

Partly Cloudy, With Showers Of Blessing

by
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The forensic view of justification cannot be found in scripture, some people say. Likewise, some people look at scripture and fail to see the Sacraments, while others see two, some see three, and others see seven. Some people fail to see the Office of the Holy Ministry in scripture; others see that ordination confers a change in being and substance, or an ontological change. The way we look at these questions is determined not by the scriptures themselves, but by the knowledge, predispositions and preconceptions we bring with us as we approach the scriptures, and the principles we use for our exegesis. The scriptures are clear---it is we who are cloudy.

There are plenty of doctrinal misunderstandings caused not by the scriptures themselves, but by our veiled understandings. The scriptures are veiled because this corruptible flesh has not yet put on incorruptibility. We go to the scriptures because in them we find Jesus; however, instead of seeing him clearly, our corrupt hearts lead us astray. Even so, as we peer into his wonderful face, we are transformed into his likeness. The more we become like him, the more clearly we see him in the scriptures. Yet the veil between us and the scriptures will persist this side of heaven.

One day we will see Jesus face to face, and we will know him even as we are known, (Gal 4:9 with I John 3:2). Until that day we search the scriptures, struggling to view the savior through the veil, and praying the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth.

The Pharisees studied the scriptures. They were looking for the coming Messiah. They knew that his arrival was imminent (Matt 11:3). Yet when Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, stood before them, they would not see Him. Jesus proclaimed His authority to them, telling them they had never heard the Father's voice, and they did not have His word abiding in them. He invited them to "search the scriptures, for...they are they that testify of me", (John 5:37-39).

Obviously, study alone is not enough. The unregenerate man cannot understand the scriptures, for they are foolishness unto him, (I Cor 2:14). Erasmus of Rotterdam was perhaps the greatest scholar of his day, yet for all his study he failed to see the simple truths of scripture. All it took was one parish priest, armed with the "sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God", to defeat Erasmus, (Eph 3:17). God grant that we should be so armed.

The Holy Spirit serves as our guide to the scriptures, (John 16:13). But the truths of scripture are not revealed through ecstatic reveries, but through careful, diligent study, (II Tim 2:15). In this work the Holy Spirit serves as our guide and fills us in our struggle against the sin in us, as we strive to pierce the veil separating us from a perfect understanding of His word, (John 16:13; Eph 5:18 with Col 3:16-17).

Always the goal is to find God's point in scriptures, not to score our own points. The scriptures are not a set of proof texts for our presuppositions. The scriptures do not exist to authenticate our dogmatics. Instead, the scriptures are self-authenticating. Without a proper hermeneutic, (a

system of scriptural interpretation), we will always end up like the Pharisees, always seeking and never seeing, always searching yet never finding.

Since we know our sinful hearts veil the scriptures, we are very careful when approaching them. The ancients have passed on to us principles for interpreting scriptures. These principles are not the inventions of man, but are derived from the way Jesus and the apostles handled scripture. Therefore, this hermeneutic serves to guide our foolish minds as we search the scriptures; this hermeneutic provides to control and correct our exegesis.

The basic principles of hermeneutics are as follows:

1. The Bible is the supreme authority in matters of faith and doctrine.
2. Every word should be interpreted literally.
3. Scripture interprets Scripture – the analogy of Scripture.
4. Scripture is to be interpreted by the Analogy of Faith.
5. Christ is the center of the Bible and of all interpretation.
6. The Bible shall be divided into Law and Gospel.

As you know, hermeneutics entails much more than that. Yet these six points are clear enough and basic enough that they can be easily taught in our parishes. Our parishioners, armed with these six principles, will be able to properly wield the sword of the Spirit and---with the aid of the shield of faith---quench the fiery darts of the devil, (Eph 6:12-17).

We exhort you therefore to study to show yourself approved unto God, that you will not be ashamed before him at his coming, (II Tim 2:15; I John 2:28). We exhort you to preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine, (II Tim 4:2). We exhort you to feed the flock of God which is among you, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, (I Pe 5:2; Acts 20:28). We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, (II Thes 1:11).

May you be enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge. Thanks be to God!