

Proper Attitudes Toward The Word Of God

Introduction. In John 10:35, Jesus made the statement, "and the scripture cannot be broken." This statement was made because of the desire of the Jews to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Jesus quoted from Psalm 82:6 which represents God as addressing a group of beings whom He calls "gods" and "sons of the Most High." If these terms can be applied to ordinary mortals, how could Jesus be accused of blasphemy when He applied them to Himself, the One whom God sent into the world? Jesus was merely asserting what He was by right.

The statement, "and the scripture cannot be broken," illustrates the high regard Jesus had for the scriptures. A Christian's attitude toward every matter must be the same as that of Jesus (Philippians 2:5-8). One of the most crucial of all occasions when Jesus showed His attitude toward God's word was when he was tempted in Matthew 4. There is no way to effectively deal with temptations without the proper attitudes toward the Bible.

Equal to understanding the scriptures is learning to interpret them correctly. Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the scriptures. Matthew 4:1-11 contains five basic attitudes and approaches of Jesus toward the scripture. I would like for us to consider the principles of Bible interpretation within them.

I. ***The Bible Is The Object Of Our Interpreting***

- A. Three times Jesus said, "It is written," and quotes each time from Deuteronomy (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16, 13). He never referred to any vision, dream, or an oral word given to Him by God (Psalm 119:105).
- B. The only past word of God which we can interpret is the written word or the Bible. Originally, God did speak orally to Israel through Moses (Exodus 33:11), but Jesus is concerned with only the word which has been inscribed in the book. He fought as a man and used the weapon that God gave to man (Ephesians 6:17).

II. ***The Bible Is Fully Authoritative And Understandable***

- A. Jesus proclaims the scripture's authority by saying, "Man shall (must) live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The present tense of the verb "proceedeth" affirms that this is to be a continuing duty of man.
- B. The source of all authority is God and man must obey "every word of God" (Isaiah 44:6; James 1:18). God's expressions of authority are statements which, in one way or another, express His will for man.
 1. Commands are perhaps the most classic expressions of authority.
In 1 Corinthians 11:24-26, we have a direct command to partake of

- the Lord's Supper for a specific reason (cf. Acts 15:19-20; Mark 16:15; 1 Corinthians 6:18).
2. Examples give us authority by mimicking those who had authority. We are told of giving regularly upon the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). If this action was acceptable then, it is acceptable now (cf. Acts 15:12; John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 2:21).
 3. Necessary inference is a form of authority that is somewhat more "buried." Necessary inferences examine the available evidence and then draw a conclusion. Hebrews 10:25 instructs us to assemble. By necessary conclusion, we reason that we need a place to worship. Therefore, we have the authority for a church building in which to worship (cf. Acts 15:7-11; Matthew 22:23-33; Hebrews 7:12-14).
- C. These expressions of authority are common sense, not "church of Christ tradition." If you think about it, you probably use them every day!
- D. If anyone was ever able to understand God's word, Jesus must have been able to do so.
1. Jesus not only understood the Bible Himself, but He assumed that man and Satan could understand it as well.
 2. Obviously, man could not live by every word of God if he could not understand it (Nehemiah 8:8; 2 Timothy 3:15).

III. ***The Bible Is Completely Harmonious***

- A. The second temptation demonstrates Satan's acceptance and rejection of the law of harmony. The law of harmony, presupposing the unity of truth, is the interpretation and application of a passage as it is consistent with other scriptural teachings.
- B. Satan seemingly observes the law of harmony as he uses a passage of scripture after Jesus declared that man must live "by every word of God." At the same time though, Satan denies the principle of harmony. He insists that Jesus prove Himself to be the Messiah by throwing Himself off the temple and go by this passage alone as though it contained the only statement which God has said on this subject.
 1. In other words, Satan seems to be saying, "The charge given to the angels is to care for you regardless of what you do. Therefore, my charge to you is to jump off the temple and show that you unconditionally accept God's promises."
 2. This is revealed in Satan's use of the implied word "only" in Matthew 4:6.

- a) Whenever anyone takes only part of what God says and excludes the other parts, they are doing the same as Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:23).
- b) Satan's two favorite subjects with which he takes this approach are man's faith and God's promises.
 - (1) He insists that man is saved by faith only although the Bible tells us that we must repent, confess and be baptized.
 - (2) He insists that God fulfills His promises unconditionally although God has often told us conditions to their fulfillment ("once saved, always saved").
- C. In contrast, Jesus, by His answer that "it is written again" (4:7), necessarily implies the principle of harmony in the Bible.
 - 1. The implication of the word "again" is the powerful principle that every "again" must be added to every other "again" before man can have the full sum of God's word.
 - 2. Psalm 91:11-12 has to be balanced with the fact that one is not to tempt God (Deuteronomy 6:16; cf. Exodus 17:1-7).
- D. Although these three scriptures are all to be seen together as building blocks of the larger biblical teaching, still we have to put them together until we arrive at the total teaching of the Bible on any particular subject. When we put these three statements together, it reveals a couple of very important ideas.
 - 1. The combined thought of these three Old Testament passages is that man's need for obedience to the authority of God is not fulfilled by man's need to accept God's promises as unconditional, but by his need to obey specific commands.
 - 2. Therefore, if we expect to receive the fulfillment of God's promises, then we must realize that God wants something from us (Psalm 116:12; Revelation 2:10). If you study the nature of biblical promises, you will find that God's promises are mostly conditional (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).
- E. The law of harmony requires that neither any one nor any two of these passages take any precedence over the other one or two passages because of any precedence in time or in physical location within the text.
 - 1. The only real requirements are that they be equally spoken by inspired men and that they be spoken under the same covenant.
 - 2. People make this mistake in relation to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43). We cannot be saved like him because he was under a different covenant.
- F. Each text has two kinds of contexts: the immediate and the remote.
 - 1. All texts must be considered in the light of both their immediate and remote contexts. In other words, every text is in context with

all the other texts in the Bible. We must take in everything the Bible says on a specific subject in each of its contexts.

2. Another way to think about it is to say that the issue is whether we accept all of God's "ands," or put in periods before God stops talking on any subject. We cannot put any period before the end of Revelation 22:21!

IV. *The Bible Is Practical In Its Material, Not Curiosity-Satisfying*

- A. Satan's third temptation entailed depriving God of His exclusive claim to worship and denying Jesus His necessary death on the cross (cf. Luke 24:25-27).
- B. Jesus could not worship Satan because He recognized that this would be a violation of God's twofold purpose.
 1. Man has the purpose of living according to the word of God (Matthew 4:4).
 2. Man has the purpose of obeying or worshiping God (Matthew 4:10).
- C. The only way we can accomplish these two purposes is by holding fast to the truth. I would venture to guess that Satan does not object to man's speculating about all kinds of biblical subjects.
 1. Satan knows that if man does speculate about biblical subjects, it will serve his purpose of getting us to do his will, not God's.
 2. However, God completely rules out both the dissemination of knowledge for knowledge's sake and man's speculations (Deuteronomy 29:29).
 3. In short, the word of God is for practice, not speculation (1 Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 6:4, 20; 2 Timothy 2:14, 16, 23; Titus 1:14; 3:9).

V. *The Bible's Self-Interpretations Are The Best Interpretations*

- A. Jesus gives us the inspired interpretations of what Moses, in some of his statements in Deuteronomy, and the psalmist of Psalm 91 really meant by fitting together these varied biblical statements. Therefore, we can be sure that if we accept His interpretations of both individual statements and their composite harmony, we cannot possibly go wrong.
- B. The Bible is filled with its own interpretations, both direct and indirect, of many of its own statements.
 1. There are 43 different statements where the New Testament specifically states that it is fulfilling Old Testament prophecies (cf. Matthew 1:22-23; 8:17; 27:9).
 2. There are eight different statements which state in a more general fashion that the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament (cf. Matthew 5:17-18; Acts 3:18; 13:29).

C. If we miss these self-interpretations or misunderstand them, we will be missing many opportunities to know God's word more accurately and overlooking much of the interpretative help the Bible offers.

Conclusion. These five basic attitudes of Jesus toward the Bible must be our attitudes toward it too. These five basic attitudes also must become five hermeneutical principles to guide us in our interpretation of the Bible. Satan, however, will get us to accept his biblical attitudes and hermeneutical principles if we are not careful.

Luke's account says, "Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). Although the devil departed from Jesus, he certainly has reappeared in recent decades in the push for a "New Hermeneutic" by our liberal brethren, which has been developed so they do not have to be limited in their religious practices. Their hermeneutic has changed to support their change in practice. Several examples can be cited:

1. All marriages are right, no matter what the circumstances.
2. "Grace only" salvation.
3. Baptism is non-essential for salvation and can include sprinkling and pouring.
4. The unimmersed are to be recognized as "Christians."
5. Instrumental music, women preachers and women elders.
6. Reinterpretation of scripture based on external principles; i.e., the days of Genesis 1.
7. More emotional worship in the assembly with spontaneity and celebration.
8. Holding worship services on Saturday.
9. One elder over a local church.
10. Leaving off the practice of taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday.
11. Observing the Lord's Supper on Saturday.
12. Changing the elements of the Lord's Supper from grape juice and unleavened bread.
13. The use of the local church treasury to support all kinds of social programs.
14. The church is not the kingdom of God; the church is now, the kingdom is yet to come.
15. A denial that the wicked will suffer endless torment in hell.
16. Unity and fellowship with other religious bodies.

Let's always be very careful in our study of the scriptures. God's word is a wonderful book, but it must be studied very carefully (2 Timothy 2:15). We need the hermeneutical principles of Jesus and the apostles. I appeal to all brethren to follow the example of Jesus and the apostles as they seek to handle accurately the word of truth today.