

Biblical Hermeneutics

In the book of Acts, the word “love” (agape) does not appear in Luke’s history. Those who seek to develop or justify certain soteriological doctrines merely from a study of a Bible concordance judge that absence to be significant. Some even conclude that we shouldn’t tell people indiscriminately that “God loves them” since no one “said that” in Acts. The Gospels and the Epistles, forming the backdrop of the whole counsel of God, a counsel that Paul taught repeatedly to the Mediterranean world of the first century (Acts 20:27; 28:31), tell us plenty about the universal love of God for the world of lost sinners (e.g., I John 4:8, John 3:16; I Timothy 2:1-6; I Thess. 1:5-6). Every time New Testament evangelists preached the finished work of Christ, the power of God unto salvation, they were preaching the love of God the Father Almighty to and for lost humanity. And, that love was not just proclaimed in the book of Acts; it was preeminently demonstrated by actions, as the participatory Acts of the Holy Spirit; i.e., the love of God in action. The out-breathing of the love of God empowered first century men and women who were daily constrained through that Spirit by the love of the Father and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ seeking to save the lost (Rom. 1:15; II Cor. 5:14; Romans 5:5; II Cor. 13:14; Luke 19:10). We pray for the same demonstration of the Holy Spirit in our times.

James Nickel

It is interesting to note how many theologians, or “Bible study experts,” read their system of theology into Scripture while, at the same time, unmask the errors of others who, according to them, do the same! For example, note how the Calvinist will change “all” or “the world” to “elect” or “God’s chosen” in defense of their view of the extent of the atonement and how the Arminian will read “free will” into “he who is willing may come” in defense of their view of the extent of the atonement. Forcing a logical system of man’s making (e.g., the TULIP of Calvinism) onto Scripture, no matter how one might “Biblically” support it, will inevitably distort the true meaning of Scripture. There are many tensions in Scripture of which the Calvinist and Arminian systems, when seen together, expose. But, these two systems, when seen as separate approaches to Scriptural understanding, will inescapably emphasize some elements of truth at the expense of others. Paraphrasing Thomas F. Torrance (1913-2007), we need to transform the way we think about Scripture and this renewed way of thinking, this “mind of Christ,” will crucify our natural inclination to develop systems using our natural reason. There is an “interior logic of Scripture” that holds its tensions in balance and it is not open to us to try to resolve the tensions using any type of man-made logical schema. We need to learn to think as Scripture thinks and hold together what it holds together in Christ. If not, we get what we currently see in many quarters, the “un-love” of polemical argumentation based on natural reason resulting in blindness to the truth revealed in Christ.

James Nickel

Do not strive to master Scripture; strive to let Scripture master you by allowing the focal point of Scripture, the person of Christ—who is the ultimate Word of God, to master us through Scripture by the Holy Spirit.

James Nickel

We must always strive to go back to the base, the Bible. No system of theology should ever be absolutized because only God is absolute; we shall never know Him exhaustively (i.e., have all the theological answers for God can never be “boxed in” by any systematic theology—although we must strive to develop, in grace, such a system), but we can know Him truly in the basis of His verbal propositions as revealed in Holy Scripture.

Glenn R. Martin (1935-2004)

Biblical Hermeneutics

It is better to let the biblical texts speak in all their power. Many things can then be said about the God who has graciously disclosed himself, but all of them leave God untamed.

D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, p. 200

... Pharisees, the persons in the first century who knew the words of Scripture well but heard the voice of God not at all. They had an extensive and meticulous knowledge of scripture. They revered it. They memorized it. They used it to regulate every detail of life. So why did Jesus excoriate them? Because the words were studied and not heard. For them, the scriptures had become a book to use, not a means by which to listen to God. They isolated the book from the divine act of speaking covenantal commands and gospel promises. They separated the book from the human act of hearing which would become believing, following, and loving. Printer's ink became embalming fluid.

Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, p. 13

Scripture is read and heard—and touched and smelled and tasted—in order to be practiced. It is not for entertainment. It is not for diversion. It is not for culture. It is not a key for unlocking secrets to the future. It is not a riddle to intrigue the pious dilettante.

Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, p. 17

The intent of Revelation (the Revelation of St. John, the last book of the Bible—JN) is to put us on our knees before God in worship and to set the salvation-shaping words of God in motion in our lives. We are always trying to use scripture for our purposes: scripture uses us. God's gracious purpose in giving us his word in written form is not to turn us into Bible students, but to provide a means by which we can hear him speak and be turned into *Christians*—awed worshippers, sacrificing sufferers, devout followers.

Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, p. 24

... in Deuteronomy 12:31, a ... warning: "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it or take from it." Neither Jews nor Christians interpreted that to mean that nothing more should be written—otherwise our Bibles would consist only of Genesis through Deuteronomy. It has been interpreted to mean that what God has revealed is sufficient. We have a complete revelation. Dilution is not permitted; additions are forbidden. Scripture is not to be toyed with. It is not to be twisted and squeezed into our needs and wishes. We are to submit to scripture and let it develop in our lives.

Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, p. 25

One of the unintended and unhappy consequences of St. John's Armageddon vision [Revelation 16:12-16 and Revelation 19:11-21—JN] is that it has inflamed the imaginations of the biblically illiterate into consuming endtime fantasies, distracting them from the daily valor of dogged obedience, sacrificial love, and alert endurance. This is exactly what St. John did not intend, as even a cursory reading of his Revelation makes evident. When people are ignorant of the imagery of prophets and gospels, and untutored in the metaphorical language of war in the story of salvation, they are easy prey for entertaining predictions of an end-time holocaust at Mount Meggido in Israel, conjured up from newspaper clippings on international politics.

Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, p. 165

There are some writers and speakers who reserve to themselves the right to judge Scripture but no man in his right mind can claim that right and if man does make this claim, his mind is not right.

James Nickel

It never ceases to amaze me to see people who "claim" to have the gift of "discernment" unable to see that the teaching of false doctrine (i.e., instruction that clearly violates Scripture) is truly false.

Biblical Hermeneutics

James Nickel

The Four Gospels were written by (1) an ex-tax collector (more than likely a wealthy publican), (2) a follower of a fisherman, (3) another fisherman, and (4) a doctor. A wealthy financier, blue-collar workers, and a scientist ... there is a message here.

James Nickel

We have no right to put a spin on Scripture (i.e., to falsify it) if we do not like what it says.

James Nickel

The totality of Scripture, God-breathed and illuminated to us by the gift of the Holy Spirit, is the lens through which we must see (or interpret) the world and the march of history. This lens is the light that lightens our path; without it, we are blind men walking.

James Nickel

It is not optimal to be fervent in studying Scripture (or theology, etc.) if we are slack in living. We are more likely to be attuned to the message of Scripture if our conduct is patterned by it.

James Nickel

“For a proper perspective on Scripture and for valid understanding of revelation there must be a constant interworking of these factors: (1) an infallible and authoritative Word, (2) the activity of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and applying that Word, and (3) a receptive human heart. No true knowledge of God takes place without these elements.

James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000)

To speculate or to be sincere does not mean one has a handle on the Truth. Sincerity and/or speculation are not substitutes for careful thinking. In the words of John Mark Peterson, “Old books like the Bible require rigorous exegetical skills or they end up saying what we wish they said.”

James Nickel

It is not only unwise, but it is wicked to be disheartened because of the external feebleness of the Church, compared with the work she has to do, and the enemies she has encountered. God is her strength, her glory and her hope, and to despair of her is to deny God.

Thomas V. Moor

You must understand what the Bible says before you can say what the Bible means.

David Chilton

Four problems that many Christians have regarding the Bible: (1) Not reading enough (e.g., II Tim. 3), (2) Not understanding the text and the context (e.g., timing and historical setting), (3) Reading into Scripture what you think it says, and (4) Not comparing Scripture with Scripture (e.g., Matt. 7:13-14 with Luke 13:23).

James Nickel

The word of God originated in a historical way, and therefore, can be understood only in the light of history It is impossible to understand an author and to interpret his words correctly unless he is seen against the proper historical background.

Louis Berkhof

It is of the first importance, in interpreting a written document, to ascertain who the author was, and to determine the time, the place, and the circumstances of his writing. . . . Herein we note the import of the term grammatico-historical interpretation. We are not only to grasp the grammatical import of words and sentences, but also to feel the force and bearing of the historical circumstances which may in

Biblical Hermeneutics

any way have affected the writer. Hence, too, it will be seen how intimately connected may be the object or design of a writing and the occasion which prompted its composition.

Milton Terry

Although grammatico-historical interpretation is important, we must always ground all interpretation through the incarnate life of God's Son, the One in whom eternal life exists. Without the life of the Incarnate Son speaking into us by His Spirit, all interpretation of Scripture will ultimately lead us into the dead-letter of Pharisaism.

James Nickel