

The Need to Study Scripture as a Whole

Getting a Biblical doctrinal balance by examining all that Scripture has to say on a subject

Introduction

There are many ways to get deceived and to form unbiblical notions about a certain subject. Often the cause is that people misrepresent what the Bible says or just ignore key texts; this results in the worst heresies. However, there is a more common problem amongst evangelicals.

This is where people form doctrines by referring to specific texts, or perhaps a few texts, but not from a complete reading of Scripture. Very often sound interpretation is determined by observing a controlling text, usually in the apostolic writings. The later revelation must clarify the earlier, just as the clear interpretation clarifies the symbolic or partly formed. This rule is universally ignored today.

For example; genuine church officers do not wear religious vestments of any sort, neither are they to do anything to establish some form of higher status than the members, nor are they to adopt formal titles (Matt 23:8). They are equal members one of another and all are to be subject to everyone else (1 Pt 5:5). There is to be no authoritarian domination of the church by men and, therefore, no status symbols of any kind, whether being on a platform, taking a title or having vestments (1 Pt 5:2-3). Yet by following the practice of the Old Covenant, evangelical leaders, in various denominations, do all of these things. Some conservative Reformed church preachers wear the academic robe and insist on being called reverend or pastor. Anglicans wear various coloured robes and have various leadership titles that are unbiblical and near blasphemous (e.g. vicar or priest – Christ is the only vicar or mediator and we are all priests). Charismatics have various titles for leadership, apostle, prophet etc. and elevate men on platforms to speak. We could go on.

The problem here is that Old Covenant texts, which related only to the situation in Israel under Mosaic Law, have been treated as acceptable practice in a New Covenant situation. They are not. This is a failure to see the importance of apostolic teaching on leadership, church membership, church meetings and ministry.

A series of examples from the life and ministry of Christ

Perhaps the Lord himself is subjected to more misrepresentation in the world than anyone or anything else in Scripture. Here are a few examples of this.

Marxists

Marxism hates the idea of God and institutional religion. Yet modern Marxist philosopher, Slavoj Zizek said recently on BBC2 Newsnight that Jesus was his hero. He then explained that this was because Jesus said: 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple,' (Lk 14:26). And, 'Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword,' (Matt 10:34).

By taking these verses in isolation and ignoring everything else Jesus said, he portrays Jesus as a committed freedom fighter zealous to overthrow a cultural and political system. Yet Jesus also told us to pay taxes to Caesar (i.e. our government), while his apostles (who were passing on Jesus' final words from heaven) told us to obey authorities and give all

those in authority respect (Rm 13:1; Titus 3:1). The Marxist interpretation of Jesus is untenable.

Transcendental Meditation

It may surprise some to know that Transcendental Meditation (TM) advocates regularly mention the Lord Jesus in recruiting seminars since this is a means to interacting with those in the west, despite TM being a derived sect of Hinduism. Consequently, they will seek verses from Scripture which appear to comply with their theology. One such verse is, 'For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you,' (Lk 17:21). By quoting this they affirm the benefits of mysticism, declaring its basic premise that men are gods but don't know it and need to release the god inside by the discipline of TM. Yet this idea is a pole apart from the entire teaching of the Bible, which universally affirms that man is a sinner, is unrighteous, cannot be holy and is separate from God. Furthermore, Jesus' whole life is a testimony of praying to the Father outside himself. The Father sits in heaven and had sent the Son to Earth to perform a specific task. Jesus' teaching of his disciples constantly affirms the need to pray and commune with God in heaven, not to be subjective and stimulate inner feelings.

What Jesus meant by saying that the kingdom was within can be variously explained. After being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom would come, by which they meant the universal reign of the Messiah conquering their enemies, Jesus shows that the kingdom has already come in his person and is standing in the midst of them now. Others believe that he means the reign of God by the Spirit in the heart of those believe in him. Christians have the kingdom inside them but reprobates do not. What is impossible is the TM interpretation.

Liberation Theology

Originating in Latin America and the US civil rights movement, Liberation Theology (LT) seeks to work out the Lordship of Christ in the political and social arena; salvation is not trusting in Christ for salvation but is self-denunciation and working for others in need. It seeks to bring God's liberating power to human societies. Latin American LT sought relief from economic oppression; US black theology from social oppression. It is slightly Marxist in methodology (more so in South America), adapting the NT under Marxist principles of communism to alleviate the problems of the poor in Latin America. Its chief theologian (Gustavo Gutierrez) has an unbiblical view of salvation (people are saved as they open themselves to God and help others); an unbiblical view of sin (negation of fellow human beings as brother); an unbiblical view of faith (an act of trust in commitment to God and one's neighbour); an unbiblical view of Christian objectives (political liberation); and an unbiblical view of eschatology (cultural and political revolution to make the kingdom of God).

LT sees Christ as the liberator from sinful structures of society, a model for liberation. Consequently, it would focus upon a narrative such as the Lord overturning the tables in the temple and driving out the hucksters. It would centre on Christ's compassion for the poor and concern for their welfare. However, it completely ignores Christ's statement that, 'For the poor you have with you always,' (Jn 12:8). There will never be a utopia operational in this sinful world and liberation of all human societies is not a goal for the Gospel because, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here,' (Jn 18:36). Our goal is the liberation that becomes physically effectual after the Second Coming; the current liberation is spiritual. Furthermore, Christ repeatedly warned his followers that persecution will follow all those who follow him (Matt 5:11, 23:34; Jn 15:20) and that we should be patient under this tribulation, trusting in God's sovereignty over our circumstances (Rm 5:3-5; Col 1:11). Oppression is used by God to test his children and teach them patience and endurance. It

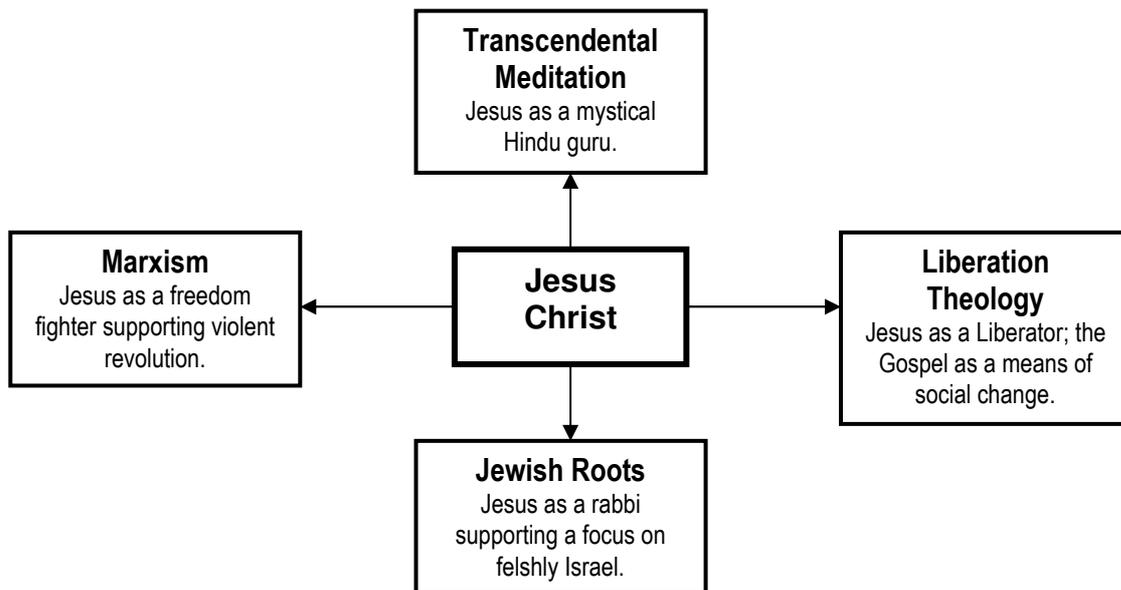
is his prerogative to overturn governments, not ours. The Christian is to be the servant of all (Matt 9:35), not a zealous revolutionary.

Jewish Roots

This system seeks, like its heretical historic predecessor Ebionism, to concentrate upon Jewish things instead of Biblical teaching. Missing the point completely that Christ's kingdom is universal and his Gospel is to all nations equally, it utterly fails to properly interpret Scripture, being stuck in Old Covenant idioms. Claiming (with historic Dispensationalists) that there are two kingdoms and two peoples of God, it holds that God has a special love for fleshly Israel and fails completely to see that the Old Covenant is cancelled (Heb 8:13) and that the old theocratic relationship of God with Israel is now severed. In fact, it was always meant to be but the beginning of God's missionary move to the nations (Isa 2:2, 56:7, 60:3, 61:11; Mic 4:1-2; Mal 1:11), which Israel utterly failed to comply with. Instead of bringing the Gospel to other nations, Israel continually committed apostasy by adopting the idolatrous gods of other nations (Ps 81:9-13).

Jewish Root teachers would centre attention on things like the Lord's crying over Jerusalem (Matt 23:27; Lk 13:34) claiming that he is crying for the Jewish people – in fact the text shows that he was crying for the elect ('children') which the Jerusalem religious powers persecuted. What Jewish Root teachers never mention is that Christ said, 'Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it,' (Matt 21:43). This text alone destroys all the Jewish Roots arguments.

Summary of false pictures of Christ



We could continue in this vein but enough has been shown to demonstrate the point that many different groups claim that Jesus' teaching supports their particular heresy. Focusing upon selected texts is foolish unless they comply with all that Christ said as well as the general Biblical teaching and particularly with what the apostles said about the matter.

Ways in which this is done in evangelical churches today

Hierarchical leadership

It is common in evangelical churches to have a hierarchical or even pyramidal leadership structure; particularly so in Charismatic churches where there are often multi-layered ministries. This goes back partly to Old Covenant systems and partly to worldly

methodology. The temple was presided over by the high priest and beneath him were a number of priests in his family to assist in the work. Beneath them were the various orders of Levites with different ministries regarding the work of the temple and offerings or, in the time of the Tabernacle, dealing with the erection and striking of the Tabernacle and its transportation.

Were these inspired? Yes. Were they following God's clear word? Yes. Is this practically applicable now? No! Why? The New Covenant changed all of this operation; all the external means of church worship were discontinued in their historical forms and took on a spiritual meaning. There are no more sacrificial offerings, they pointed to the great sacrifice and offering of Christ on the cross. There is no more temple or any building made with hands; the church is God's temple; he dwells in human hearts not bricks and mortar. We could continue through all the forms of Old Covenant worship. Apostolic teaching makes it clear that all things are new and shows us exactly how churches meet and worship – in simplicity and without organisation, hierarchy or excessive ritual. The focus is on edification in fellowship and the only prescribed ritual is the simple breaking of bread to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, the meeting is always in a home and is small in number. All this is very clear apostolic teaching, and yet it is universally ignored in favour of Old Covenant systems.

Dancing

Charismatics and Pentecostals encourage the worship of God in improvised dancing; some institutional churches also practice more formalised dancing or acted out dances. They base this on Old Covenant texts such as, '**Praise Him with the timbrel and dance**' (Ps 150:4) and '**Let them praise His name with the dance**' (Ps 149:3). Is this acceptable? No it is not!

Dancing is one of the Old Covenant forms that has vanished after the cross, with all the other cultural forms. In fact, even under the Old Covenant dancing is rarely mentioned and when David danced for joy it was considered scandalous and unbecoming for a king. Dancing of girls with tabrets (timbrels, tambourines or small drums) was a cultural aspect of ancient Israel and other nations, often seen at occasions such as weddings. Many would have tabrets and spontaneously dance with them for joy. A Biblical example of this is Miriam after the Red Sea, '**Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances,**' (Ex 15:20). This is not a cultural norm in modern Britain and Scripture commands that what we do in church must be done with decency and order (1 Cor 14:40) i.e. not cause a scandal or offence to outsiders.

More importantly, dancing fails to grasp the change that has occurred with New Covenant worship. The New Covenant has internalised the way we worship and approach God. We must worship in Spirit and Truth, not in the flesh or in excitement. Worship is not external, is not in outward forms, but is in Spirit and Truth. The Old Covenant external forms are now applied spiritually; the loud music of the temple is gone and represents the spiritual harmony of the worshipping heart. The hierarchical priesthood is gone as every member is now a priest with a part to play in the meeting. The Ark of the Covenant has gone, which is now represented in Christ our mercy seat. We no longer blow silver trumpets at the New Moon or even celebrate Jewish feasts lest we get into bondage to externals (Gal 4:3, 9, 24-25, 5:1). The temple itself has gone since God dwells in the heart of every believer.

Prophecy

Have you noticed that apostles and prophets in the New Testament, when bringing the oracles of God, did not use the normal phraseology of OT prophets. They did not announce their words with, '**Thus says, the Lord of Hosts**' or '**Thus says the Lord God of Israel**'. Even the phrase,

'Thus says the Lord' does not appear at all in the New Testament. Why then do Charismatic prophets regularly seek to add authority to their words by using this phrase – it is Old Covenant.

Old Testament prophets were special men on whom the Spirit fell from time to time and used them as a mouthpiece for God's word. They did not have the indwelling Spirit as we do now after the cross; nor were they baptised in the Spirit in union with Christ, since this occurred at Pentecost (I am not referring to a Charismatic experience here). They were vital in re-establishing divine order after a breakdown; when things go wrong, prophetic ministry was required to show the way back; which is why they are more frequently operative later in Israel's history. They were God's corrective.

Under the New Covenant economy prophetic ministry is not the same; it is an encouragement by bringing an application of God's word. For a time in the early church, prophets with powers of inspiration were necessary, working with the apostles to establish the church but, with this form of apostolic ministry, they passed away. When the church was established in communities with elders and the Bible more readily available, prophets were no longer necessary as inspired mouthpieces. Before the Bible was available, prophetic ministry was vital.

At the end of the 1st century it was clear than many things had changed which were earlier not fully understood. With the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, it became clear to all that the Jewish system was finished and the book of Hebrews made more sense. Without a temple and officiating priesthood Biblical Judaism cannot function; it is only in an unbiblical Pharisaic (and heretical) manner that rabbinic Judaism continues to flourish. With the death of John the last apostle passed away and gone forever was the ministry of the apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:14) – i.e. those who had met Christ and were commissioned by him to preach the Gospel with power and plant churches with authority. Gone were the signs and wonders, which were to authenticate apostolic ministry and set it apart from the hundreds of other contemporary cults (Heb 2:4). Gone was forth-telling prophetic ministry and gone was the gift of tongues, not longer required as a sign of judgment to Israel (1 Cor 14:21-22) since Israel was finished in the mind of God in that form (in God's will some are still saved along with the Gentile elect and by the same Gospel).

Is there apostolic ministry today? Yes, but not as it was. Apostles to the churches (2 Cor 8:23 'messengers' = 'apostles') are not apostles of the Lamb. An apostle now is a church planter that is sent from a home church to initiate a new work. He has no more authority in his home church other than what he uses there (e.g. as a teacher). Is there prophetic ministry today? Yes, but not as it was. Prophets bring the spiritual authority of God's word to encourage people in a powerful way; in a different way from the didactic ministry of teachers. Both are required. Are there tongues today? No! When tongues ceased, they ceased forever, as the Greek text of 1 Cor 13:10 makes clear.

This is why NT prophets do not use the language of OT prophets. They are a different breed. What Charismatics repeatedly try to do is to bring about Old Covenant ministry that has been cancelled because they do not understand the New Testament teaching. Prophets do not have the same sort of authority of OT prophets and neither the same power. They cannot call down fire from heaven or hold back rain. They do not raise people from the dead or make axe heads float. Rather, '**he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men,**' (1 Cor 14:3). This mistake would not be made if people looked at the whole teaching on prophetic ministry and not just a part of it. It is also why Charismatic prophets today cannot actually do supernatural things, despite their claims.

We could continue to list items, such as fasting or tithing; the New Covenant believer does not practice these in the way of the Old Covenant. New Covenant believers do not stop eating food in order to gain spiritual power through human effort, they are under grace and are priests to God. The affliction of the flesh through fasting is now fulfilled in the putting off of the old man. The flesh is not starved any longer but considered dead. Giving is no longer merely of 10% of produce but is 100% of everything, including ourselves.

Conclusion

It is vitally important to understand that the teaching of the apostles is the final words of Jesus from heaven to his church. It is common today to find people disparaging apostolic teaching or even setting it aside completely (as with Jewish Root groups). This is close to blasphemy since the words of the apostles are the words of Christ. This is what inspiration means.

Christ promised to lead his disciples into all truth to remind them of what he said which is not recorded in the Gospel narratives. He also explained that the Spirit would be sent to them to bring them what Christ himself said from heaven:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you... I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you. Jn 16:7-15

Jesus promised that the Spirit would hear Christ's words from heaven and bring those very words to his chosen apostles. These words would glorify him and would actually emanate from the Father, through the ascended Christ. This makes apostolic teaching of supreme importance in Scripture; it represents the final revelation that God gives to the church through Christ by the inspiration of the Spirit into men. Any doctrine which contradicts apostolic teaching is heresy, pure and simple; even if it is based on Old Testament verses. Thus, for instance, Jewish Root doctrine is heretical because it is violently opposed to clear apostolic teaching.

We must interact with what the apostles teach and carefully interpret what we find in the Old Testament. We cannot take verses out of the Old Testament and simply teach them as applicable and valid in that form unless the apostles have endorsed that. The Old Covenant is a shadow of the real thing, which is in Christ; it is not the true form but only a shady reflection. If the words of Christ and his apostles are the sun, then the Old Covenant is the moon.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2010
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>