled Old Testament prophecy are unexpected, especially in the way the New Testament uses it. For example, the context of Hosea 11:1 refers to the eventual return of God’s people from captivity, yet Matthew 2:15 applies it

to the child Jesus coming out of Egypt with his parents after the death of Herod. Whether we expect it or not, however, we must allow the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Second, an explicit Bible statement may explain another Bible statement. An Old Testament passage may explicitly interpret another Old Testament passage, such as when Ezekiel said the vision he saw was “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (Ezk. 1:28), not some UFO as some think. A New Testament passage may explicitly interpret an Old Testament passage, such as when Matthew interpreted the meaning of Isaiah’s “Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14; 8:8), as being “God with us” (Mt. 1:23). A New Testament passage may explicitly interpret another New Testament passage, such as when John explicitly interpreted Jesus’ statement, “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (Jn. 7:38). John interpreted it by saying, “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn. 7:39).

The Importance of Exegesis

Explicit statements are not the only way the Bible interprets the Bible. There is a sense in which every verse in the Bible interprets itself by its vocabulary, structure, syntax, and context. The way we allow the Bible to interpret the Bible in this sense is through exegesis. The word “exegesis” is from a Greek word (*exegomai*) that means “to lead out of.” When applied to the study of the Biblical text, it simply refers to the “reading out” of the meaning. Exegesis is the key to allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible!

There are basically two ways to study the Bible: topically or exegetically. For example, when applied to baptism, a topical study would look from Genesis to Revelation at the occurrences of the word baptism, arrange them in a logical fashion, and then draw points from that arrangement. An exegetical study would take a baptism passage such as Romans 6:1-7, draw out the meaning put in the text by the Holy Spirit, and let the text itself formulate the points. Although there is value in both approaches, the exegetical method gets one closer to the mind of God because it draws out the meaning that God intended for us to learn from a given passage when it was first written.

This is not to say that exegesis will answer all the questions we may have, nor does it settle all matters of judgment. Some things just simply are not revealed (Deut. 29:29). Proper exegesis, however, does address matters of judgment in that it will distinguish what matters are matters of judgment and what matters are matters of doctrine. Think of all the unnecessary division that would not exist if brethren allowed the Bible to interpret the Bible as to what are matters of judgment and what are matters of doctrine!

Exegesis also allows for fewer misapplications from Scripture because it draws out the meaning from the text itself and examines it contextually. An example of a topical lesson misapplied is when a Bible class teacher read, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34), and then taught a lesson on how we should have respect for one another as God does. Everything he said was true, but it was not what Acts 10:34 was teaching. A serious credibility issue is at

stake. If that same Bible class teacher would have done an exegesis on Acts 10:34, he would have discovered that it teaches that God shows no partiality.

Exegesis comes to mind upon reading what the wise man said of wisdom, "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Pr. 2:4-5). Exegesis digs into the text to discover the treasures therein. It is not enough just to quote the Bible as if that alone proved a point. The devil could quote Scripture (Mt. 4:6), but he misapplied it because he did not honor the immediate and remote context of Psalm 91:11-12. Too many people, preachers included, approach the Bible with preconceived ideas and force those ideas on the text rather than allowing the text to teach what the Spirit intended. Would it not be better to allow the text to speak for itself? Is not that what is involved in "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15)?

Hindrances to Proper Exegesis

There are two main hindrances to proper exegesis. First, some are just too lazy to properly examine a text. Studying the Bible is hard work. It takes time and discipline to go through a passage verse by verse, word by word, studying as much background information related to that passage as possible. It also takes time to study a passage exegetically (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13). There will be weeks that preachers will not be able to study as much as they would like. Funerals, illnesses, and tragedies in families will happen, and sometimes all at once. These situations are legitimate reasons for not having time to study the

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*Our final deposit for the month is usually made on the last Wednesday of the month. All contributions received after that time are reported on the next month's financial statement.

Bible as intensely as one might like. However, some are just not interested in studying, no matter what may happen during the week. They are not willing to put forth the effort it takes to truly learn the mind of God revealed in Scripture. As a result they are spiritually malnourished and pitifully weak (cf. Pr. 6:9-11).

Second, human tradition hinders proper exegesis. In one section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly said, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time ... But I say unto you” (Mt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). In this section, Jesus was not correcting Moses, nor was He adding to what Moses had said. Rather, the Lord was revealing the truth that God through Moses taught all along. The problem was that centuries of Jewish tradition had blinded the masses to these truths. Yes, each section in Matthew 5:21-48 begins with a quotation from the Old Testament, or at least a statement derived from it. Of course, “hate thine enemy” (Mt. 5:43) was nowhere found in Scripture. However, what the scribes

and Pharisees taught from those statements was human tradition, not what God through Moses taught. Likewise today, many approach Scripture through the glasses of human tradition. They will not let the Bible interpret the Bible. Rather, they “allow” human tradition to determine the meaning of Scripture.

Conclusion

The question, “How can we understand the Bible alike?” is easy to answer: when we allow the Bible to interpret the Bible! Our very salvation, the salvation of others, and the unity of the Lord’s church depends upon allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible. The Bible was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21); it is all sufficient and inerrant (2 Tim. 3:16-17); and it is perfectly capable of interpreting itself. Are we really interested in salvation, unity in the brotherhood, and learning the mind of God? If so, then let everyone of us allow the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Introducing Our 2014-2015 Faculty

With the retirement of Jackie Stearsman and the passing away of Maurice Davis, our faculty has taken on a slightly new look. We are still as solid as ever in the faith and proclamation of the Gospel. I thought it appropriate at this time to let our readers know who we are. —*Brian*



Nathan Franson has been preaching for the Kissimmee church of Christ in Kissimmee, Florida, since 2009. He is a 2009 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, where he spent his first nineteen years in the Mormon Church. He now actively exposes it.



Brian Kenyon has worked with FSOP since 1996 and has been serving as Director since 2009. He is a 1991 graduate of the Florida School of Preaching. He earned an AS in 1984 from Florida Institute of Technology and two degrees from Freed-Hardeman University (BA, 1993; MA, 1995).



Uleysses Richardson has been preaching for the Southside church of Christ, Tampa, since 2005. He is a 1994 graduate of FSOP. He earned a certificate in 1977 from Okaloosa Junior College (Fort Walton Beach), and an AA in 1982 from Maryland University (in Tacoma, WA). He was in the USAF for 23 years.



Daniel Stearsman is a full-time pharmacist, and preaches regularly in Zephyrhills. He has earned degrees from Hillsborough Community College (AA, 1996), University of Florida (Doctor of Pharmacy, 2000), Southern Christian University (BA, 2005), USF College of Medicine (MABMH, 2009).



Ted Wheeler has been preaching for the Venice church of Christ in Venice, Florida, since 1989. He is a 1984 graduate (along with his wife, Renee) of FSOP. He served as a missionary living in Ghana, West Africa, from 1984-1989. He also serves as chairman of FSOP’s board of directors.



Stephen C. Atnip has been preaching for the Black Creek church of Christ, Middleburg, Florida, since 1985. He is a 1975 graduate of Bear Valley. He has degrees from Southern Christian (known now as Amridge) University (BA, 1992; MA, 2001), and is currently working toward a PhD.



Bob Bauer has been preaching for the Orange Street church of Christ, Auburndale, since 2000. He attended University of Cincinnati and FSOP. He earned a BA in 2006 from Southern Christian (known now as Amridge) University. He lacks a few hours from completing a masters degree.



Eric Dawkins has been preaching for the Sixth Street church of Christ, Lakeland, since 2014. He is a 1995 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He earned a BA in 1996 from Magnolia Bible College (for whom he was an adjunct faculty) and a M.Min. in 2000 from Freed-Hardeman University.



Mike Elledge has been preaching for the Palm Harbor church of Christ in Palm Harbor, Florida, since 2009. He is a 1995 graduate of the Florida School of Preaching. He also attended Central Michigan University and Santa Fe Community College. He is also actively involved in substance abuse recovery.

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Day	Time	Lakeland Classes	Instructor	Credit
Monday	__ 8:30-12:00	Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (203)	Bauer	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Ezekiel and Daniel (214)	Richardson	3
Tuesday	__ 8:30-12:00	World Religions (275)	Wheeler	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Sermon on the Mount (280)	Wheeler	3
Wednesday	__ 8:30-12:00	Greek I (222)	Kenyon	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Topical Studies (134)	D. Stearsman	3
Thursday	__ 8:30-12:00	1 & 2 Thessalonians and Galatians (137)	Kenyon	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Life of Paul (262)	Dawkins	3
Friday	__ 8:30-12:00	Old Testament History (239)	Franson	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Hebrews (210)	Elledge	3
Extension Classes				
Thursday	__ 6:00-8:30	Romans (261) (Orange Street church of Christ, Auburndale)	Bauer	2.5
	__ 7:00-9:30	Ezekiel (112) (Wesconnett church of Christ, Jacksonville)	Atnip	2.5