

Approaching Scripture

What constitutes religious authority within Christendom? How is does one ascertain the “will of God”? Throughout the centuries these, and related questions, have been posed. There are three dominant views (not always held exclusive of one another). These views are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

A related, though different, question is how is one to approach the reading of scripture to determine its meaning.

You may have heard people say, “The Bible says what it means and it means what it says.” But what, exactly, does the Bible say and how can we learn what it means? How can we feel confident that the translation we have received is accurate? How confident can we be of the various interpretations offered? Can the Bible simply be read at “face value” without any helps? How do can one guard, if there is any need, against going to the Bible to receive answers that seem applicable but are taken from passages that were not intended to address the questions posed to them.

How would one seek to discover principles and values revealed in scripture that could be applied to situations not specifically addressed by their author? It may not be as easy as some would like but neither should it be assumed to be impossible.

1. Consider:

Do you know the meaning of the phrase, Good-bye? (Change in spelling to good-by)
What does that tell you about what it meant in the beginning?
What does it present use mean?
What does this change reveal?
What would it mean if we spoke of the “original” meaning and then applied it to a contemporary situation? What mistakes could we make in such a situation.

2. Exegesis:

Biblical interpretation (understanding the Bible)

1st Task of exegesis, understanding the limits of the study:

- a. To discover the _____, intended meaning of the author.
- b. Examples of how this is heard (What Jesus meant by this was...; Back in those days they...)

Without exegesis we “read” assuming that with which we are familiar...

Example #1: Worship, Assembly, Lord’s Supper, Communion, Eucharist, etc.

- a. What image(s) are associated with these words/events? Why?
 - b. What, historically, has been their context throughout the ages?
 - c. Acts 2:42 (Order of worship?)
1. Establish the text. (Read the text within its larger context)
 - a. Specific context (use, but do not depend on, “headings” in your Bible)
 - b. Larger context (use, but do not depend on, chapter and verse divisions)
 - c. Context of biblical book (read the entire book- look for themes, etc.)
 2. Immediate context.
 - a. Who is the author? Who is speaking? (can be different answers)
 - b. To whom is the author writing? Speaker speaking? (different answers possible)
 - c. What has occasioned the text? (Specific event? Questions? Reports?)
 3. Historical context.
 - a. At what time did this take place? (Pre- or post- exile, resurrection, Pentecost, etc.)
 - b. What are the customs of the day? (Washing feet; holy kiss; day’s wages)
 - c. Geographical considerations? (Mountains around Jerusalem; desert place, etc.)
 4. Literary context.
 - a. Related to “establishing the text.”
 - b. Includes recognizing genre (parable, narrative, wisdom literature, etc.)

Determine Genre: Read carefully, Ask the right questions

Literary context (What’s the point? What does it say about the state of the dead?)

Ecclesiastes 9:2-6 (Wisdom literature)

Luke 16:19-31 (Parable)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (Epistle)

If you asked a text the wrong question would you receive the wrong answer?

Tools which may prove helpful in understanding a text

1. A good translation of the Bible (consider a Study Bible)
 - a. There are several translations available.
 - b. My favorites: NIV, NAS,

2. At least two other translations.
 - a. Three basic schools of translations: Literal, dynamic equivalent, free
 - b. NIV- dynamic equivalent
 - c. Literal- KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, (NRSV-→)
 - d. Dynamic equivalent- NIV, NEB, GNB
 - e. Free- Phillips, Living
 - f. Difference? (Money, Euphemisms, Grammar & Syntax)

3. A concordance
4. Bible dictionary
5. Topical Bible
6. A Bible handbook
7. A library card to OVC's library

The History of Early Christianity

1. List at least four sects of the Jews. Include one belief or action that makes them unique.
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
 - (4)
2. What factors are suggested in the article as explanations for the early success of Christianity?
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
 - (4)
3. Who wrote the book of Acts (Acts 1)? How could Acts 1:8 serve as an outline for the book of Acts? Please explain your answer.
4. Who is introduced in Acts 8 - 9? (What is his position: Romans 11:13) What could be considered significant about Peter, rather than Saul/Paul, being the one who speaks and acts in Acts 10 -11?
5. Who is set apart by the Holy Spirit in Acts 13:1-3? Who goes to Jerusalem to argue that Gentiles may become Christians (without becoming Jews) in Acts 15? Who is recorded as speaking at the meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15)? What may be significant about their being the ones who spoke?