

Why Incarnation is Necessary for a Proper Biblical Interpretation

The Bible teaches us that it is impossible to know God or the Scriptures outside of the physical, experiential realm. John 1:14-17 teaches us that the glory of God was revealed to us in Christ when He became flesh and tabernacled among us.

1 John 1:1-2 says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.."

Hence, in the Hebraic understanding of biblical interpretation, there was of necessity an intersection between the physical and spiritual world. However, by the second century, through the influence of Greek culture, the faith was communicated merely through creeds, concepts, and metaphysical ideas to better relate to the Hellenistic culture.

The focus was on the pre-existent Logos in some ways, more than the incarnate human Jesus (who died physically and rose bodily). The Roman/Greco understanding of Jesus brought us amazing concepts describing Jesus as God of God, the Light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father.

This illuminated a different perspective of Jesus than the Hebrews who looked at Jesus primarily as Messiah, the Savior who enunciated His eternal kingdom when He appeared on the earth. Also, when sharing the gospel with the backdrop of the Roman empire, the apostles depicted Jesus more as Lord, along with the Jewish focus of Anointed One or Messiah. This fit the

Roman/Greco understanding of how they viewed Cesar as lord over the empire. Hence, language, philosophy, and culture influence the biblical understanding of theology and how we communicate the gospel and depict Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

During this era, the heretical movement, Gnosticism, taught that the material world was evil and that salvation involved receiving hidden (mystical) knowledge that enabled a person to be rescued from the world of flesh and experience the spiritual realm. Consequently, since the material world is evil, they taught that Jesus did not come in human flesh and could not have died physically on the cross. This also meant that they denied the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus.

In response to this heresy, the apostle John wrote that we could tell if a spirit is prophesying from God if it confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. 1 John 4:1-3 says, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."

The Bible is not a magic book. Understanding this as a backdrop is essential for how we should understand the sacred text. The evangelical fundamentalists often view the Bible as some magic book that miraculously dropped down from heaven, apart from the medium of human personalities and experience. Consequently, they extract verses out of their context and walk around quoting them, expecting something miraculous to happen. They fail to understand the nature and circumstances that made the particular verse powerful within its context.

In the early days of the word of faith movement, this became a habit amongst some who acted as though the Bible was some magic formula to confess. They thought we could confess our real-life suffering and pain away by merely quoting a

particular verse. This resulted in many saints being disillusioned.

Of course, God-breathed or inspired the word of God through the apostles. A portion of it can be very powerful if it enters our heart and we genuinely believe it. However, that is not the full scope of engaging the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19-21).

The fact that people try to quote a verse apart from the context in which it was written shows that some semi-Gnosticism has crept into the Church. People think they could be saved by mystical knowledge apart from obeying it by walking out the Word incarnationally

This has also caused many preachers to project their thoughts on the sacred text. They often extract and apply it out of context instead of initially bringing out the author's original intent before bringing out a corresponding moral application.

Furthermore, some contemporary scholars, who are not practitioners, make a living writing about the Bible. However, all of the biblical writers were practitioners who served as shepherds to the people during challenging times.

Some even think it is almost impossible for an effective pastor to become a theologian because they believe he will not have enough time for serious study. However, the apostle Paul debunked this view. He was the greatest New Testament theologian and the church's greatest practitioner.

We also see people through the years, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others who served as shepherds and scholars. (I believe that not being a practitioner immersed in the lives of congregations hurts our ability to understand the sacred text fully.) {eoa}

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