

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Why Is Interpretation Needed? – 2-8 May 2020

Christ would have us diligently seek right interpret of Scriptures. “But without faith *it* is impossible to please *Him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Sunday: Presuppositions – Jesus had told His disciples everything that should take place, but although He told them only what had been written by the prophets, “they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (Luke 18:34). It was not until all these things had been accomplished, and Christ had “expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27), that they understood. So difficult is it for preconceived opinions to give way for truth.

There are two principal causes why people misinterpret the Bible, even after they give assent to the fact that it means what it says, and think that they believe it. The first is the power of preconceived opinions. They come to the study of the Bible with certain fixed ideas, and they think that they must find those ideas in it. When they read a certain passage that conflicts in any degree with their ideas, they modify the statement to agree with their ideas. This they do unconsciously. They do not mean to put their ideas in the place of the Bible statement, but they are so firmly persuaded that their ideas are according to Scripture that they think the passage in question must be toned down a little to agree with some other text. This suggests a principle that must be grasped before one can hope to get any real benefit from the Bible; and that principle is: The Bible means just what it says in every text. No text can modify another, so as to make it mean less, or anything different from its plain reading. True, no one text tells all that may be said upon any subject, or else there would not be another one written on the same subject; but every text must be allowed to stand just as it is written. “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:5-6).

The other cause is the impatience of the reader. He cannot wait for an understanding of the text. He must know at once. So he rushes off to some friend in whom he has confidence, and inquires for the meaning. Having received an answer, he thinks that he knows the meaning; but he does not. Even though the exact truth be told him, he does not know it. By and by some other commentator or friend will give him another explanation of the same text, and then his doubt is greater than before. The poor man sees that learned men differ, and he wonders, ‘How am I to know which is right?’ He could not know, if he were to depend on the testimony of men, for he would never know what men to depend on. But he may know for a certainty, if he will let the Lord tell him. “For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6). The knowledge of God is found in His Word, and He alone can give the understanding. We do not get light upon the Word of God, but we get light from it. The Word itself is light. If at the first we do not perceive the light, that is no evidence that it is not there. It will be revealed to us if we look long enough.

“God does not conceal His truth from men. By their own course of action they make it obscure to themselves. Christ gave the Jewish people abundant evidence that He was the Messiah; but His teaching called for a decided change in their lives. They saw that if they received Christ, they must give up their cherished maxims and traditions, their selfish, ungodly practices. It required a sacrifice to receive changeless, eternal truth. Therefore they would not admit the most conclusive evidence that God could give to establish faith in Christ. They professed to believe the Old Testament Scriptures, yet they refused to accept the testimony contained therein concerning Christ’s life and character. They were afraid of being convinced lest they should be converted and be compelled to give up their preconceived opinions. The treasure of the gospel, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, was among them, but they rejected the greatest gift that Heaven could bestow ... Do you ask, What shall I do to be saved? You must lay your preconceived opinions, your hereditary and cultivated ideas, at the door of investigation. If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not

misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given. Open mind and heart that you may behold wondrous things out of God's word" {COL 105.1; COL 112.3}.

Monday: Translation and Interpretation – The Bible has been translated from the original Hebrew and Greek languages into various other languages. In the English language alone there are many versions. In general, the various translations of the Bible are not materially different. The differences are mainly differences of expression, and are no more than would be expected in translation from one language into another by different persons, especially when several different words expressing different shades of meaning may be used in the rendering of a single word in the original. One thing is essential, and that is that the reader must have a sincere desire to worship God rather than himself; for "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). The different English versions may help us understand Scriptures better; we may be sure that if there is an error in one, we may detect it by the fact that all other versions, while not identical on that point, are uniform in thought.

As to interpretation, we need not err. "Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted. In the little book entitled '*Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology*,' Father Miller gives the following simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation:" {RH Nov 25, 1884 Par 23}. "1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible; 2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application and study; 3. Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering; 4. To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error; 5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom is my rule, and not the Bible" {RH November 25, 1884 Par 24}. "The above is a portion of these rules; and in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth" {RH November 25, 1884 Par 25}.

Tuesday: The Bible and Culture – We must not directly or indirectly entertain the thought that the Bible accommodated the cultures of the day and therefore it should be understood from ancient cultural perspective. This thinking informs the women ordination debate. God established that husbands should be the servant-leaders of the home, by extension, church. "Unto the woman He said, ... thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). Supposing the Bible leaned on culture, some have argued that the passages regarding man's leadership role reflect the biases of a male-dominant culture. But notice that the command in Genesis 3:16 came directly from God, not from John or Paul. When Jesus chose the twelve apostles, He was not accommodating the cultures of the day when He chose only men (Luke 6:12-16). Jesus changed cultures that were repugnant to the gospel, such as rabbis not teaching women; Mary sat at Jesus' feet to be taught (Luke 10:39). We may be sure that not having women in leadership roles (priests or elders) was not a culture, it was Jesus' own command in the Scriptures that testify of Christ (John 5:39) who inspired prophets to write all Scriptures (1 Peter 1:10-11), otherwise Jesus would have changed it.

Wednesday: Our Sinful and Fallen Nature – Sinful nature is no excuse for misinterpreting Scriptures. Our doing right is based on this: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). In this, boasting is entirely excluded by this process. "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). A knowledge of our sinful nature, of the sin that continually lurks in our mortal flesh, waiting to spring upon us, and devour us, leads to constant trust in Christ, whose righteousness is our salvation. Then if one asks you, 'Do you correctly interpret Scriptures despite sinful nature?' the reply should be, "not I, but Christ."

Thursday: Why Interpretation Is Important – Right interpretation will enable true believers in Christ to "all *speak the same thing*" (1 Corinthians 1:10) in doctrines. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). The key to achieving perfect unity in right interpretation of the Bible is for each individual having in him or her the mind of Christ.