The Lion

The best method of studying the Bible is the common method of reading literature that is taught in schools everywhere from the elementary years through high school, and in college courses like interpreting the short story. This is the method of "keeping your finger on the text," by which I mean taking the text with the utmost seriousness, paying attention to the intention of the author, making sure that your interpretation of the text is based on detailed observations of what you find there, and truly enjoying and respecting the creativity of the author. It is sobering to think that some biblical scholars assert that their technical, critical approach to the biblical text provides their readers with some very special, higher knowledge that is better than the knowledge of a common reader. This is a very serious matter because such scholarship sets itself up as a barrier between "children" and the presence of Jesus Christ himself.

Many scholars on the conservative side of the theological spectrum put unwarranted emphasis on the non-existent biblical "autographs." These conservative scholars imagine that they are defending the Bible, when people observe errors in the text, by assigning the errors only to the existing manuscripts from which our Bibles are translated. These manuscripts have gone through a copying process, and they are certainly not the original autographs. The autographs themselves were inerrant according to these conservative scholars.

It is almost as if practically everybody seems to think that the existing text of scripture is somehow inferior. Well of course, not everybody believes that; it is just that this view is very widespread over the whole spectrum of theology, from progressive to conservative.

It is certainly reasonable to assume that the existing manuscripts have some scribal (copying) errors in them that were not in the autographs, but there's no reason to believe that all the errors in the existing manuscripts have resulted from scribal errors. The biblical documents were written by fallible people, and they did make some mistakes, and the Holy Spirit is pleased to use the work of fallible people in revealing the living Christ to unbelievers in evangelism. He also engages believers throughout their lives by teaching, guiding, counseling, comforting, warning, prompting, convicting, and reminding them. The witness of the Bible will always be subject to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men and women! If examined carefully, the errors in the Bible are discovered to be only errors of detail that have no bearing on the substance of the biblical message. People disagree about which ones are truly errors, but there are not that many. What is really striking, and telling, is how the Spirit overcomes the substantial imperfections of our own verbal and practical witness to others and reveals our Lord to them even through our imperfect witness in evangelism! Furthermore, those who think that they must defend the scripture when others see errors in the text are being distracted from the real hurdle to faith in Christ. The real hurdle is the devil himself who steals the word away from people’s hearts (Luke 8:12). In evangelism, the Spirit overcomes the devil (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). Errors in the text of the scripture are of no consequence at all. The doctrine of inerrancy is conjecture, and the conjecture accomplishes nothing. The existing manuscripts of the Bible contain errors, but this does not hamper the Holy Spirit in any of His work. A call is being issued to

the proponents of the doctrine of inerrancy to be sensible. The doctrine is a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit and this is the reason it must be laid aside.

If someone thinks that all of scripture is revelation, this view is in error. Scripture is a witness to revelation (John 5:39-40). In revelation, God reveals Himself to us. This may happen through our interaction with the scripture, but it happens in other ways also. A multitude of examples are found in the testimony of the scripture. And the Lord is revealed to men and women in evangelism by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). This may happen through interaction with scripture, but it happens in other ways also. Examples are found in the scripture. And the Lord reveals himself also to us if (not when) we obey his commands (John 14:21). This may happen through our interaction with scripture, but it happens in other ways also. Examples are found in the scripture. And the Lord sometimes disciplines us for our sin; he also fellowships with us if (not when) we repent (Revelation 3:21-22). It is the Lord who reveals himself to us in fellowship, and we certainly learn to fear his discipline like a son fears the discipline of his father but still loves him. And the Spirit lives in us, and we do know Him (John 14:17). He does show many things to believers in His teaching, guiding, counseling, comforting, warning, prompting, convicting, and reminding us. He may use the scripture to do these things, or He may do them another way. We should not allow ourselves to be confused about what constitutes revelation.

The Book of Revelation is revelatory because it is a prophecy. All prophecy (OT and NT) is revelatory (Revelation 1:1-3). The Book of Revelation is a prophetic book that is intended to encourage and strengthen us in our tough experiences, such as persecution. We need this book.

We can most certainly ask our God to reveal Himself to us, and we can ask for the Lord to reveal himself to us also. Those prayers are not out of bounds. We should pray for revelation. The Lord has said very clearly that he is with us always and that he will show himself to those who obey him (Matthew 28:20; John 14:21). God revealed Himself to Elijah at Horeb, and He reveals His presence to us in any manner He chooses. This may be dramatic, or it may be quiet. God will do as He pleases. And in guiding us from within, the Spirit brings glory to the Lord by taking what belongs to him and making it known to us (John 16:14). So, the Spirit gives us knowledge that glorifies our Lord. He is the Spirit of truth. We should ask God to keep giving us such knowledge through the Spirit.

The idea that all of scripture is revelation is another example of misplaced devotion like what Paul addressed in his epistle to the Galatians, with the incursion of the Judaizers into the church in that place. The Judaizers wished to substitute adherence to the law for the role of the Spirit in the lives of believers. Paul intervened. He told the Galatians to live by the Spirit, then they would not carry out their sinful desires (Galatians 5:16). Instead of emphasizing the life of the Spirit within believers, as Paul did and as Jesus did in the Gospel of John, contemporary religious groups are attempting to substitute scripture for the Spirit. Instead of substituting scripture for the presence of the Spirit within us, we ought to give the Spirit His proper place at the helm of our lives and then orient the scriptures in a proper manner where the Spirit can use them in our lives. Our need and desire for revelation is indeed satisfied by the Spirit who lives in us, and we do know Him (John 14:17). He is always with us, and better than the Bible, immeasurably better-- the Spirit interprets and applies the Bible properly for us through His teaching, guiding, counseling, comforting, warning, prompting, convicting, and reminding us. We must emphasize what is proper, namely the presence of the Spirit within us. Let's live by the Spirit and sow to the Spirit (Galatians 6:7-8). We sow to the Spirit by practicing all the Christian practices.

Readers will now realize that I'm criticizing everyone whose approach to the Bible does not focus on the existing text which is used by the Spirit for a multitude of purposes. In Ephesians 6, the sword of the Spirit, which is the scripture, is used to defend against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:17). The Spirit uses the scripture in evangelism to reveal the truth of Jesus Christ to the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The Spirit is pleased, through the Bible, to reveal Jesus Christ to a young person who is learning how to interpret literature in school and is also therefore able to read the Bible quite productively. This criticism is directed toward anyone, conservative or progressive or otherwise, whose theology obscures the witness of the scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am not denigrating critical analysis in and of itself. Neither am I saying that Christians should not engage in the critical analysis of the Bible. Such analysis can yield authentic insights that illuminate the way of faith, but of course that depends on the presuppositions that the scholar brings to the critical methods. I assert categorically that such methods of Bible study are not better than the common method of reading literature we have all learned from our childhood and youth in school. Understanding the ancient texts of the Bible often does require some knowledge of the historical and cultural context of the times, so that type of background knowledge is surely useful.

The Church has expressed throughout its history that the Holy Spirit is pleased to teach us through the text of the Bible as we read it at our own level. The child who is too young to read may simply listen to a story from the Bible and encounter the Lion. I wonder how many erudite scholars do not believe this last statement. To be sure, plenty of scholars think that the biblical text has great deficiencies. Beware of these people. If you examine the product of their analysis carefully, you will find that their message is a distortion of the truth. The Lion is the truth.

People exhibit great creativity in postulating all sorts of ideas and arguments and “evidence” in defense of their own positions. Individuals, and institutions, assert their positions endlessly, and often very creatively and persuasively. Believers need to learn how to think for themselves. My advice would be to test everything and rely on the existing text of scripture to guide you and rely on the Holy Spirit to teach you.

Misleading scholarship may come from all over the theological spectrum. This is a warning to people, young and old, who are looking for education in biblical studies. Search carefully for teachers who love Jesus Christ and are seeking to serve him because they have been encountered by him and have experienced his gracious presence and the presence of the Spirit within them and the presence of their God. Look for teachers who are committed to discipleship and who practice Bible study as one of the essential Christian practices for the purpose of cultivating their own spiritual formation and that of their students. These teachers should be engaged in all the Christian practices and spiritual disciplines. The Holy Spirit will help us to be discerning.

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