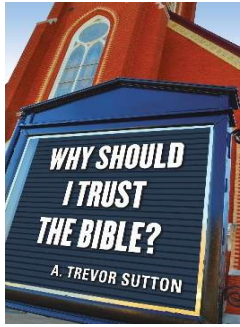


Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Eight – Claim: Even Christians Disagree About How to Interpret the Bible. Why Should I Trust It if You Can't Even Agree Among Yourselves?

Elder Dan Swanson, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

If that is true, then you should probably set this book down right now. Rejecting the Bible on the basis of differing interpretations would require you to reject every book ever written. And every work of art ever produced. And every movie ever made. And every musical composition ever arranged. And just about everything else in the world.... if you do not want to reject all these things, then you should probably learn something about hermeneutics. (143)

The theory and methodology of interpretation is known as hermeneutics. The goal of hermeneutics is to answer the question "What does this mean?"... Although hermeneutics is used in many different disciplines, scholars studying the Bible were foundational in developing this academic practice. Methods for interpretation were first formulated through reading, discussing, and applying Scripture. For as long as the Bible has existed, people have been developing best practices to help interpret these sacred texts. (144)

Biblical interpretation can be divided into two different categories: historical-critical and historical-grammatical. Think of these as different operating systems for a computer. The operating system for a computer determines how a user logs on, navigates through pro-grams, and performs tasks. The overall user experience depends on the operating system. The same holds true for these two methods of biblical interpretation. (145)

Historical-Critical Method: This method of interpretation assumes that the Bible is a purely human text and the aim of interpretation should be to understand the historical factors that gave rise to the writing... The goal is to deconstruct the text and reveal what is hidden behind it (i.e., author, historical setting, and political forces). The historical-critical method relies only on tools developed by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and literary scholars.

There are two substantial problems with this method of interpretation. First, since the historical-critical method aims to deconstruct the text and reveal the hidden factors behind the text, this method obliterates the text and leaves only shreds of Scripture for readers to interpret. [Example of Peter and his view of women - p.146]

The other problem with this approach to interpreting Scripture is denying that it is the Word of God. This method assumes that the Bible is a purely human text like the phone book or a handbook on tax code. This is problematic because the Bible asserts that it is the Word of God on numerous occasions (Deuteronomy 9:10; 2 Chronicles 34:31; Acts 18:11; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). (145-146)



Historical-Grammatical Method: This method of interpretation strives to accurately understand the author's original meaning for the text. According to this method, the goal of biblical interpretation is to draw on reputable scholarship—history, archaeology, and ancient languages—in order to determine the meaning of the text as the original author and audience would have intended. Rather than trying to deconstruct a text to determine the historical factors that gave rise to the writing, the historical-grammatical method aims to understand what the text meant in its original setting. Scholars use a number of techniques in order to determine the original meaning of the text.

Exegesis is the practice of closely studying the language, syntax, and grammar of a text. Understanding the original language is vital to accurately understanding a text's original meaning....

Genre is another important factor for biblical interpretation. A genre is a literary category or type of writing. Scripture is comprised of many different genres: narrative, poetry, prophecy, parables, apocalyptic writing, along with other subgenres. These genres are essential to understanding how to interpret the text...

Context, like genre, is crucial in understanding the meaning of a text. Context is the text surrounding a text: the sentences, paragraphs, and chapters surrounding the text that is to be analyzed. Biblical interpretation relies on the surrounding chapters and books of the Bible in order to gain an understanding of a text...

Like the historical-critical method, the historical-grammatical method relies on reputable scholarship to inform interpretation. Nevertheless, there is one major distinction between these methods: the historical-grammatical method interprets the Bible with the recognition that it is the Word of God. It relies on human scholarship insofar as the Bible is God's Word composed through human authors within a historical context. It relies on faith given by the Holy Spirit insofar as the Bible is the eternal Word of God. (147-148)

Arguing that the Bible should not be trusted because of the multitude of different interpretations misses a serious point: the truth is worth a fight. The apostle Paul used the image of a boxer fighting in a match when he said, "Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). Fighting for a faithful reading of Scripture, orthodox interpretations of the text, and accurate applications into daily life is worth the struggle. The disagreements about how best to interpret the Bible are not evidence that it should not be trusted; rather, they are proof that Christians take the Word of God seriously. (149)

Diverging interpretations of Scripture have always threatened the truth. And God's people have always fought the fight of rightly interpreting God's Word... Struggling to maintain an orthodox reading of the Bible does not undermine its trustworthiness. It does just the opposite. Striving to have a faithful interpretation of God's Word – even if that leads to disagreements – is essential to trusting the Bible. (150)

