

How to Study the Bible – Part 5

August 24, 2019

R.C. Sproul: “Knowing Scripture”

Practical Rules for Biblical Interpretation

#8: Observe the Difference Between the Spirit and the Letter of the Law

Rather than merely focusing on the words, Jesus points us to the intent.

Sproul: “To obey the letter while violating the spirit makes one technically righteous but actually corrupt.”

Mat 5:27-28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ (28) But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Mat 5:21-22 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ (22) But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

#9: Be Careful With Parables

What is the Purpose of Parables?

Mat 13:10-14 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” (11) And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (12) For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (13) This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (14) Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.

The parable of the sower is allegorical. Should we interpret all parables allegorically?

Augustine’s Commentary on the Good Samaritan

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; Adam himself is meant; Jerusalem is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; Jericho means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies. Thieves are the devil and his angels. Who stripped him, namely; of his immortality; and beat him, by persuading him to sin; and left him half-dead, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called half-dead. The priest and the Levite who saw him and passed by, signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament which could profit nothing for salvation. Samaritan means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin. Oil is the comfort of good hope; wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit. The beast is the flesh in which He deigned to come to us. The being set upon the beast is belief in the incarnation of Christ. The inn is the Church, where travelers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed after pilgrimage. The morrow is after the resurrection of the Lord. The two pence are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come. The innkeeper is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked

with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him “to live by the gospel”[1]

[1] Augustine, *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, II, 19 –slightly abridged as cited in Dodd, C.H., *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribners, 1961), pg. 1-2.

Sproul: “The safest way to treat the parables is to look for one basic central point in them.”
See Luke 10:25-37

#10: Be Careful With Predictive Prophecy

Example 1: The coming of Elijah

Mal 4:5-6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (6) And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

John says he is not Elijah

Joh 1:19-21 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" (20) He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (21) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

Luke says John goes in the spirit and power of Elijah

Luk 1:16-17 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, (17) and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Jesus says John is Elijah

Mar 9:11-13 And they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" (12) And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? (13) But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."

Mat 11:13-14 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, (14) and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

Example 2: Signs in the heavens

Joe 2:28-32 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. (29) Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (30) "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (32) And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Act 2:14-21 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. (15) For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. (16) But this is what

was uttered through the prophet Joel: (17) "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (18) even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (19) And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; (20) the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. (21) And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Concerning the King of Egypt: Eze 32:7 When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light.

Concerning Babylon: Isa 13:9-10 Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. (10) For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

Concerning the “tribulation” Mat 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

#11: Interpret the Bible with a Spirit of Humility

Christians who respect biblical authority have a special burden to read right. We, too, are prone to fall into error. In fact, none of us is absolutely right about what God's Word really means. That is why we must ourselves return daily to the Bible—reading and rereading, thinking and rethinking, obeying what we grasp, correcting our earlier readings as new insight is given us, constantly crosschecking our grasp of Scripture with our pastor, our fellow Christians and with the historic understanding of Scripture by orthodox Christianity. – James Sire

Sproul, R. C.. Knowing Scripture . InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

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