

HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?

Week 4/JROC – SO, How ARE We Understanding the Bible?

January 21, 2024

A Pastor who wanted to take more liberties with the Bible passage confessed that sometimes we, himself included, want to go beyond the plain reading of the Bible to get it to say what we want it to say – to make it sound good – to make it sound more compelling to people – to support our agenda!

Taking liberties with the word of God seems to occur more often when teaching/preaching from the OT. Instead of taking the Bible as it is, GOD’S WORD...we spiritualize the content and reshape it into what we think it should be. Are we making ourselves God? Are we then denying the truth that God has said in His word that is actually recorded in Scripture?

Heb. 4:12 - For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Eph. 6:13-17 - Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having belted your waist with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having strapped on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

If we solely read and teach from the NT because it’s easier to understand, upon whom are we relying? US! What then are we saying about the Holy Spirit’s ministry in our lives? Isa. 11:2 – the Holy Spirit is *the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD*. Are we asking the Holy Spirit to give us understanding when we read Scripture?

In praying for the believers in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. Paul prayed that...*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe (Eph. 1:17-19).*

So – what does spiritualizing the text look like? Spiritualizing is allegorizing in an attempt to find a deeper “spiritual” meaning!!

Why do people spiritualize the Bible? It appears that some wish to make it apply to US/to them in a more contemporary way. What does that do to the text/the content/the context? It's not highlighted because we are highlighted. And, that results in our NOT knowing the Bible!

Spiritualizing is allegorizing. Many times we allegorize to find a deeper spiritual, hidden meaning!? Deut. 29:29 - *The secret things (the hidden things) belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed (uncovered – that GOD uncovers to us in His word – through a literal understanding and through the Spirit of understanding – the Holy Spirit) belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

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And, in the seeking for what we might truly consider as a deeper spiritual meaning – what if your deeper spiritual meaning is different than your friend's deeper spiritual meaning. How do we then decipher what is truth? John 17:17 – Jesus, in prayer to God the Father before His arrest and crucifixion, said *Your word is truth.*

Allegorizing is storytelling. It's taking the characters, setting, actions in Scripture and telling a story whereby the historical characters, setting, and actions represent something else. The most famous allegory in Christian literature is *Pilgrim's Progress*. How then do we know the Bible if we make it into a story about something else? The Bible then becomes like Aesop's fables! Are we then diminishing TRUTH – ABSOLUTES? How are we then understanding God and His absolute sovereignty (rulership)? How are we to discern between righteousness and evil/wickedness?

When we spiritualize the text are we assuming there's a deeper spiritual meaning beyond what is OBVIOUS in Scripture? Are we thinking that if we can unlock the hidden meaning of the text then we can grasp what the Holy Spirit wants us to learn? ASK the Holy Spirit for understanding of HIS word!

David and Goliath – how many times do we reshape the account of David coming against the enemy, Goliath – and apply it to us and our desire to slay the “giants” in our lives? Do we make the five smooth stones that David picked up to represent faith, prayer, etc.? When we talk about the stones representing other things – and teaching it to others – we are denying teaching one of the GREATEST themes in the Bible – a theme that unifies many accounts in Scripture.

If we read on in the text, we would understand that David is not relying on skill or strength but on the name of the Lord! I Sam. 17:45 - *David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a saber, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of armies, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied....'* AND, the text goes on to declare another Biblical principle in I Sam. 17:46 - *This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I will strike you and remove your head from you. Then I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.*

Cross reference “so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” – there are many verses that relay this truth. God desires to make Himself known to all the earth!!!!

Hab. 2:14 – *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God.*

In Eze. 38:23, following the War of Gog and Magog, God proclaims, *Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.*

In Ex. 9:16 – God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, *Thus says the LORD, ... indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*

Cross referencing to grasp the entire Bible – the big picture - and understanding it literally via the plain sense of the words and in the context of the passage – understanding what comes before the text you’re studying and following the text – and understanding the big picture of Scripture – the context of the entire Bible – is more work. BUT, what does God desire for us to do?

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When we teach from words that we insert to drive home our own agenda, we are NOT standing on the Bible’s authority! Spiritualizing the text removes God’s authority! When we convey that we’ve found some hidden meaning, we are drawing attention to ourselves.

As believers we know the truths from God’s word because they are spiritually discerned – through the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:14)