

HERMENEUTICS (I): Principles, Problems, and the Use of Extra-Biblical Sources

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Broadly speaking, *hermeneutics* is the science of textual interpretation. *Biblical hermeneutics* is the science of properly interpreting the text of the Bible. The Bible claims to have been given by the “inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Hermeneutics does not attempt to argue the claims of inspiration or the integrity of the biblical text¹, but simply deals with the proper interpretation of the text itself. That being said, a healthy respect for the divine inspiration of Scripture can have a significant effect as to the approach to and handling of the biblical text.

There has been basic agreement among Bible scholars and students over the years as to the broad principles of biblical hermeneutics. I do not wish to rehearse all of those principles in this short paper, but only to suggest and encourage a study of some good texts on the subject if one wishes to engage in a personal study of this important topic.² Nevertheless, there has been in recent times more than one call for a “new hermeneutic.” These “new hermeneutics” are generally characterized by a rejection of an old, stale, patternistic way of looking at Scripture for a less restricted, liberating, and elastic method of interpretation.

Hermeneutics – the Jesus Way

When Jesus joined Cleopas and another disciple on the day of his resurrection, he talked with them as they walked to Emmaus (Luke 24:13f). After they demonstrated that they did not understand God’s purpose in the death of Jesus, we are told,

²⁵Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” ²⁷And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He **expounded** to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (vv. 25-27).³

The word “expounded” is translated from the Greek word διερμυνωσεν (dierneneusen). It can also be translated “explained” or “interpreted” (see use of this word for “interpret” 1 Cor. 12:30; 14:5, 13, 27). Thayer notes its meaning as “to unfold the meaning of what is said, explain, expound.”⁴ Jesus used the principles of what we call “hermeneutics,” or exegesis, to open the meaning of the Scriptures to them. He would do the same thing a little later to a larger gathering of disciples:

¹ Apologetics deals with the investigation of inspiration, and textual criticism (lower biblical criticism) deals with the integrity of the text as handed down through the centuries.

² Standard texts that have been used among brethren include D. R. Dungan’s *Hermeneutics* and Louis Berkof’s *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, as well as Bernard Ramm’s *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*.

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations will be taken from the New King James Version.

⁴ Thayer’s Greek Lexicon.

⁴⁴Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” ⁴⁵And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

Establishing Biblical Authority

The methods of interpretation necessary in establishing biblical authority have been recognized as 1. Direct Command/Statement of Fact, 2. Approved Apostolic Example, and 3. Necessary Inference. This has been referred to as *CENI* : (*Command, Example, Necessary Inference*).

Jesus made use of each of these methods in his teaching. He referred to statements of fact (Matt. 19:3-6), commands (Lk. 10:25-28), approved examples (Jn. 13:13-15), and necessary inferences (Matt. 22:31-32). These same methods were also employed in the controversy in Jerusalem in Acts 15. Peter appealed to the approved example of the conversion and God’s acknowledgement of Cornelius and his household (vv. 7-11). Barnabas and Paul appealed to the miracles and wonders that God had worked through them among the Gentiles as a necessary inference of God’s approval (vv. 12). James quoted a statement of fact from the prophetic scriptures (vv. 15-18). These methods have not been dreamed up by patternistic-minded religionists bent on bringing men into the clutches of legalism. They are common methods of interpretation employed by mankind as well as illustrated in the Bible.

This has not stopped some from attacking these methods of biblical interpretation:

For those unfamiliar with the term in the title of this article [The Legalistic Leap of CENI, *mwg*], **CENI** merely refers to a specific hermeneutical theory, largely embraced by those who have a tendency toward legalism and patternism, the major tenets of which are: *Command, Example, Necessary Inference*. The primary problem with this one particular interpretative theory is the inherent tendency toward inconsistency with regard to application, especially with respect to the establishment of religious *authority*. Few disciples have any real argument with the use of divine *commands* contained in Scripture to ascertain the will of God. The problem arises with how, and to what extent, one employs biblical examples and human inferences to determine and establish binding decrees applicable to all of mankind throughout the ages. Does such selective, subjective use of examples and the accrued assumptions of fallible men have the right to assume the status of regulatory LAW over the disciples of Christ? And just *who* gets to determine *which* examples apply? Who's assumptions and deductions are to be equated with divine decree, and who's are not? And *who* gets to decide? Each group of patternists and legalists, of course, insist *their* deductions from Scripture are TRUTH, and that which is inferred by *others* is FALSEHOOD. It doesn't take a genius to see how such a hermeneutical approach to the establishment of one's *Faith* leads far more frequently to the establishment of *Factions*.⁵

Within churches of Christ, believers have usually required a very restrictive form of Bible interpretation. Churches of Christ traditionally demand positive authorization from scripture

⁵ Maxey, *The Legalistic Leap of CENI*, (emphasis his).

for every aspect of faith and practice. This authority is established by a direct statement, approved example, or necessary inference from the Bible for everything we do. Wherever the scriptures are silent, the lack of positive authority is said to forbid. Though expedients are accepted as being generically authorized by a specific duty (e.g. Noah's tools which would be necessary for building the ark, though not specifically commanded by God), churches of Christ usually claim to reject whatever cannot be logically derived from a command, example, or implication in scripture.

Though the basic premise of returning to scripture and simply believing, teaching, and doing whatever the early Christians under the direction of the apostles did is commendable, there are, nevertheless, serious objections that can be raised against the actual application of our traditional hermeneutic in churches of Christ.

First, where is the Bible authority for requiring positive authorization from scripture for every aspect of faith and practice? The proof-texts used to support this theory fall short of establishing such a requirement as a universal rule for believers. Second, where does the Bible teach the examples of early Christians are equivalent to divine commands in binding religious obligation on believers today? The practice of early Christians was certainly directed by apostolic instruction, and none can deny their examples would constitute permission to do the same, but can we logically infer these examples, in the absence of explicit commands, are to serve as binding illustrations of religious obligation, deviation from which cannot be tolerated? Third, where is the biblical precedent for judging and separating from believers whose judgment on matters not explicitly addressed by scripture differs from our own? Central to the traditional hermeneutic in churches of Christ is the belief that without positive authorization from scripture any practice is unlawful and, therefore, sinful. Does the Bible actually teach such a strict standard of refusing to fellowship those with whom we disagree? What happened to speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where it is silent? If the Bible does not condemn my brother in his application of a biblical principle, on what basis may I lawfully do so (Ro. 14:4)?⁶

Those who mock brethren who are diligent in "rightly dividing the word of truth" and careful "not to think beyond what is written" (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Cor. 4:6) should be very cautious in their disdain for the proper interpretation of the scriptures taught in the scriptures themselves. Setting aside the will of God for man today by calling for an "elastic gospel" or saying the New Testament is nothing more than a "collection of love letters" demonstrates a digressive mindset that rejects the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9). This all leads to the predictable cry for a "new hermeneutic" which is nothing more than an attempt to formulate a "no-pattern" pattern for human will-worship.⁷

⁶ Ellis. Ellis further demonstrates his disdain for the authority of approved apostolic examples when he states in footnote v, "Acts 20:7 is interpreted by many in churches of Christ as prescriptive in designating every first day of the week for observance of the Lord's Supper. This interpretation is so definite in the minds of some they are willing to condemn those who would permit observance on another day or at any interval other than weekly. Yet nowhere in the discussion of the memorial in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, or 1 Corinthians is a specific day or frequency expressly mandated by any inspired person."

⁷ A good overview of recent calls for a "new hermeneutic" can be found in Chris Reeves, *Out with the Old and In with the New: The Cry for a "New Hermeneutic"* (see bibliography).

Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

In any effort to understand the truth of God, the Scriptures must be allowed to speak for themselves. The exegetical method must include word meanings, contextual consideration, and literary analysis. These, and other supporting methods, contribute to the main task of a thorough analysis of the content of the written word. The Bible must be allowed to speak to us as to what the Holy Spirit originally revealed through the author to the first century audience. Then careful application must be made to our situation today from those timeless and unchanging truths found therein.

While **exegesis** is the drawing out of a text its meaning, **eisegesis** is bringing into the text outside preconceived notions that intentionally, or unintentionally, alter the proper interpretation of that text. Everyone must guard against this, because no one enters into the task of biblical study as a pure blank slate. We are who we are, shaped by our culture, parental guidance, peer relationships, experiences, and educational pursuits. The challenge is twofold: 1) to identify our own biases and preconceptions for what they are, and 2) be willing to lay them aside as the task of biblical exegesis is pursued. As the divine text is understood according to a proper hermeneutic, our biases and preconceptions will be changed, discarded, or confirmed according to the standard of God's word. This is the diligence and study that is required to present ourselves approved to God, workers who do not "need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). In this same context, the apostle Paul warns about striving about words to no profit (v. 14), profane and vain babblings (v. 16), and false doctrine (vv. 17-18). Such things will cause us to fail in "rightly dividing the word of truth."

The Twistings of Error

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter gives warning about false teachers (ch. 2) and scoffers (ch. 3) because of the danger they presented to those established in the present truth (1:12; 3:17). To avoid these errors of the wicked they were to diligently add to their faith (1:5-7) and grow in knowledge (3:18). The knowledge of Christ and His inspired truth would make them fruitful (1:8), their calling and election sure (1:10), and ready to be found by Christ in peace, without spot and blameless (3:14).

Peter describes the perverse handling of God's word by those in error:

¹⁵and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Please note that while Peter describes some of Paul's writings as "hard to understand," he did not proclaim them as *impossible* to understand. Yet, some of the more difficult matters were twisted by the untaught and unstable. The *untaught* (amatheis ἀμαθεῖς) are the unlearned, the ignorant who are so because of their spiritual youth and/or lack of (or unwillingness to) study. The *unstable* (asteriktoi ἀστηρικτοί; same word used in 2:14) are the unestablished, the unsteadfast

who are unwilling to stand upon the truth that they have learned. This could be because they find that truth unappealing or contradictory to some other course of thinking that they desire. Because of these problems, they *twist* (streblousin στρεβλοῦσιν) the Scriptures. The meaning of this word is to distort; “metaphorically, to pervert, of one who wrests or tortures language to a false sense.”⁸ This can involve, for example, giving words additional meanings not supported by the context or switching language between figurative and literal, again without contextual support. All of this results “to their own destruction” because they are lead away into error. This error is not just “another viewpoint” or “has some truth to it” or is something “we have missed until now.” It is a twisting alteration of divinely revealed truth in a way that threatens one’s steadfastness and faith!

Similar to this is Paul’s warning to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:3-4) that the time would come when some would not “endure sound doctrine.” *Endure* (anexontai ἀνεξονταί) means to bear with, hold up, have patience with. They will see to it that they hear what they want to hear by “heaping up for themselves teachers” according to their own desires. It is easy to collect preachers, scholars, and references to support our position. But if it results in turning away from the truth, we have gone too far. Outside of truth are fables – inventions of falsehood. Perhaps they contain a little truth, but they are still fables which do not represent truth in its entirety.

Sola Scriptura

Without going into the history of this phrase,⁹ allow me to use the general idea that it represents – that Scripture alone is complete, authoritative, true, and sufficient for the faith and practice of the Christian today.¹⁰ The Scriptures speak accurately and truthfully on every subject. There is absolutely no need for any additional documents or writings of man to supplement any perceived lack in the Bible. Creeds, dogmas, catechisms, and the like are unnecessary and divisive.

This is true about secular educational disciplines as well, such as science, humanities, history, archaeology, etc. They can contribute to background information about people, places, and things mentioned in the Bible. At the same time, these outside, human disciplines must *never* be allowed to control the interpretation of the Scriptures. Scientific theory cannot take a historical, literal text such as Genesis 1-2 and alter its interpretation into a figurative, poetic, non-literal text in order to accommodate the demands of that theory. Tentative, changing archaeological theories must not be allowed to deny the historical record of the Exodus or the destruction of Jericho.

Historical studies are subject to the availability of materials and the veracity of those recording history. One can never be sure that all available opinions or situations are represented in the available materials, or that some may have been lost or unrecorded. One must carefully study the documents to determine if what is recorded is true, and not tainted by bias or ignorance. Historical studies on the canon of New Testament have led some to question the authenticity of certain books. This is unfortunate because historical studies are not the standard by which we should judge canonicity. That is a matter of faith based on the testimony of Scripture itself. This

⁸ Thayer.

⁹ For more information on the history of *sola Scriptura*, see John Gibson’s lecture manuscript (see bibliography).

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3

is not circular reasoning, but allowing a source to present itself for examination on its own merits and claims.

As touching the subject of this study – the New Perspective on Paul – research in extra-biblical literature (in particular Jewish rabbinic literature) has been used to redefine the nature of second Temple Judaism as non-legalistic. We must be very cautious in drawing hard and fast conclusions from these historical studies which then are used as a template, or paradigm, to radically reinterpret Paul’s view of the Law, his dispute with the Judaizing teachers, and his purpose for teaching justification by faith.

The elevation of such extra-biblical sources to the level that would force the reinterpretation of Scripture is sometimes referred to as the “67th book.” The idea is that though there are only 66 inspired books in the biblical canon, there is, in fact, a “67th book” of additional outside material that carries an equal amount of authority. Theistic evolutionists have contended that nature is an additional aspect of God’s revelation that we have missed, so it is the 67th book. What they actually mean is that evolutionary theory about nature is in that book and affects our understanding of Genesis and creation.¹¹ It has also been suggested that human psychological research is the 67th book.¹²

Again, we need to understand that the Bible is that which judges the rightness or wrongness of human studies and conclusions. It is authoritative and sufficient. For the Christian who wants to know all things which pertain to life and godliness, it is sola Scriptura!

The Historical Context of Scripture and Extra-Biblical Sources

Without question, the Bible events and writers existed in a certain historical context, whether it is described through geography, culture, government, or time. The Bible writers would often frame their writings in the context of their time (Luke 3:1-2). Bible classes that study Bible books usually do a background study of the historical context of the times in which a book was written, and of the people and events recorded therein. While this is commendable and encouraged, should we consider it *absolutely necessary* to know such background material to properly interpret, understand, and apply the word of God? Could someone simply pick up a Bible, totally unaware of the background historical context, and arrive at a sufficient and adequate understanding of God’s truth for him today? I contend that he can!

But not everyone would agree with this view. David McClister, religion professor at Florida College, in a 2009 Florida College lecture made the following remarks as he discussed some “good things” that have come out the New Perspective on Paul:

First of all, an emphasis on the fact that we have to understand New Testament texts in light of their historical context. Not often, but once in a while, I’ll get somebody ask me, “Why do I have to mess with all this new perspective/old perspective stuff. Why can’t I just pick up Romans and read it?” Well, the answer is that Romans is neck-deep in this context; that

¹¹ *Is Nature the 67th Book of the Bible?*

¹² Waymeyer.

when you read Romans, you are in this context, and you've got to understand that to understand what Paul is saying. You can't just pick up Romans and read it context-less. We have to figure out what Paul was talking about, and the best evidence from ancient Judaism is that he's not talking about Calvinism, that he was talking about something else. And it behooves us to understand that if we are going to understand Paul correctly.¹³

From these remarks, are to understand McClister as saying that we cannot just pick up the book of Romans and exegetically, from the text alone, come to an understanding of the truth the Holy Spirit revealed through the apostle Paul? Must we immerse ourselves in extra-biblical sources in order to truly understand Paul's message? It would seem so, for he states that we "have to understand New Testament texts in the light of their historical context" and "you've got to understand [the historical context] to understand what Paul is saying." Without it, apparently, we are clueless, and commentaries of good brethren in the past that have failed to use this new perspective are rendered useless.

This is no academic question, for many do not have access to the extensive amount of historical research about the larger context of the world in which Bible people, places and events existed. Must one know the origin, geography, history, and culture of the city of Philippi to understand the Holy Spirit's revelation by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the church at Philippi? I think not. Such knowledge can certainly add to one's appreciation for the things that are said and add "flavor" to a Bible study or sermon. By a knowledge of the history and geography of the seven churches of Asia one can note certain things spoken by the Lord in the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 that would have had a special meaning to each congregation (e. g. Laodicea's water was lukewarm when it arrived from the hot springs of Hierapolis and cold springs of Colossae – Lord would spew out "lukewarm" disciples, Rev. 3:15-16). But if one did not know anything about such matters he could still discern the teaching of the Lord in these seven letters. Many such examples could be given.

The point is that while researching the historical context of Scripture from extra-biblical sources can be helpful in learning about the wider world in which the Scriptures were written, it is not itself inspired of God. It is the product of the research of men with all the attending problems that can come with it – biased analysis, lack of original records, misunderstood evidence, and ever-shifting conclusions. The most dangerous problem is the tendency to subject the interpretation of Scripture to the prevailing historical theories of the day, and the contention that a passage of Scripture cannot be properly understood without first understanding its historical context. This places the interpretation of inspired Scripture at the mercy of uninspired historical research.¹⁴

Others on the Use and Misuse of Extra-Biblical Sources

Others have raised the same concerns about the use and misuse of extra-biblical sources in Bible study and hermeneutics. Edward W. Klink III used his internet blog to address this issue and

¹³ McClister, transcription mine.

¹⁴ McClister further stated in his lecture: "If we are going to debate and revise the picture of the historical context, then we need to debate and revise the exegesis that is based on that context." Here we have a statement that would subject the exegesis of Scripture to the ever-changing and uninspired human debates about historical context. This opens the door to multiple interpretations and the disregard for the inspiration of Scripture.

raise some excellent points for consideration. I quote him in full along with some extra material he wrote in his comments section:

How necessary are extra-biblical sources for reading Scripture? Even for those who believe the Bible *is* Scripture, the text is assumed to stand behind a dense fog of historical distance and cultural isolation. I teach a class called Biblical Backgrounds to upper-level biblical and theological studies majors at Biola University, and it is by far my most dreaded class. I do not dread the class because the course is uninteresting or unimportant; on the contrary, I find extra-biblical sources like history and culture to be fascinating and think the class might be the most important one I teach. But it is important not because backgrounds gives necessary insights for the study of the Bible, but because it might be the most destructive tool for reading the Bible *as* Scripture.

I want to say this carefully, because I am the first to use backgrounds material in my reading of Scripture. Extra-biblical sources are dangerous because they remain unchecked, since the “meaning” of the text and its historical context are often inappropriately coalesced in the process of interpretation. The history behind the text is not the same thing as *the text*; and the Bible is far more than a text – it is Scripture (cf. *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* by Michael Legaspi, 2010). Ultimately it can only be the text – inspired Scripture – that is the final and arbitrating *authority*. At stake is not merely the control or influence of what can only be a reconstruction (a hypothesis or educated guess), but also the imposition of an alien or foreign authority on the Bible. Thus, the question for evangelicals is not “if” we use background material, for of course we do; the question is “how” do we use background material when interpreting Scripture.

I am currently writing a commentary on the Gospel of John for the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (Zondervan), and I use backgrounds in every passage. But as I write I am careful to interpret “John,” not the history or events to which he refers (cf. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* by Hans Frei, 1974). John (and God) has already interpreted the history and events for me; there is no cleaner presentation or preferable perspective from which to stand than from within the confines of “John.” The attempt to get “behind” John to explore the history, culture, or events themselves would be not only to interpret something other than “John,” but to undermine the very presentation provided by “John,” that is, provided by God.

Comments:

I do want to say that I am in no way unconcerned with history or extra-biblical sources; to be a good reader of Scripture I must be. Rather, I am saying that to read Scripture one must be not less but more concerned with such tools. In my humble opinion, the more difficult task for the exegete, and maybe more necessary, is not becoming a fluent historian, but becoming a fluent theologian. Not a theologian who lacks historical-cultural sensitivity, but one who knows where it belongs, knows where it is deficient, and knows when to apply it - and when not to apply it.

The study of the Bible today is so deeply divided between the sub-disciplines (a generous description) of biblical studies and theology that the one is not giving enough assistance to the other. A biblical studies person will not even think of themselves as a theologian. It is at this point, when our defenses are down, that we being to allow in other arbitrating authorities, like history, culture, forms of theologies that are undetectable to the non-theologian, that truly change the way Scripture is read. So, I am not arguing in the least for a non-backgrounds readingt[sic] of scripture, some kind of naive biblicism or something. Rather, I am arguing for a self-critical biblicism, one that uses theology (imagine...the ruel[sic] of faith) to gaurd[sic] against a foreign invasion. Right theological thinking, like security at an airport, is not out to stop travel, but to make sure travel is safe by making sure the wrong items stay off the plane!

...in light of Scripture's own functioning authority we must ask if the questions "what happened in real time" and "what Jesus' original intentions were" are appropriate interpretive questions. Is there a functional real time that can be discerned by the interpreter and placed over scripture so that Scripture's time can be balanced against the plumb line of interpretive precision? Or, would we not want to say - need to say - that what the Word said in his word are his real intentions, and he is not saying someting[sic] other than or beyond what he actually said in his word? Where is real time found if not in scripture? Where might an ambitiuous[sic]-yet-pious interpreter go to find the "original intentions" of Jesus outside of Scripture? As you can see by my questions, I wonder if our historical metaphysic has become so properly basic that we actually look away from Scripture in order to listen to it, that is, that we look to a higher authority in order to support and use the authority we claim for the Bible.¹⁵

Several excellent points are made in the above comments by Klink:

1. Bible background studies can become a destructive tool for reading the Bible *as* Scripture.
2. The history behind the text of Scripture is not the same thing as the text itself.
3. The question is: *how* do we use background material when interpreting Scripture?
4. We can allow other "authorities," like history and culture, to change the way Scripture is read.
5. Our historical metaphysic may cause us to look *away* from Scripture in order to listen to it, to look to a "higher" authority to support and use the authority we claim for the Bible.¹⁶

The Contrary View Again

¹⁵ Klink.

¹⁶ Klink also provides a link to a short but interesting video exchange between D. A. Carson and John Piper on this subject of biblical hermeneutics and the use of extra-biblical sources in biblical studies:
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/videos/24636177>

We note again that not everyone agrees with this hermeneutical view about the usage limits of extra-biblical sources. In the interest of fairness, consider the following comments about a study of the book of Matthew:

Although it is absolutely true that Scripture is the best source for interpreting Scripture, the fact is that much of what is written in the Bible cannot be fully understood without turning to extra-Biblical Hebrew texts. Maintaining a "*Sola Scriptura*" approach leads to horrific error in understanding of the Hebrew texts, as everyone is then free to interpret the more difficult passages from their own personal viewpoint, rather than looking at where the author was coming from culturally and religiously.

Take the following questions as a simple example:

- What is Rome?
- What is a centurion?
- What is a legion?

Of course most people might already know what these terms mean, having acquired the knowledge from their own education. But what if they did not already know? Does the Bible explain what these words designate? No. You would have to go outside the Bible to find out. If something as simple this requires looking into extra-Biblical material for proper understanding, how much more then does this apply to complex Hebrew religious concepts that are not defined in the pages of the Bible?¹⁷

Here the concept of maintaining a Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) approach is actually described as *dangerous*, so we absolutely must consult extra-biblical Hebrew texts. But the examples given are curious – what scripture’s correct interpretation would absolutely necessitate a background knowledge of Rome, a centurion, or a legion? Even if I did not know more than a cursory knowledge of these items gained from general education, I could understand the point of Jesus’ miraculous healing of the centurion’s servant (Matt. 8:5-13) and that the Father could provide Jesus with many angels to assist him if he asked (Matt. 26:53). I do not know of any “horrific error in understanding” that would occur if I simply concentrated on the text alone. Once again, background studies can be an excellent aid in Bible study, but to maintain that the scriptures *cannot* be understood without turning to extra-biblical sources is wrong.

Conclusion

The subject of biblical hermeneutics is a vast and vital subject. The proper interpretation of scripture can greatly depend on the philosophy of hermeneutics that a student carries to that study. Proper and common sense principles need to be reviewed from time to time, and problems that have arisen in the past and continue into the present should be considered carefully. In this particular study that concentrates on the so-called New Perspective on Paul, the use and misuse of extra-biblical sources becomes a primary issue. This paper has defended the position that the Bible can be understood independent of such sources, and that while such background studies

¹⁷ “Use of Extra-Biblical Hebrew Materials.”

can aid biblical studies in many ways, extra-biblical sources cannot, under any circumstance, become the “authority” by which we interpret the Scriptures.

Part 2 of this study will concentrate solely on the New Perspective on Paul and the hermeneutical issues connected with it.

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