

Legitimate Interpretation of the word of God

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 22 September 2010 09:47

'*Dividing the word*' has been a messy, pretentious and unscriptural affair in the hands of dispensationalists, who literally cut-up the word of God with abandon, giving us what is known as 'dispensationalism', a system of belief that bears no resemblance to the simple teaching of God. Some folk, though, think that the more obscure a system of thought is, the more advanced and true it must be!

Others, less methodical than dispensationalists, also misuse and abuse scripture. They take a basic text and then elaborate upon it. That is, they 'spiritualise' and give remarkable (and often ridiculous) meanings to texts that the texts themselves cannot possibly bear. Yet others, possibly the majority of folk, just collect this bit of 'meaning' and add it to another bit, collected from a different source. Then they sew it all together in to what I call a 'patchwork quilt theology'. The quilt keeps them warm, but it uses so many different cottons and materials, it falls apart after just a few washes. These folk are magpies. They collect anything that is shiny or different, and anything that takes their fancy. But they do not want the truth as it is given in scripture.

With such a variety of ways of looking at scripture, how do we know the *best* way? Dare I be so obvious as to say

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best way to examine scripture is to see what scripture itself says!

Possibly, you are thinking this

is

obvious. Well, if it is that obvious, why do the majority of people have next to no real understanding of scripture? Many of those I meet and communicate with clearly have no true understanding of what God says. Theirs is a confusion or mish-mash of ideas and half-formed theology, mostly either extreme or popular.

What is the scriptural way? It is as follows:

1.

Look at the text itself. Not at what others (no matter how famous) say about it.

2.

Examine the words in the text, as found in the original languages (mainly Greek and Hebrew).

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3.

These meanings are the basis for interpretation. Note that each word can have many different possible meanings, which, sometimes, cannot be ascertained until the context has been examined.

4.

Look at the text in its setting, that is, the context. All meanings must 'fit' the context.

5.

Put together the meanings you have found, and interpret them according to the context.

6.

If something is unclear, only then should you look at what others have said about the text. But, be very careful! You might read a view that is prejudiced or wrong.

7.

The role of the pastor or Bible teacher is to do all of the above, using his God-given gift of teaching. This means he will be enabled to provide a proper interpretation applicable to those he teaches. Because it is God-given it will always be relevant and useful, and will always be correct. Once the teacher uses his own abilities, his interpretation will falter or be wrong.

Note that even if you follow the above, *the final interpretation is given by the Holy Spirit.*

And remember that what you read is an English transliteration, so it is not the actual original word used. This ought to be borne in mind when using aids such as Strongs, etc.

By going only to scripture you get only what scripture says. Makes sense? If you do this and you still cannot understand what the text is saying, then you must simply leave it alone! Do not

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become agitated and do not think that you must always obtain a full understanding of every text you read. It is quite possible that the Holy Spirit is not ready to give you understanding at that time. It is also possible that you will never come to an understanding of that particular text. Just accept it. Each of us is given his or her own 'measure' of spiritual gifts and understanding. God will not reveal something to us unless He is ready to do so. So do not fight it!

It is also true that although you know all the meanings a word might have, you will not necessarily also obtain the full interpretation of a given text, unless the Lord is pleased to give it at that time. And also bear in mind that teachers are called by God for a purpose... listen.

Example of Proper Textual Examination

Read John 3:16. It is a very familiar text, but it is also a much misused and abused one. Do you believe this text is telling us God 'offers' salvation to *everyone*? If you do, then you are mistaken. If the proper 'rules' of scripture interpretation are applied, you will discover the following...

1.

The vital word to find a meaning for is '*world*'. It is not as easy as you think! Look in, say, a Strong's concordance. There you will find there are at least nine different meanings for the word 'world'. One of them is 'Believers only'. Did you know that? Write down all the possible meanings for the word, for the proper interpretation of the word will affect the meaning of the whole text (and your understanding of election/salvation).

2.

Now, look at the context. What does it tell you? It says, in unequivocal language, that God sent His Son to die for ***those who would believe***. Now, look again at all those meanings you wrote down. Which of those meanings can fit the context? You will find the

only

meaning that fits is 'Believers only'. Read the rest of that portion of scripture and you will find that God sent His Son only for Believers. That is, those who are

already elect

. He did not die for 'everyone in the world'! Once you add the word meaning to the context, you have your 'interpretation'.

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Of course, if you are Arminian, you will reject this proper way of interpretation, and will instead replace it with an invalid and totally humanistic method. The total effect is to reject God's election and to 'choose' one's own salvation.

Basically, you are either a Believer or you are not. If you truly are saved and a Believer, then you have no right to tamper with God's word. Even a football team's fan club has its rules and regulations. If you do not abide by them, then you are not a member and cannot claim to be one. If you are a Believer and you reject the proper ways of interpretation as found in scripture itself, then you cannot claim to be acting as a Believer. Simple, really.

(Also see [O-048 How to Study Theology](#))

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