

Lesson 8 Notes – 02/19/2008

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Part I

This session begins our exposure to our second textbook, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart.

Introduction: The Need to Interpret

1. Read to get the overview, then dig deeper with ALL Bible passages, not just the obviously difficult. Never assume we already know it.
2. Things which lead to MIS-interpretation: desire to impress others (pride), desire to know supposed “secret things” of God, vested interest defending or supporting a bias, and ignorance (not use good exegesis or hermeneutics).
3. Bible readers are being subjected to “interpretation” already. Translations involve much interpretation by the scholars. Books, commentaries, Bible teachers, and preachers are all interpreting the biblical text. Let’s not just leave to others what we can do ourselves.
4. Dual nature of Scripture
 - a. **Eternal relevance** - belief it is a revelation from God, and important to all mankind of all time.
 - b. **Historical particularity** - revealed within human history, circumstances, and language.
 - c. Non-believers are only interested in the second part; some uninformed believers only acknowledge the first. Good Bible students have a balanced view: “We have to understand the ‘*there and then*’ before we can apply it to the ‘*here and now*.”
5. **Exegesis** involves considering both the context and content
 - a. Context
 1. Historical background, occasion and purpose of the writing
 2. Literary context - genre of writing, what is the author’s point
 - b. Content: vocabulary, sentence structure, logic and organization.
6. **Hermeneutics** involves discovering the relevance of the original meaning to our situation today.
 - a. Remember, it cannot mean today what it never meant originally!
 - b. The meaning and principles will be the same, perhaps the particulars of just how they apply may be different
 - c. No amount of rules and axioms can overcome lack of common sense.

Chapter 2: The Basic Tool, A Good Translation

1. Since few Christians are fluent in Hebrew or Greek, translations play an important role in Bible study. Therefore, we want to use multiple translations which get us as close as possible to the original.
2. First challenge is understanding how the text of the Old and New Testament in their original languages have been transmitted down to us. The study of the transmission of the text is called “textual criticism.”
 - a. Despite the assertions of some modern, popular, critical books, textual criticism is well established, trustworthy... and works!

- b. It is still a developing science, with confidence that even better and more accurate approximations of the original texts will be produced. We need to learn how this works and not fear uninformed claims that it is unreliable.
3. Types of English translations
- a. “Formal equivalence” - stay as close to the original words, idioms and sentence structure of the original language as possible. Examples: King James Version, New King James Version, American Standard Version, New American Standard Version.
 - b. “Functional equivalence” - use words better understood today, use modern English language idioms and sentence structure. New International Version, Today’s New International Version, English Standard Version.
 - c. “Free translation” - seek to communicate in modern words and idioms the essential meaning and thought without being committed to specific vocabulary or sentence structure. New Living Bible, The Message, New English Bible.
4. Real challenges all translations face:
- a. How to handle weights, measures, and monetary amounts. We no longer understand “ephah,” cubit, and denarius.
 - b. Euphemisms (a more delicate way to talk about sexual and toilet topics). Does the translator just translate the original euphemism, substitute a modern euphemism, or put in the plain meaning of the euphemism (and shock the reader!)?
 - c. Vocabulary - choosing the most appropriate word to translate the Greek or Hebrew word. Both the original language vocabulary, and modern English words, often have multiple meanings, and varying shades within a given meaning. Which to use in each situation is a challenge.
 - d. Word plays - most languages have lots of plays on words. In fact, in English most of our jokes depend on such word plays to work. The Bible has many word plays in the original as well. It is very difficult to make those obvious in English.
 - e. Grammar and Syntax varies among different languages.
 - f. Matters of Gender - controversial today as some translations (like the TNIV) render passages gender neutral if both male and female are intended in the original, but only male terms were used.
5. The authors’ biases toward their preferred translations are plain. At least they admit their bias; this does not negate the value of their observations.

Effective Bible Study

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