**BIBLE TALK**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

**How To Interpret the Bible (Pt. 1)**

**7/26/2020**

On previous programs we have emphasized the fact that the Bible is the word of God and that it is the complete and sufficient revelation of God to man. If we are to know God’s will for our lives we must go to the Bible. And if God’s people are to be united as Jesus prayed in John chapter 17, then we must all accept the Bible as our standard of authority. Without a common standard of authority there is no unity. We have also emphasized that the Lord demands that we abide in His written word--that we do not add to it or take from it. This was the attitude Jesus had toward the will of His Father. He said, *“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous,* *because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”* (John 5:30). Now, if Jesus refused to do His own will, but to teach and do only what the Father commanded, should not that be our attitude toward God’s will today?

The question I want to address today is how do we go about interpreting the word of God, the Bible? Are there rules in interpreting scripture?

Let me say first of all that since the Bible is the word of God, and God says that it is the “all truth,” His complete revelation to man, then God has chosen to communicate His mind, His will to us by means of words. He could have just zapped the knowledge of His will miraculously into all our brains. But rather He chose to give us His will by means of words, the words of the Bible. Words are conveyors of thought. Human beings typically communicate with one another by means of words, whether spoken, written, or by sign language. I convey what I am thinking and what I want others to know by means of words. God has chosen to do the same thing. He has chosen to convey His mind to us by means of words, human language. Now, I suggest to you that the rules that we use in interpreting human language every day should be the same rules we use to interpret the words of the Bible. Since God has chosen human language to communicate His will to us, it seems evident that the rules that we normally use in interpreting what others say will be the rules we will use to interpret what God has said.

In communication the primary goal of the one speaking or writing is to effectively make known his mind to others by means of the words he is using. And the primary goal of the one listening or reading is to correctly interpret what the speaker or writer is trying to say. To be fair with the one speaking we should try to understand exactly what he is saying. It would not be right for us to interpret what one is saying in whatever way WE choose. The person speaking wants us to try to understand what he is saying and not put our own interpretation on his words.

God is communicating His mind to us by means of words, the words of the Bible. Because of His wisdom, He surely is perfectly capable of communicating by means of words what He wants us to know. God’s word, the Bible can be understood. It should then be the goal of every reader of the Bible to interpret exactly what God is trying to convey by His words. To be fair with God, should we not try to understand what He is saying? It would not be fair to read God’s word, and then interpret it in whatever way WE choose. But that is the way many people read the Bible today. They read it, and rather than trying to understand what God is saying, they get out of it what they want it to say. That is not how we communicate. When you say something you want the other person to try to understand what YOU are saying. That is exactly what God wants us to do. He wants us to try to understand what He is saying in His word. The Bible is not open to many different interpretations, in the same way that when you speak, your words are not open to many different interpretations. You mean something by your words and you want others to understand what you are meaning. God’s word means something and He wants us to understand that meaning. This is what Bible study is all about, it is to correctly understand what God is saying.

So, the rules that we use in interpreting the words of the Bible are the same rules that we use every day in interpreting human language. If you were going to communicate your will to someone else by means of words, how would you do it? Well, the communication process involves, in the most fundamental way, express statements, examples, and necessary conclusions. Let me illustrate it this way, suppose I tell my son, “Go cut wood for the wood heater.” This statement does not specify the kind of wood he is to cut. With this statement alone he could choose whatever kind of wood he thought best and still obey my command. But suppose he had seen me cut wood several times for the wood heater, and what he had observed is that I always cut oak for the heater. He had even heard me tell someone else, “I only want to burn oak in my wood heater.” Therefore, when I told him to “go, cut wood for the wood heater” he would infer, or necessarily conclude that I wanted him to cut oak. He is using my express statements, my example and necessary inference to come to that conclusion. We do this all the time in communicating with others.

This is how God communicates to us what He wants us to know and do, by express statements or commands, by approved examples, and by necessary conclusions.

Express statement, which includes commands, is the most direct way of expressing authority. This is when He expressly states what His will is. For example when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He expressly stated, *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”* (1 Cor. 11:23-25) This tells us expressly the purpose for which the Lord wants us to eat the bread and drink the fruit of the vine. Also in Mark 16:15-16 Jesus told the apostles to *“go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”* He then says, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* Jesus expressly states that those who will be saved are those who believe and are baptized. It tells us what one must do to be saved.

How do we know that a statement applies to us? Some commands in scripture are not for us today

There are three important questions to ask concerning any statement given in scripture to determine if the statement applies to you. They are: 1) who said it? 2) to whom was it said? 3) for what purpose was it said? If you don’t care about the answer to these questions concerning a statement, then you can prove anything from the Bible. In Psalm 14:1 it says, “There is no God.” If one does not care WHO made this statement, then he may conclude the Bible teaches atheism. But the passage says, *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”* It does make a different who said it. In order for a statement to be for us to believe or do, that statement must be one that is sanctioned by the Holy Spirit. We determine that by the context.

And answering the questions to whom was it said, and for what purpose tells us if the statement has application to us. For example, in Genesis 6:14, there is the command from God, *“Make yourself an ark of gopherwood.”* This is a command from God, but is this command for all of us today? No! This command was given to Noah in a day when the world had become so wicked that God had decided to bring judgment. He decided to destroy man with the earth by bringing floodwaters on the earth. But Noah had found grace in the eyes of the LORD, and the LORD provided a means to save him and his family. And so this command does not have application to us because it was given to Noah at a specific time for a specific purpose that does not apply to us. Now, I need to mention that even though this command to make an ark of gopherwood is not for us, we still learn truths about God and His dealings with man from this story. In other words it is an important part of God’s word that we need to know.

The Bible also has commands that prohibit men from eating pork, and that forbid anyone from wearing mixed fiber clothing, or planting two different kinds of seed in their fields. Are these commands for us today? What we learn is that these commands were given to the children of Israel, and they were a part of the covenant that God made with them at Mt. Sinai when God brought them up out of the land of Egypt. This was the Law of Moses. But we also learn from the Bible that that covenant and the Law of that covenant was temporary. Colossians 2:14-17 tells us that that law was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross. When Jesus came and died on the cross, the law God made with Israel at Sinai came to end. Paul says in Ephesians 2:15 that the commands of that law were abolished. When Jesus died on the cross, He dedicated a New Covenant (Matt. 26:28). We are now under law toward Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). Those laws that prohibited eating pork or wearing mixed fiber clothing were a part of the law that was nailed to the cross. That is the reason they are not for us today. And the Bible makes that clear. And it is important for us to know that distinction between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ.

There are those today who believe that those who have never been saved, those who have never become Christians, must believe in Jesus and cite the sinners’ prayer. Is that what an alien sinner, one who has never become a Christian must do to be saved? In Acts chapter 2:38 we read the statement, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* Who does this statement apply to? First of all who said it? Peter, the apostle of Christ, said it. To whom did he say it and for what purpose? He said it to Jews who had asked the *question “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* Peter had just preached the gospel of the New Covenant to them and they had become convinced that Jesus was raised from the dead and that He is both Lord and Christ. They see themselves as sinners and they want to know what to do. This is when Peter told them to *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”* This was said to sinners who had never been born again. This statement applies to sinners today who have never been born again, who have never become Christians. It tells them what they must do to be saved.

But later we find this same Peter saying to Simon, *“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”* (Acts 8:22) In Acts 2 Peter told the Jews to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Here Peter tells Simon to repent and pray God to be forgiven. Why the difference? The difference is Simon had already believed, repented and was baptized. Look at chapter 8:13, *“Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip…”* Simon had already become a Christian, but afterwards he committed a sin. Peter didn’t tell him to repent and be baptized again, but to *“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”* You see, Acts 2:38 applies to one who has never become a Christian, and Acts 8:22 applies to one who has become a Christian but afterwards commits a sin. That is the reason we do not tell sinners who have never become Christians to repent and say the sinners prayer, because in the Bible sinners who have never been Christians were never told to repent and pray. Again, it is important that when we read statements in the Bible we must ask, who said it, to whom was it said and for what purpose.

Our time is gone for today, but next week we want to continue our study of How do we interpret Scripture. We hope you will join us then.

Before we close, we want to invite you to check out our web site. On this website you are able to hear sermons on a variety of topics, and you also are able to hear previous Bible Talk radio broadcasts. The web address is sjchurchofchrist.com.