

MODULE 7: SESSION 7

APPLIED THEOLOGY HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Interpretation Part 3

Evaluating and Using Commentaries; Synthesizing Your Study; Introduction to Application

1. Evaluating and Using Commentaries – MOST of today is simply this: READ COMMENTARIES critically! – commentary: The result of a single author’s study of a book of the Bible. (NOTE the list I will provide of useful commentaries – but read THESE critically as well!)
 - a. TYPES of COMMENTARIES
 - i. Exegetical commentaries – highly technical that require some language training to be useful
 - ii. English Commentaries – technical but not requiring language training
 - iii. Expository commentaries – less technical and more applicational
 - iv. POINT: GOOD USES for all types
 - b. Evaluating Commentaries---things to remember about commentaries
 - i. They are written by fallible humans beings
 - ii. There are more bad ones than good ones
 - iii. Look intently to discern between an opinion stated as fact and facts supported with reasons.
 - iv. Commentaries like to quote one another so beware that just because 5 generations of men quoted each other, this doesn’t make it right. – IE: Calvin leans heavily on Augustine (neither of these are infallible men)
 - v. Free commentaries online (such as Matthew Henry’s) are nice sources but keep in mind that the older they are, the less study has been made and the more likely it is more opinion and less exegesis. They have value but can lend themselves to “hero status” the older they get.
 1. IE: John Calvin’s commentaries – outstanding in regards to soteriology and terrible in regards to eschatology and Israel
 - vi. Beware of the temptation to start immediately with commentaries – it will become very difficult to form your own intelligent thoughts –
 1. SIDE NOTE: Same thing with theology books – start with Scripture first – many consider themselves SMART because

they have read a lot of what other men have studied but have not developed their own understanding of Scripture based on pure observation of the text.

2. ILL: Observe the room around you – start thinking about what features stand out to you the most – but don't think about the green chairs – NOW, that's all you are thinking about!
- vii. Commentaries will often cross reference books from the Apocrypha (e.g., 1 & 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Sirach, Prayer of Manassas) Don't be alarmed – this helps establish the normal usage of a word in the time the books were written.
- viii. Commentaries do several things for us:
 1. Serve as a check for our own study – checking several men on the same passage keep us from being misled and avoid unnecessary mistakes and shallow assumptions.
 2. Provide specialized detail and information not readily available in the text (historical, geographical, cultural, chronological, and grammatical info).
 3. Provide the author's unique application of the text which stimulates our own thinking
- c. Evaluating Commentaries--
 - i. Beware of Source Criticism: GOSPELS
 1. TWO-SOURCE THEORY--18th century
 - a. Holds to what is called MARKAN PRIORITY – that MARK was written first
 - i. Shorter, simpler
 - ii. Holds to an imaginary document called "Q" – from the German *Quelle* (source)
 - iii. IE: "Matthew and Luke both have material NOT in Mark, so they must have used Q as a source also."
 2. FOUR-SOURCE THEORY –
 - a. Same as Two-Source – but Matthew also used a document called M and Luke used a document called L
 - b. NOTE: The MAJORITY of critical commentaries on the gospels – in their introductions and throughout the commentary reference Q and M and L as if they are REAL – BE AWARE OF THIS – doesn't make the commentary BAD so far as the text itself goes, but it betrays a lower view of Scripture
 3. PROBLEMS with SOURCE CRITICISM
 - a. Assumes the existence of imaginary documents

- b. IGNORES the fact that the early church for hundreds of years was UNANIMOUS that Matthew was written first, likely followed by LUKE, and THEN Mark – our current order comes from Augustine (4th century theologian) who felt Mark came first
 - c. Assumes that so-called contradictions must somehow be explained away
 - d. Assumes a LOW VIEW of Scripture
 - e. Completely IGNORES the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
 - f. God is not capable of giving us inspired documents
 - g. Completely ignores the idea of harmonizing the gospels---that all of the 230 places of triple tradition HAVE a way to be harmonized – we may not always have the exact answers, but there are plausible explanations.
 - h. Completely ignores the fact that these are all eyewitness accounts
 - i. Often operate under the assumption that Matthew didn't actually write Matt, etc – making the authors of Scripture liars and completely ignoring the unanimous understanding of the church for hundreds of years
 - j. ALSO: If all the authors of the gospels used secondary sources NOT under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit then HUGE IMPLICATIONS:
 - k. We DON'T have the actual words of Jesus
 - l. We DON'T have the actual theology of Jesus
 - m. All we have is a second-hand account that is NOT historically reliable that MIGHT have some truth in it--YET THIS IS THE DOMINANT VIEW IN EVANGELICAL SEMINARIES TODAY---NOT the dominant view of the average church member
 - n. The goal of source criticism and similar disciplines became to examine the HISTORY BEHIND the gospels rather than considering the gospels themselves historical.
- ii. Beware of Source Criticism: NT Letters
 - 1. In general, this is the assumption that we can challenge the authorship of NT letters and that they must have been compiled using Paul's name and Peter's name but by anonymous authors.
 - iii. Beware of Source Criticism: OT –

1. Source Criticism says that the Torah (Pentateuch) is the compilation of many different authors pieced together in fragments –
2. Commentaries will refer to J E P D authors
 - a. J = Yahwist
 - b. E = Elohist
 - c. P = Priestly
 - d. D = Deuteronomic
 - e. POINT: Different men assign these different anonymous authors to various parts of the Torah – thus removing any cohesion and diminishing inspiration
 - f. POINT: When reading an OT commentary and the author starts referring to J or P authors, just be wary.
- iv. Beware of Historical Criticism: Entire Bible (presented today by scholars and most seminaries as the ONLY legitimate way to study the Bible)
 1. Historical Criticism says:
 - a. What does the text say happened?
 - b. What *actually* happened?
 - c. What do theologians and readers understand happened?
 2. IE: Robert Gundry, famous scholar who holds strongly to historical criticism holds that Peter was actually an apostate – and his views are being listened in evangelical circles.
- d. SO: Bottom line – READ CRITICALLY and look for SUPPORTED FACTS
 - i. Look for a sense of profound respect for the literal interpretation of Scripture
 - ii. Even in more liberal commentaries, good grammatical and structural info can be gleaned
 - iii. Don't assume that just because you trust an author he is infallible.
 - iv. Look for the clear acceptance of the historicity of events
 - v. Beware of careless symbolizing of a text without good reasons to do so.
 - vi. Look for arguments that support a statement – IE: Rev 4:1 – Jesus tells John, “Come up here!” – Generally accepted interpretation is that this is the rapture – but the text doesn't say that! (Now, the rapture occurs chronologically between chpts 3-4)
- e. EXAMPLE: Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

- i. Three Major Observations:
 1. God requires that we rid ourselves of internal sinful attitudes and external sinful actions toward other believers.
 2. God requires that we put on Godly internal attitudes and external actions toward other believers.
 3. We are to forgive others with the standard being how God has forgiven us.
 - ii. I've synthesized that to ONE SUMMARY STATEMENT – exegetical proposition: *What is inside matters to God and determines our actions.*
 - iii. Commentary sample:
 1. Exegetical Commentary – Harold Hoehner – 8 pages on my passage
 - a. Concerning “Be kind to one another,” Hoehner observes, “In the LXX [Septuagint] it appears twelve times . . . it is used to refer to Ahasuerus’ graciousness to Esther when she was given Haman’s house (Esth 8:7).” Very helpful and very factual
 2. Exegetical Commentary – James M. Boice – Part of a chpt on Eph 4:25-32 called “Putting Off and Putting On.”
 - a. His only observation of our two verses: “The last of Paul’s five contrasts is a catchall. On the one hand, he speaks of bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice – six vices. On the other hand, he [gives] . . . three virtues.”
 - b. KEY: Boice has opened up a tremendous introductory comment to help set the context: “The last of Paul’s five contrasts” – GREAT way to introduce the text!
2. Final Thoughts on Synthesizing Your Study
- a. Read back through the study you have done and (if you have a hard copy) mark or highlight the parts that really grab your attention. Highlight the parts that are really the keys to understanding the text. Highlight the newest things you learned or the freshest angles you discovered.
 - b. At this point, you are now beginning to think in terms of how you would organize this information for presentation.
 - c. SNEAK PEEK:
 - i. Already done one technical term: *exegetical proposition* – a synthesis statement about your text – IE: Eph 4:31-32 -- *What is inside matters to God and determines our actions.*
 1. This is the boiled-down summary of the interpretation of the text.

