

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

AIM OF THIS SEMINAR

Give Participants the tools to understand, read and interpret the Scriptures accurately.

1. CONTINUOUS STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES--A MUST FOR FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

1.1 JOSHUA

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Exod 17:14).

So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God (Exod 24:13).

So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle (Exod 33:11).

And the LORD said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; (Num 27:18)

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying (Josh 1:1).

"Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success (Josh 1:7-8).

Joshua had been Moses' assistant for nearly 40 years? He had been by his side, even waiting for 40 days at the base of the mountain, while Moses climbed to the mountain top to receive the 10 commandments.

So why did God command Joshua to study the Scriptures day and night?

Answer: God knew that Satan, humanity's archenemy, is always on the loose seeking whom to deceive. (Recall the Parable of the Sower--Satan making every effort to either see that the word is not planted or does not have root or is made unfruitful through worldly concerns).

1.2 HOW PAUL BECAME THE GREATEST DEFENDER OF THE GOSPEL

Saul (Paul) was not a disciple while Christ Jesus was on earth; in fact, he was an enforcer for the Jewish religious establishment bent on eradicating the early Church (Acts 8:1; 9:1-2).

Then he met Jesus while on his way to Damascus to arrest followers of Christ (Acts 9:3-18).

The one that was the greatest persecutor of the faith at the time became the greatest defender of that faith.

Christ Jesus, while on earth, taught the apostles and disciples. Paul could have followed them after his conversion. He did not. Rather, he chose to sit under the resurrected Christ's teachings. And what a blessing that has been, and continues to be, for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How come he became the greatest defender of the faith despite not being one of Christ's disciples?

I submit that it was not because of the following reasons:

- Paul was well versed in the Torah (teachings--the central reference of Judaism) before his conversion.
- Paul had heard Stephen's testimony before he was killed.
- He had had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus.
- Ananias had baptised him and shared the things God had revealed to him to Paul.
- Paul had made a brief visit to Jerusalem to see some of the apostles.

I aver that he became the greatest defender of the faith because he took time to study the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15) just as Joshua did.

Let us trace his journey of faith through his writings:

a) His letter to the Galatians:

Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12, NLT).

For us to understand Paul's claim that the Lord Jesus Christ taught him, we have to assume the following:

Paul subjected his experiences (rabbinic teachings and way of life, his encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, baptism in the Spirit and the revelations he was receiving from the Lord Jesus Christ) to the revealed word of God then (the scrolls of the Law and the Prophets).

As he studied (comparing Scripture with Scripture), the Lord opened his eyes to glean an unparalleled understanding of God's mission because He saw that his heart was open and that his desire to know the truth was not for personal gain,.

b) Paul was not in hurry (he did not run ahead of God).

He sat under the Lord's teaching initially for about 3 years before going to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and some of the other apostles (Gal1:15b-18) and then for a further 14 years (Gal 2:1).

Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus. Then three years later I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days (Gal1:15b-18 NLT).

No doubt, he studied hard (2 Tim 2:15; Josh 1:8) in those 17 years.

Hence he was able to have a fuller understanding of Christ's mission--God's redemptive plan was for all humanity (Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, slave, free, black, brown, yellow, etc).

c) Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ and the Head of the Church, sent Him When He saw He was ready.

When the Lord Jesus Christ saw that Paul was fully equipped for his ministry to the Gentiles, He sent him to Jerusalem to meet with the whole leadership of the early Church (Gal 2:2).

After that Jerusalem meeting, Paul, now recognized as the apostle to the Gentiles, worked tirelessly until the early church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, accepted that gentile Christians would not have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:13-29).

2. CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US IN THIS SEMINAR

Just like Paul, you and I did not follow our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ, while He was on earth.

But just as God chose him and called him by his marvelous grace, so has He also called you and I.

NOTE: Paul did not rush to consult any human being after God had revealed Jesus to him (Acts 9:16).

BUT you and I have been consulting human beings and swallowing their teachings hook, line and sinker without subjecting those teachings to the Scriptures.

OUR hope is that at the end of this seminar, each one of us will have the tools to understand and interpret the Scriptures faithfully.

3. WHY THE NEED FOR FAITHFUL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION?

3.1 UNPRECEDENTED WORLDWIDE APOSTASY

The need for faithful biblical interpretation is even more now than ever before.

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear (2Tim 4:3 NLT).

That time prophesied by Paul, the apostle, is now. Truth is regarded as lies and lies have become truth. The discerning cannot be surprised that many Christians have been snared by counterfeit gospels.

Many Christians are being deceived by their leaders. Some of these leaders are under hypnotic spells while others have actually sold their souls to the devil. Those leaders and elders have in turn hypnotised their congregations through displays of demonic powers. Otherwise, how does one explain why so many Christians place the teachings of their Christian leaders whose messages reveal that they are "enemies of the cross of Christ" above those of the Scriptures.

Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth (Phil 3:17-19 NLT).

3.2 WRONG INTERPRETATION OF COVENANTS' MESSAGES

All of us here can say what a verse or a story in the Bible says. But can we actually agree on what that verse or story means and how it should be applied to our lives?

There are many Covenants in the Bible (i.e., Rules that govern God's relationship with His creation at every moment in history). For each Covenant, there are blessings and curses (rewards and punishment).

What has happened is that 21st century Christians have been taught to appropriate the blessings of one Covenant while rejecting the curses (corresponding punishment for failing to meet God's standard in that Covenant) in that Covenant.

The Bible is not a buffet where human beings can choose what they like and leave out what they don't like. 'Splicing and dicing' of Scriptures is wrong. Whoever insists on appropriating the blessings of a Covenant should understand that the curses associated with that covenant apply.

One of the reasons we have many denominations and churches today can be traced to wrong biblical exegesis. Oftentimes, many people (some self-seeking) have used one or two verses of Scripture to start their own churches. Had they subjected those verses of Scripture to objective exegetical analysis, many of them would not have taught and promoted those false doctrines.

I believe that Matthew 28:20 is as important as Matthew 28:19. Witnessing that does not include teaching is unacceptable. Had it been otherwise, the Lord would have said so. He tied both verses together. And you and I should not separate them.

Faithful biblical interpretation leads to correct teachings (doctrines) and wrong interpretation leads to false doctrines.

4.0 DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics derives from the Greek verb *hermēneuō*, which means to explain or to expound or to unfold the meaning of what is said or written.

It describes the task of explaining the meaning of the Scriptures and provides a strategy that enables believers to understand the meaning and significance of what an author intended to communicate to the hearers or readers.

Hermeneutics is both a science and an art. It is a science in that it involves a logical and orderly classification of the laws of interpretation and it is an art because it requires skill to apply those logical and orderly laws of interpretation.

Finally, it provides a bigger picture or meta-narrative of a biblical passage, book of the Bible or the entire Bible.

- Exegesis

Exegesis is the explanation or exposition or interpretation of a text, especially of the bible, based on careful and objective analysis (oftentimes on the lexical and grammatical details of a word, verse or book).

- Exegete

It is both a verb and a noun.

Used as verb, it means to expound or interpret

As a noun, an exegete is one who interprets or expounds

5.0 SIX ASPECTS TO CONSIDER IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

GOD

Classical thought paved the way to our understanding of God as Father, Son and Spirit who, “in their eternal mutuality of love constitute what we mean by the word ‘God.’” (Leslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 2)

The Scripture (Bible) is God's story, His covenants with His creation and of humanity's response to God. This story has been told through human beings.

God commanded continuous study of the Scripture for the following reasons:

- He wanted His children to know Him more intimately
- He did not want His children to be misled by other 'voices'
- He wanted His children to understand and situate what they hear, read or experience in the context of His overall mission

THE AUTHOR

The author is the person who communicated God's word to persons in their generation either orally or in writing.

THE MESSAGE (TEXT)

The text (oral or written) is that which the author communicated.

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

The first hearers of what the author said or wrote.

THE INTERPRETER

Those expounding the Scriptures to their generation.

PRESENT AUDIENCE

21st century hearers of the gospel

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Fee Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.