

A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

Question

- What are some examples where experience, reason or tradition might *legitimately* affect of your hermeneutic (approach to biblical interpretation)? Alternatively, in what cases does what you know from outside of Scripture at the very least help you understand what a passage almost certainly does *not* mean?

Why Scripture's Clarity as *Functionally* Supreme?

- The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture
 - God, the excellent communicator
 - Scripture is said to “make wise the simple,” to be light, and in most cases is written to common people.
 - NT indicators of purposeful clarity
 - Koine Greek
 - Explained Hebraisms
- The creator-creature chasm (Rom. 9:19-21)
 - Our natural intuitions about what an all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing God could do or would want us to do are at very best exalted projections of what some *creature* could or would do if they were put in a God-like role.
 - The owner, the employee and “stealing” example

Why Scripture's Clarity as *Functionally* Supreme?

– Our depravity (Rom. 3:10-18; Jer. 17:9)

- Even our intuitions about how to relate to one another as creatures have been devastated by the fall *in a way* that understanding natural language (and math, for example) seems not to have been.
 - Plenty of unbelievers agree with evangelical, Christian *interpretations* of the Bible, even if they reject the worldview as a hoax.
 - E.g. “The Bible condemns homosexuality”

– Inspiration and/or the Doctrine of Special Revelation

- The Scriptures are intended by God to be the *normative* and pre-eminent source for understanding him, his creation and how to live before him. They are God-breathed so that the man of God can be complete and fully equipped (2 Tim. 3:16-17) as well as being a sharp, two-edged sword piercing the deepest part of our being and discerning the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (Heb 4:12).

So What Does This Mean Practically?

- It means that our *default posture* in discerning doctrine and practice in the Christian life is to turn to Scripture with a degree of confidence in its ability to impart such knowledge that exceeds any other source.
 - Ultimately, Scripture is the *clearest* theological and ethical resource for believers and thus, should be *functionally* supreme for discerning Christian doctrine and practice in addition to being ultimately supreme in virtue of being God's word.

Textual Grounds | God's Expressed Authority

- **Proposal:** Scripture is authoritative in all the ways expressed in section one because to talk of the “authority” of Scripture is *really* to talk about *the authority of God expressed through Scripture*.
- God as Truth-Giver
 - Heb. 6:13
 - John 17:17
 - Ps. 119:160
- God as Obligation-Giver
 - Mic. 6:8
 - Acts 4:11-12
 - Ex. 20:1-17

Textual Grounds | God's Expressed Authority

- God as Rewarder and Punisher
 - Mk. 10:29-30
 - Rev. 2:7
 - 1 Cor. 2:9
 - Ps. 37:4
 - Matt 25:31-34
 - Matt. 10:28
 - Isa. 45:7
 - Rev. 19:17-21
- God as Epistemic Authority
 - Ps. 139:1-4; 147:5
 - Matt. 10:30
 - Rom. 11:34
 - 1 Jn. 3:20
- God as Acknowledged Authority
 - Ps. 1:2
 - Josh. 24:15
 - Matt. 6:9-13
 - Jas. 4:13-15
- Even if we agree that Scripture is theologically supreme *and* functionally supreme, we still have to *approach it* and *use it* correctly to *live* under its authority. What does that look like?

Strategies for Honoring the Authority of Scripture

- A *Contextual* Reading of Scripture
 - Historical Context
 - Culturally relative vs. culturally located
 - Theological Context
 - What is *presupposed* by the text?
 - What theological theme is being discussed?
 - How does this fit within the context of The Story?
 - Semantic/Grammatical Context
 - How is a word or phrase used in the near context?
 - How does the author use this word or phrase elsewhere?
 - Literary Context
 - Genre?
 - Purpose?

Strategies for Honoring the Authority of Scripture

- *A Liturgical Reading of Scripture*
 - Public *reading* of the whole counsel of God's word, particularly the New Testament.
 - This forces exposure to the breadth of God's revelation and prevents against presenting the Scripture as a systematic theology or a cleanly-categorized ethics book.
- *A Historical Reading of Scripture*
 - Scripture should be read and applied with frequent reference to the scaffolding of the beliefs of the historic church, represented in Orthodox creeds and confessions (e.g., The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed).
 - While not Scripture itself, someone who finds their interpretation of the Bible disagreeing with the core elements of historical Christianity should likely re-evaluate their interpretation.
 - Improvising within the key vs. playing out of tune

Strategies for Honoring the Authority of Scripture

- *A Scholarship-Informed Reading of Scripture*
 - No one should confuse their Google searches or personal reading initiatives and research with the knowledge base of a top-notch scholar—they are *worlds* apart (e.g., D.A. Carson, Greg Beale, Richard Bauckham, N.T. Wright, Kevin Vanhoozer etc.)
 - In many cases, but fewer than the above, this also applies to theologically well-educated pastors.
 - If an individual or theological community finds themselves interpreting Scripture in a way that enjoys virtually no top-notch scholarly representation, they should be extremely cautious.

Strategies for Honoring the Authority of Scripture

- A *Discussion-Based* Reading of Scripture
 - People should not seek to develop their theology in isolation only to emerge into theological discussions *defending* their views, with the now-added incentive to “not be wrong” hampering their theological development.
 - The interpretation and application of Scripture should be done *within* an interpretive community where the concrete begins to solidify only after one’s understanding has been shaped by the pressures and insights of the group.
 - Ideally, views totally absent from one’s regular interpretive community should also be consulted for their unique perspectives, generally through literature.

Strategies for Honoring the Authority of Scripture

- *A Privately-Studied* Reading of Scripture
 - Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12
 - The Scriptures are to be carefully read, meditated upon, studied, prayed through and applied by individuals and smaller groups.
- *A Prayerful* Reading of Scripture
 - Even when being studied for “academic” purposes, Scripture should be read with *humble* hearts and minds dependent on the Spirit’s work of illumination. We must not fall into the danger of thinking that our hermeneutics textbooks and commentaries can somehow replace the Holy Spirit.