

Sermon Outline

“The Importance of Rightly Interpreting God’s Word” – Reading the Bible For All Its Worth, Part 1 – Don DeVries – January 8, 2012

Introduction

1. About 3500 years ago, Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to meet with God. It was on this mountain that God gave Moses His words on two tablets of stone “written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18). As Tony Reinke captures in his book *Lit!*, “The One who created the cosmos by the word of his mouth in the beginning, the one who invented human language in Eden, the One who spread languages across the land at Babel, now put pen to paper – or finger to stone – and wrote.”
2. That was just the beginning. Over the next 1500-1600 years, God, through the Holy Spirit, superintended the writing process of over 35 human authors producing the 66 books of our Bible, in which every word written was exactly what God wanted to communicate to us – free from error and stamped with His authority. When God chose to reveal Himself, His purposes and His commands, He did so in words. And that’s what we have in Scripture – God’s disclosure of himself. God’s communication to us. God’s Word to us.

Why is it important to learn to rightly interpret our Bible?

Right Interpretation is Important to God

1. The Scriptures, themselves, show that accurate interpretation matters to God. There are several passages in the Bible that demonstrate there is a correct way and an incorrect way to understand the Scriptures.
 - a. 2 Timothy 2:15, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, *rightly handling the word of truth.*”
 - i. In this verse Paul exhorts Timothy to “rightly handle” or to literally “accurately interpret” the word of truth, that is the Scriptures. Such an exhortation motivates to right interpretation and carries an implicit warning – Scriptures might be wrongly handled or wrongly interpreted.
 - b. Psalm 119:18, “*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*”
 - i. In this verse the psalmist cries out and prays earnestly that the Lord would allow him to understand and delight in the meaning of Scripture. The appeal implies that just because we have read the Bible, the experience of joyful understanding is not automatic. It matters to God that we not only desire, but also rightly grasp His mind and heart in His Word.

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- c. Luke 11:52, “Woe to you experts of the law, because *you have taken away the key of knowledge*. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.” (NIV)
 - i. In Luke 11, Jesus saved some of his most scathing rebukes for the “lawyers” or “experts of the law.” They were leaders entrusted to interpret and teach God’s law to His people. Not only did they not enter into God’s kingdom, but their distorted interpretation deprived others from knowing God and entering into salvation.

Right Interpretation Guards Us From Error

1. Nearly every book in the New Testament has something to say about false beliefs and those who advocate them. We are warned about false prophets and false teachers, false christs, false apostles, and “another gospel.” These warnings apply as much to today as they did when the NT was written in the 1st century. And many of the errors in or outside the church begin with faulty interpretation.
 - a. Some of the world’s leading religions – Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christian Science – all claim to place the Bible at the center of their religion and faith. They simply “interpret” it differently. But their interpretation has led to serious error.
2. But this also applies within the church. For example, God’s unchangeableness and sovereignty are being undermined with inaccurate interpretation. The Bible is being used to justify same-sex lifestyles and same-sex marriage, the abolition of roles in the home and in the church and to claim that Christ’s sacrifice amounts to cosmic child abuse. All these errors begin with interpretive errors.
3. When we rightly interpret our Bible, we avoid the errors that can lead to false beliefs, which can, at times, result in hurt, condemnation or disillusionment among God’s people.

Right Interpretation Bridges the Gaps between us and the Biblical Writers

1. Some of the Bible is relatively easy to understand, like the Old Testament stories, the Psalms and Proverbs. But there is much in the Bible that can be confusing. The reason is because there is a fairly large gap that separates us from the biblical writers.
 - a. We are separated by the culture and customs of a people who lived in the Ancient Near East and the Roman Empire.
 - b. We are separated by language. We use an English translation, but the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek and some Aramaic.

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- c. We are separated by historical situations (kingdoms that no longer exist), by geography of the Middle East, and by vast amounts of time (between 2 – 3½ millennia).
 - d. We are separated by covenants. We live under the New Covenant inaugurated by Christ's life, death and resurrection. But much of the Bible was written to those under the Old Covenant.
2. There is a wide river between the biblical writers and us. Learning to rightly interpret and handle God's Word is a bridge over that river to bring right understanding and application.

Right Interpretation Leads us to a Growing Knowledge and Love of Jesus

1. This point might be self-explanatory if we narrowed our reading and study to only the New Testament. But what about the Old Testament? Does that lead us to Jesus?
 - a. In a debate with the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem, Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is *they that bear witness about me...*" (John 5:39)
 - b. The gospel of Luke tells us that when the resurrected Jesus spoke to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in *all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" (Luke 24:27)
 - c. When Christ appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, "he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that *everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures..." (Luke 24:44)
2. These passages reveal that God's plan for all time is thoroughly and radically centered in the person of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, as whole, is like a big finger pointing forward to Jesus. Through its promises, symbols, prophecies, priesthood, sacrifices and pictures of salvation, the Old Testament looks forward to the actual accomplishment of salvation that took place once-for-all in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
3. It is very helpful and beneficial to learn the practical tools and principles to rightly handle and interpret God's Word. But the tools and principles are not an end in themselves. They are a means to an end. The end is knowing and loving Jesus, or as John Piper puts it, in "seeing and savoring Jesus Christ."