

Biblical Interpretation & Application

CGC ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

THINK BIBLICALLY - CLASS 2

JANUARY 14, 2018

For Discussion

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Why or why not?

1. Christians should offer sacrifices to atone for their sins (Leviticus 4:27-31)
2. Women should wear head coverings in church (1 Cor 11:3-16)
3. Spanking is an acceptable form of disciplining children (Proverbs 23:14)

Previously...

Biblical Worldview

- A framework for understanding the world, rooted in the truths of the Bible
 - Seeing and understanding the world as God sees it, as He has revealed in His Word
 - May overlap with other worldviews at some points, but will often differ at others
- Importance of discernment, and transformation by the constant renewal of our minds through God's Word

From the AGC Statement of Faith

The Scriptures

- “The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the complete Word of God. As originally given, it is verbally inspired, without error, and entirely trustworthy. The Bible constitutes supreme authority in all matters of faith, teaching, and behaviour. The Bible has Jesus Christ as its focus and fulfillment.”

2 Peter 1:16-21, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Luke 24:27, Matt. 5:17-18

- *Indispensable foundation for a Biblical worldview*

From the AGC Statement of Faith

The Scriptures – Concepts in the Statement of Faith

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- The ***Canon*** of Scripture
 - Biblical worldview grounded on teachings of the OT & NT

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The Scriptures – Concepts in the Statement of Faith

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- The ***Inspiration*** of Scripture
 - The Bible is God’s words to us, spoken through human authors

From the AGC Statement of Faith

The Scriptures – Concepts in the Statement of Faith

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- The ***Inerrancy*** of Scripture
 - The Bible is a reliable guide

From the AGC Statement of Faith

The Scriptures – Concepts in the Statement of Faith

- “The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the complete Word of God. As originally given, it is verbally inspired, without error, and **entirely trustworthy**. The Bible constitutes supreme authority in all matters of faith, teaching, and behaviour. The Bible has Jesus Christ as its focus and fulfillment.”
- The **Infallibility** of Scripture
 - The Bible is a reliable guide

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The Scriptures – Concepts in the Statement of Faith

- “The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the complete Word of God. As originally given, it is verbally inspired, without error, and entirely trustworthy. ***The Bible constitutes supreme authority*** in all matters of faith, teaching, and behaviour. The Bible has Jesus Christ as its focus and fulfillment.”
- The ***Authority*** of Scripture
 - The Bible overrules other ‘authorities’ and is the standard by which everything else is judged - not vice versa

From the AGC Statement of Faith

The Scriptures – Concepts in the Statement of Faith

- “The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the complete Word of God. As originally given, it is verbally inspired, without error, and entirely trustworthy. The Bible constitutes supreme authority ***in all matters of faith, teaching, and behaviour***. The Bible has Jesus Christ as its focus and fulfillment.”
- The ***Sufficiency*** of Scripture
 - The Bible teaches all we need to know about God, and about how to live so as to please Him

Towards a Biblical Worldview

Authority & Sufficiency of Scripture are key to developing a Biblical worldview

- Scripture is the supreme authority – the standard of truth by which all else is measured, not vice versa
- The world's wisdom often at odds with God's
- *“To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.”
(Isaiah 8:20)*

Towards a Biblical Worldview

Authority & Sufficiency of Scripture are key to developing a Biblical worldview

- Scripture contains all the words of God that we need for salvation, for trusting Him perfectly, and for obeying Him perfectly
- “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Towards a Biblical Worldview

Some overarching principles for interpreting & applying Scripture...

- Read & interpret Scripture as you would any other book / literature
- Scripture interprets Scripture
- Scripture is infallible – our interpretations are not!
- Proper interpretation necessarily comes before application

Read & interpret Scripture as you would any other book

1. Same rules of interpreting any literature apply...

- Normal rules of grammar, syntax/sentence structure, speech, context, etc. apply
- original languages → translations can sometimes pose challenges
 - Go to the original languages if you can
 - Reading different translations can help
- Where possible, understand the situation / context in which passages were written

Read & interpret Scripture as you would any other book

1. Same rules of interpreting any literature apply...

- Pay attention to the meanings & contexts of words
 - Words can *mean* different things in different contexts
 - e.g. *justify* in Paul vs. James
 - Words can change meaning over time
 - Good translations will attempt to reflect these differences, but also reflect ambiguities of meaning, where they exist
 - e.g. “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5, ESV) – ‘the obedience that is faith’ vs. ‘the obedience that results from faith’?

Read & interpret Scripture as you would any other book

1. Same rules of interpreting any literature apply...

- Interpret different *genres* appropriately
 - e.g. historical narratives (e.g. Gospels) vs. poetry (e.g. Psalms)
 - e.g. Law/doctrinal teaching vs. proverbs/wisdom literature
- Be careful with
 - metaphors & figurative speech – e.g. the sun rises in the east
 - Predictive prophecy
 - Apocalyptic writings (e.g. Revelation, parts of Daniel)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Scripture is coherent & doesn't contradict itself
- Derives from the principles of inspiration & inerrancy
- Scripture is God's Word
- God is omniscient & omnipotent – He makes no mistakes and is perfect in all His words and ways
- God is truthful – doesn't contradict Himself

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Direct instruction / commands
 - Typically clear in their application (e.g. do not murder)
 - Not comprehensive (i.e. don't cover every possible situation)
 - ***Universal application vs. limited application in specific contexts***
 - The scope of a command may be limited by other instructions
 - “Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’” (Deut. 15:11)
 - “For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” (2 Thess. 3:10)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- General precepts
 - Principles underlying direct instructions / commands
 - Guiding principles when there are no direct commands
 - Often require balance with other principles
 - Application often requires keeping 2 (or more) principles (or commands) in tension, without violating any
 - Different contexts may require emphasis of one principle over another

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- General precepts
 - e.g. “...and what does the Lord require of you but to **do justice**, and to **love kindness...**” (Micah 6:8)
 - Kindness without violating justice, at the Cross (Rom. 3:25-26)
 - Kindness rather than justice should be primary in our personal relationships with others when wronged (Matt. 5:38-41)
 - Justice rather than kindness should be primary in the governing authorities’ relationship with wrong-doers (Rom. 13:3-4)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- A note on culture & Scripture...
 - Some commands or principles may be limited to the culture of the time the Scripture was written, but ***if there is indication in Scripture itself*** that the command is culturally limited
 - e.g. eating clean vs. unclean foods
 - Commands/principles should not be discarded as culturally limited just because our current culture disagrees with them; or if “experts” or “scientific evidence” say they are culturally limited
- Undermines the authority of Scripture; places other authorities (e.g. culture/experts/etc.) over Scripture

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Culture & Scripture – an example
 - e.g. “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” (1 Timothy 2:12-13)
 - An unpopular command in modern Western cultures; disregarded by many (most?) churches as culturally limited:
 - e.g. these verses were shaped by Paul’s patriarchal cultural background; Paul must have been addressing a specific heresy (that wasn’t mentioned in Scripture); the Scriptures are moving towards a including women in all roles, even if the authors didn’t quite get there by the time that the Scriptures were completed; etc.

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Culture & Scripture – an example
 - e.g. “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” (1 Timothy 2:12-13)
 - Against cultural restriction...
 - Paul roots his command in Creation, suggesting it is not culturally limited, but continues to be in force
 - No compelling reasons elsewhere in Scripture to view these verses as culturally limited
 - Disregarding these verses places other ‘authorities’ over Scripture

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Culture & Scripture – an example
- Question: “So... why do we apply Paul’s directive in 1 Timothy 2, but not in 1 Corinthians 11, which requires women to wear head coverings (and/or long hair)?”

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

“Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels... Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.” (1 Cor. 11:4-10, 13-16)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Why apply Paul’s directives in 1 Timothy 2, but not 1 Corinthians 11 (head coverings/long hair)?
- Against cultural limitation: Paul seems to argue from Creation in 1 Cor. 11, as he does in 1 Timothy 2:11-12
- But...
- Paul makes it clear in the passage that the main underlying issue is a wife’s submission to her husband’s authority (v.10)
- A recurring principle throughout Scripture is that God looks, not at the outward appearance, but at the heart / inward reality (e.g. 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Pet. 3:3-4)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Why apply Pauls’ directives in 1 Timothy 2, but not 1 Corinthians 11 (head coverings/long hair)?
- Other passages in Scripture suggest that Paul’s directives regarding covering head/hair length are not necessarily applicable universally
- Priests (who were all males) serving in OT temple worship were required to cover their heads (with turbans – Exodus 28:4)
 - Part of their ‘uniform’ – “for glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28:2)
- Long hair was not disgraceful for men, if grown as part of the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Why apply Pauls’ directives in 1 Timothy 2, but not 1 Corinthians 11 (head coverings/long hair)?
- Conclusion
 - In 1 Cor. 11, Paul is applying a universal principle (headship & submission in the husband-wife relationship; cf. Eph. 5:22-33) to address a culture-specific issue
 - Revolves around what the head covering/length of hair meant in that context (i.e. sign of authority on wife’s head) – what does an outward appearance say about a wife’s heart?
 - The underlying principles still apply, even if the culture-specific command no longer does

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- A word on commands & precepts in the OT
- Care is needed in applying OT commands and precepts to today
- Some commands & underlying principles apply to all time (e.g. ‘moral’ law – e.g. the 10 Commandments)
- Some commands had limited application to the theocratic nation(s) of Israel/Judah (e.g. ‘ceremonial’ & ‘civil’ laws)
- Fulfilled in Christ (e.g. ceremonial laws) or no longer apply after the destruction of the theocracy
- Underlying principles may continue to apply in other ways

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- The implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit
 - i.e. things that might be implied or deduced from a passage need to be interpreted in light of things that are explicitly stated
- Unclear or obscure passages should be interpreted in light of clearer ones
- Don't build major doctrines / applications based on ambiguous or obscure passages
 - e.g. Paul's reference to baptism for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Interpretation of historical narratives must be informed by the rest of Scripture [especially didactic (teaching/instructional) passages]
- Historical narratives often report events, without stating if what happened was good or bad
- Assessment relies on other passages of Scripture that help interpret the narrative
- e.g. Abram lying to Pharaoh about Sarai (Gen. 12:10-20) – might seem OK since it turned out well for Abram
 - We know from the rest of Scripture that this was ***not*** OK

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Interpretation of historical narratives is to be informed by the rest of Scripture
- e.g. “Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.” (Judges 4:4)
- OK or not OK?
- Justification for women serving as pastors & elders in churches (since Deborah was leading God’s people)?

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Interpretation of historical narratives is to be informed by the rest of Scripture
- e.g. “Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.” (Judges 16:1)
- OK or not OK?
- Justification for pastors & elders to have sex with prostitutes (since Samson was leading God’s people)?

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

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- OK or not OK?
- Justification for pastors & elders to have sex with prostitutes (since Samson was leading God’s people)?
→ Of course not, as per the rest of Scripture! (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:12-20)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Back to Deborah...
- “Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.” (Judges 4:4)
- Cf. Isaiah 3:1-4,12

“For behold, the Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water; the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, the captain of fifty and the man of rank... And I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them... My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them.”

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

- Back to Deborah...
 - Isaiah 3:1-4,12 – absence of leading men as evidence of God’s judgment on His people
 - In Judges – cycles of rebellion and God’s judgment on His people → narrative account of Deborah & Barak illustrates the principle stated in Isaiah 3
 - In line with the rest of the book of Judges – things are not well in Israel – “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Jdg. 21:25)

The “Analogy of Faith”

2. Scripture interprets Scripture - Summary

- Scripture contains both direct commands & general precepts; some universal, some limited by context
 - Take extra care when deciding if something is culturally limited
- The implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit
- Unclear or obscure passages should be interpreted in light of clearer ones
- Interpretation of historical narratives is to be informed by the rest of Scripture

The Fallibility of Interpretation

3. Scripture is infallible – our interpretations are not!

- The Scriptures (as originally given) are without error (inerrant) & entirely trustworthy (infallible)
- But our interpretations of the Scriptures are not (inerrant or infallible)!
 - Imperfect / incomplete knowledge & understanding
 - Colored by our culture, background & experiences
 - Tainted by sinful motives or attitudes

The Fallibility of Interpretation

3. Scripture is infallible – our interpretations are not!

- Some implications...
 - Our understanding and interpretation of parts of Scripture will likely change as we grow and mature in Christ
 - The importance of continuing to study & meditate on the Word
- The need for genuine humility
 - Knowing we may be wrong
 - Patience with those who may not see things quite as we do
 - Willingness to be corrected by Scripture & by others
- The importance of learning together in community

Interpretation before Application

4. Proper interpretation necessarily comes before application

- Need to know **what** the Bible is actually saying before you can know **how** rightly to apply it
- Take the time & effort to understand & interpret properly
- Improper interpretation → incorrect (and potentially harmful) applications
 - e.g. 'Prosperity Gospel'
- Remember OIA!
 - Observation → Interpretation → Application

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