

Smoky Mountain Reflections

November 2013

"That is your interpretation"... That was often the response I got when I would try to share God's truth with people in my many years as a parishioner. I know it is frustrating when you try to tell people the truth as you have come to understand it through the help of your family and your church and especially the Holy Spirit. When people reject God's truth you can't help but feel a little rejected yourself so, in this month of thanksgiving I would like to briefly touch on two topics that may help; Hermeneutics and Evangelism. I know these two words will illicit one or both of two reactions among most Christians....confusion and/or fear. Let's first deal with confusion, so we do not need to run in fear from the second.

Hermeneutics: Biblical interpretation. When you are discussing living out your faith with your neighbor, you may be using different methods of biblical interpretation. If so, you can and will come up with different conclusions. Using the metaphor of leaves, your discussion comparing two leaves may be confusing because you may be coming from the prospective of an oak tree while your neighbor is coming from the prospective of a maple tree. The 'leaves' or conclusions are different because they come from completely different trees. It is the same with biblical interpretation. While there are many methods or lenses out there through which people look at God's word, they really all fit into one of two categories; magisterial or ministerial. I know, two more big words to define but be patient with me as I define both of them for you and explain how these two lenses come up with different applications and conclusions about the unchangeable truth of God's word.

Magisterial: There are actually many methods of interpretation that fall into this category but what they all have in common is an appeal to human reason over and above God's word. The most prominent among these methods is the Historical Critical method. The conclusions that are derived are based on the preconceived notions of those who use this method. In other words, if God's word says something they do not like or agree with, then they simply use this method to say "I know what it says but it cannot mean that so if you look at it through 'this' lens I can decide the meaning for myself". This method puts all the authority in human reason over and above the revealed truth of God's word. Some biblical scholars, atheists, and agnostics fall into this category and what they have in common is the idolatry of the human mind over God's revealed truth. This method leads to a misapplication of biblical principles or just outright denial of any biblical authority at all. If your ultimate authority is the human mind then you can hold the rights of the individual over and above the rights of those you define as less than individuals...those of other races, those of other genders, those not yet born, those with a lifestyle you do not like, those with a quality of life you arbitrarily decide is not worth the status of individual with protected rights. You also have the freedom to depart from God's word completely and make new rules for yourself and your society. Society can make new rules and norms such as; "Anyone can be a pastor". (Call, education and gender have no bearing on who should fill that role.) "Marriage is for consenting adults of any gender". (Chastity, monogamy, heterosexuality, and fidelity are the products of a manipulative, medieval, patriarchal society and we have out grown these oppressive cultural norms of the past.) "Only God can forgive sins" (God's biblical directive to the church through Peter to forgive sins does not mean what it says.) "Baptism and the Lord's Supper are acts of obedience" (because it is not logical that water and word can save or that bread and wine can be flesh and blood.)

Ministerial on the other hand, has one main method called the Historical Grammatical method. Many use this method until their 'human' reason pulls them back over into the 'magisterial' category. The Historical Grammatical method also employs human reason, but only as we finite beings acknowledge that we cannot fully comprehend the infinite and we let God's word have the final say even when God's word says things that are illogical. This method acknowledges that God is all powerful and can reveal His truth to us in any way he chooses. He chooses to reveal His truth, clearly defined through history and grammar, in His word, the infallible, inerrant, 66 books of the Holy Bible. As such, this method produces interpretations that are clear confessions of biblical truth only. If your ultimate authority is God's word then you will acknowledge that all human life is created in His image and is intrinsically valuable. All races, locations, sizes, and conditions of humans are therefore worthy of the highest respect and protection we can provide. We also have the freedom to

function within the gifted order of His creation. He put 'norms' in place for our benefit and we let His word have the final say no matter how politically incorrect or illogical it may sound. "God gives men and woman different roles"; (mother, father, husband, wife, pastor - Scripture attaches genders to each of these roles. see: 1 Tim 3:1-13, Titus 1:6-9, 1 Cor 14:33-35, Eph 5:21-26, Col 3:18-19, 1 Tim 2:9-13, 1 Cor 11:3-10, 1 Peter 3:1-5.) Yes, history and grammar can help us better understand these things but cannot redefine what the words mean. To be a pastor, one must be male, rightly called and ordained. Marriage is defined for us in Genesis, one man and one woman. Other truths in scripture are; chastity for the unmarried, and monogamy and fidelity for the married. These are the gifts of a loving God to us all regardless of our fallen sinful condition.

"Only God can forgive sins" This is most certainly true and He can do so however He wishes. To that end, He has established means through which forgiveness can be given. Forgiveness can be given through words spoken in His stead and by His command after confession, and through Baptism and the Lord's Supper, see: John 20:22-23

"Baptism is a gift from God" This gift is not logical, water and word cannot normally save and give faith miraculously but scripture tells us that His word combined with water does just that. see: Matt 28:19; Mark 15:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38-39; 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5-6; Heb 10:22; John 3:5; Rom 6:3-6; Col 2:11-12, Gal 3:27-29

"The Lord's Supper is a gift from God" This gift is not logical, bread and wine normally cannot be flesh and blood and give forgiveness when consumed in faith, but scripture tells us that it is and it does. see Matt 26, Mark 14 Luke 22, and I Cor 11.

As you can see the 'leaves' on these two trees are very different. So the next time you are sharing your faith with someone and they say "well that is your interpretation", you can politely respond "yes and it is also the confession of the universal, historic, Christian faith so your disagreement is not with me but with a plain and clear exposition of God's truth". Or perhaps you can just say, "your disagreement is not with me but God's word" that might be simpler. It looks like I got a bit wordy for this month so I will address the topic of evangelism in December.

In Christ Pastor Portier