

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Guidelines to Proper Exegesis

By Brian R. Kenyon

Over the last three issues of the *Harvester*, we have examined how to properly interpret the Bible with articles titled “The Bible: Divine Testimony and Divine Interpretation” (April 2014); “Allowing the Bible to Interpret the Bible” (May 2014); and “Allowing the Bible to Interpret the Bible (Part 2)” (June 2014). This article fittingly concludes this study by showing how the Bible student can mine the “unsearchable riches” that the Holy Spirit has placed within the text of the Bible—the very mind of God revealed!

Five Steps

Remembering that exegesis is bringing out of the text the meaning and application that is already in the text, the following guidelines are given. These are not meant to be an exhaustive list coming from an expert scholar, but are simply practical suggestions that have helped this writer to better allow the Bible to interpret the Bible and thus learn better the mind of God revealed in Scripture.

First, choose a block of Scripture. Many factors may be involved in choosing the text. We may have been given an assignment for a summer series, Gospel meeting, or VBS. Of course, the best text to choose is one about

which we are very interested and want to know more.

Second, become as familiar as possible with this text on our own. Those who have had training in the original languages would do well to translate the passage, which is in itself a tremendous learning experience. Those not trained in the original languages can also become familiar with the text by reading it over and over again, perhaps even memorizing it. Look for patterns in the text such as recurring phrases, series of infinitives, or key words. Define key words in the text by using a Bible dictionary, word study, or lexicon. Always remember, though, that context is the overriding factor in determining the meaning of a word. Bible dictionaries and lexicons can be wrong (McCord 460-469).

Third, make an outline of the text according to the understanding gained from familiarizing ourselves with the text. Many times we will discover that the text has naturally outlined itself.

Fourth, consult commentaries, lectureship books, and journal articles. Good sources will give valuable information on people, places, and things. Learning the historical background of a passage will also add insight into the meaning of the text. When we study a text with an

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opened mind and determination to let it speak for itself, we might be surprised to find that some of the scholarly commentators reached the same conclusions we did!

Concerning commentaries, there are two common misconceptions that can potentially keep us from the best understanding of a passage. Some think that the older a source is, the better it is. This is not always so. Adam Clarke, for example, may have been the premiere commentator in the early 1800s, but much has come to light over the last couple hundred years that helps us to better allow the Bible to interpret the Bible. The meaning of the Biblical text has not changed, but our understanding of it has. Case in point: Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon*, originally published in the late 1800s, says that *agape* love was "a purely bibl[ical] and eccl[esiastical] word." However, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, originally published in English in the mid 1900s, says that for *agape* "an unquestioned example fr[om] a pagan source was lacking for a long time," and then goes on to show that the word was used, though rarely, by non-Christian sources.

Another common misconception is that only brotherhood sources should be used in studying a passage. If we limit our sources to only brotherhood material, we will be deficient in some areas. This is not to say that brotherhood materials are not valuable. They are! However, there are not enough good brotherhood sources to fill the need, though we are doing what we can to improve that. Some writing brethren do not do their own, "primary" studying, but simply repeat what others have written. While it is true that de-

nominal writings often contain false doctrine, it is equally true that we cannot assume that because a source is from a member of the church of Christ, it is free from error. We must learn the word of God and be able to separate truth from error!

Fifth, after consulting commentaries, lectureship books, and journal articles, we may need to revise our outline and/or reword some of our points. If the exegesis will be used for a sermon, this would be the time write the introduction and conclusion. This would also be the time to formulate the main points, as some preachers like, so that they all begin with the same letter or perhaps even rhyme.

Conclusion

One does not have to be a preacher or Bible class teacher to exegete a passage. All will benefit tremendously from doing exegetical studies. In the judgment of this writer, there is nothing more—dare he say—fun and exciting in Bible study than to dive into a passage of Scripture, study each verse word for word, examining the immediate and remote contexts, to later ascend with newly learned treasures of truth from the mind of God! Yes, it takes time and hard work, but the rewards are much more valuable than all of this world's treasures!

Works Cited

McCord, Hugo. "Lexicons Can Be Wrong, Parts I-III." *Do You Understand Worship?* Brian R. Kenyon, ed. (Lakeland, FL: Florida School of Preaching, 2002) 460-469.

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THE BEST MOTIVATION FOR SERVING GOD

By Brian R. Kenyon

John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3, NKJ). This statement may seem paradoxical. Over the years, God's people have suffered, even died, because they kept the commandments of God, yet John says His commandments are not "burdensome [grievous, KJV]." How can this be?

SOURCES OF MOTIVATION

There are three sources of motivation for following God. First, there is the fear of eternal damnation (cf. Mk. 9:43-48; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Hell is real, and though it was prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41), it will be the place of eternal torment for all who have departed and will depart this life in a state of disobedience to God (cf. 2 Thes. 1:7-9). The fear of hell, however, can subside when ignored, and thus will not keep us faithful by itself.

Second, the reward of heaven when time shall be no more is a source of motivation to serve God. Heaven, the eternal presence of God, also is real (Rev. 21:1-6), and is the promised reward God will give to the faithful of every age (cf. Rom. 2:6-7). However, the anticipation of heaven, like the fear of hell, can subside if we take our mind off of it, and may not thus keep us faithful by itself.

While these two motivations for keeping God's commandments are good, the greatest motivation is love. This is what motivated God to act on our behalf (Jn. 3:16). God's love for us is our motivation to love one another (1 Jn. 4:7-11), and to love God Himself (1 Jn. 4:16). Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (Jn. 14:15, 23).

OFFERS OF GOD'S LOVE

Consider these four things that God offers to prove His love for us. First, God offers us a **FATHER**. Like the father in the parable of the lost boy, God the Father is lovingly awaiting the return of those who have departed for a life of sin (cf. Lk. 15:11-32). This Father relationship is very intimate, signified by "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-6). "Abba" is of Aramaic origins and carries a very intimate mean-

ing. Every time the word occurs in the New Testament, it is accompanied with "Father," undoubtedly so others would not take "Abba" as disrespectful to God, if left by itself. "Abba, Father" is how Jesus addressed His Father in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:36). The same intimate relationship Jesus had with His Father is the same intimate relationship we can have with the Father if we keep His commandments! As heavenly Father, God "will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

Second, God offers us a **FAMILY**. The church is the "house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). Those who obey the will of God "are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). As members of God's family, Christ is our brother (Heb. 2:11). This brotherly relationship with Christ becomes a reality only when we do God's will. Jesus said, "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Mt. 12:50). Because Christians are brothers and sisters with Christ, we will receive "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away" (1 Pet. 1:4).

Third, God offers us **FORGIVENESS**. Even those who have lived in deliberate rebellion against God can have forgiveness if they repent. Concerning God's forgiveness of His obstinate people, Micah wrote, "He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Mic. 7:18). The Hebrews writer confirmed, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Heb. 8:12).

Fourth, God offers a **FUTURE**. The life in Christ, no matter how much suffering it contains, is worth living (Rom. 8:18). Because Jesus finished His work on earth almost two thousand years ago (Jn. 19:30), and has made every preparation He can, we have a "mansion [room, ESV]" in His and our Father's eternal home (Jn. 14:1-3).

CONCLUSION

Yes, if anyone truly keeps God's commandments, he or she will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). However, even suffering persecution is not burdensome when we love God. How much do we love God? Do we think His expectations of us are a burden to keep? Let us be motivated by love!

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Friday	8:30-12:00	Old Testament History (239) Hebrews (210)	Franson	3
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Thursday	6:00-8:30	Romans (261) (Orange Street church of Christ, Auburndale)	Bauer	2.5
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