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Private Interpretation Forbidden

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation," 2 Peter 1:20.

Many would challenge Peter's assertion, though perhaps they do so without realising the significance of their actions. I say this in order to ameliorate their error because I do feel many are unaware that they are engaged in that which Peter here forbids.

Many believe that we must come to the Bible and "interpret" what it is God says! Now the word "interpretation" means "unloosing". It is the process of "untying a knot". That suggests that God has given us a "tangled skein" rather than a clear revelation!

It is what the combatants in the Second World War on both sides were busily engaged in. Most famously, the German military developed, after the First World War, that which was called "The Enigma Code." It was a complex system of encoding its military communications, thus concealing them from their enemies. However, the Polish Cipher Bureau broke the code in the 1930s. Of course, the Germans were ever improving their code and so there was an ongoing battle of wits which I think we can say the Allies won, for during the latter part of World War II, the British knew much of what it was the Germans were saying and planning.

The USA likewise had broken the Japanese system of codes and were thus in possession of much of the communications coming out of Japan.

That is what interpretation means.

It also applies to the work of translation. When our Bible was translated out of the Hebrew and Greek languages, the translators had to give their interpretation of the meaning of the words in the original languages in order to translate them into English. It was therefore a most solemn undertaking lest the reader of the Bible be misled by what is set before them in the English translation.

Of course, this is just what has happened in modern translations. Men have written down their own meaning and views under the pretext of faithfully rendering what the inspired original Texts state.

The words of Peter may be rendered: "of one's own interpretation", that is, such as the natural mind of man forms by himself, and which is done without comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Paul said: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual," 1 Corinthians 2:12-13. We are required to consider other Scriptures when seeking the meaning of a portion of God's Word. The word "comparing" means "to joint together fitly". That is a most instructive phrase. If we understand a portion of Scripture in a way that plainly contradicts another, then we are not arriving at the correct understanding of the meaning of the words, since the meaning we have arrived at does not "joint together fitly" with other Scriptures!

Prophecy

Peter is here speaking specifically of the Prophetic Scriptures in our text. It would be most wrong to place upon those wonderful parts of God's Word which deal with the future, views that are formed by us without that proper "comparing spiritual things with spiritual", that "jointing together fitly."

The history of the Church of Christ is one filled with examples of men placing their own views upon God's Word. Such a course of action is the source of all heresies and cult religions!

It is not a problem that is confined to those religious entities which have been considered outside the fold of conservative, orthodox Christianity.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Sadly, NO! Such is the procedure adopted by all too many within the camp of "fundamentalists!"

An example of this is seen particularly amongst the followers of those who are called "Amillennialists" or those who teach that there will be no Millennial reign on this earth by the Lord Jesus Christ.

An example of their teaching may be seen in how they interpret such Scriptures as Isaiah chapter 2:1-5.

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD."

As one "Amillennialist" said to me, "God is finished with the Jew and Israel has no further part in the purpose of God."

Holding to this view forces a person to "interpret" the above verses in a manner other than by understanding the words to mean simply what they say. Thus: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it" is explained as meaning: "'the mountain' of the Lord's house is meant, not Mount Moriah, on which the temple was built, as Kimchi (a Jewish scholar) interprets it; nor the temple itself, as the Targum; though in the last days of it, and at the first coming of the Messiah, that had a greater glory than ever it had before, through the personal presence of Christ in it; through the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles there, on the day of Pentecost; and through the Gospel being first preached here by Christ and his apostles, from whence it went forth into all the world, as is afterwards predicted it should; but the kingdom of Christ, which is his church, is here designed; called 'the Lord's house'"

You will see that adherence to a notion requires the commentator to deny unashamedly in a very confusing way what God plainly says!! "The mountain of the Lord's house is meant, not Mount Moriah, on which the temple was built." Rather, the writer claims that we are to understand that "the kingdom of Christ, which is his church, is here designed; called 'the Lord's house.'"

We could multiply such assertions by which what God plainly states is denied and a man's notion is put in its place! I am amazed that men who undoubtedly love the Lord and seek to serve Him can be so bold as to thus "correct" God and change the plain meaning of His Word.

Peter

It reminds me of Peter as recorded in Matthew 16:21-22. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Peter took it upon himself arrogantly to contradict the Saviour's prophetic words.

I say that is the spirit of those who say that when the Lord speaks through His Old Testament prophets of "Zion" or "Israel" within the context of any prophecy of the future, we are told by some that He does not mean what these words plainly mean but we must substitute a completely different meaning, specified by them of course! Zion and Israel mean the New Testament Church! Why could the Lord not state such plainly? That is the question.

Given the choice between the plain meaning of God's words and the notions of men, we must ever go with the plain meaning.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Please remember the Saviour's response to Peter's contradiction. "But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men," Matthew 16:23.

Satan

Peter's words were of the devil! They were an offence (an impediment which causes stumbling). He was not speaking with God's approval but "savourest . . . the things that be . . . of men." The word "savourest" means to "mind" as is made clear in Romans 8:5 where the word is translated "mind". "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." Peter's shameful contradiction of the Lord Jesus sprang from his carnal mind. He would impose his notions on Christ and was severely rebuked in consequence.

Peter is universally censured for his folly but is not this spirit seen amongst many of God's servants who quite readily, as readily as did Peter, contradict and dare to claim to correct what the Lord says?

What is required of us when we read God's Word?

When we come to God's Word:

1. WE ARE EXPECTED TO UNDERSTAND IT.

God expects us to perceive with our minds what He is saying.

"And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand," Matthew 15:10.

"Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?" Matthew 15:17.

"Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?" Matthew 16:9.

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)," Matthew 24:15.

Such texts could be multiplied, but it can be seen that we are supposed to understand the words spoken unto us by the Lord. Indeed, a lack of understanding is rebuked. The explanation given by the Saviour is very simply an exposition of the plain meaning of the words. Failure to understand such simple words is deemed a rebukeable offence.

Peter informs us regarding Paul's writings: "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction," 2 Peter 3:16. There are difficult passages in God's Word. That is surely understandable since it deals with that which is far above our experience and native understanding!

However, it is the "unlearned and unstable" (not very complimentary adjectives) who wrestle with God's Word and place upon it their own interpretation.

What should we do? We should do what that wise and holy man Daniel did when he could not understand what God had said. "And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision," Daniel 8:15-17.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Our failure to grasp the import of God's Word should not result in our 'guessing' at what God means, but rather our asking Him for the meaning.

So did the disciples in Matthew 24:1-3. "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

The Saviour kindly, patiently answered them as Matthew 24 and 25 indicate.

So He will ever respond to those who come to Him in prayer seeking an understanding of His Word.

2. WE ARE EXPECTED TO BELIEVE IT.

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," Luke 24:25.

That is what lay at the heart of the disciples' stumbling at the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ on the cross. They failed to believe simply what God had plainly said about the Messiah. Men had their own notion of what the Messiah would do and because His death at Calvary did not fall within that notion, Calvary was a source of confusion and fear!

The answer to their fears.

"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself," Luke 24:26-27.

It does not matter whether or not what God says conforms to what men of science think. You have but to wait a year or two and they will change the views they hold so boastfully, bumptiously, today!

No, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men," 1 Corinthians 1:25. We must not censure God's Word by man's pea-brained notions!

Rabshakeh

A certain "great man" once said: "Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it? Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand? And his servants spake yet more against the LORD God, and against his servant Hezekiah," 2 Chronicles 32:11-16.

Was this man, Rabshakeh, correct in his views? No! Very soon after he learned at great cost just how wrong he was!

"And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven. And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword. Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

the hand of all other, and guided them on every side," 2 Chronicles 32:20-22.

There are more details of God's intervention in 2 Kings 19:35-36. "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh."

Thus, it was seen that the view of God and His power which was given to Israel and believed by Hezekiah and Isaiah was correct while the "wise" notions of Rabshakeh were found to be utterly wrong and cost him his eternal soul!

This how we are to embrace the wonderful words of God, irrespective of what men's changing notions may declare.

"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Numbers 23:19.

"And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord," Luke 1:45. What supernatural things were told Mary and which, praise God, all came true!

"For with God nothing shall be impossible," Luke 1:37.

3. WE ARE EXPECTED TO OBEY IT.

This is to be our reaction to God's Word. Obedience of God's Word requires an utter abandoning of man's views and opinions. Noah was required to believe in a coming flood when there was no such thing as rain upon the earth in his day. "And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground," Genesis 2:5-6.

Israel was expected to obey God and walk across the Red Sea between the divinely restrained walls of water. "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left," Exodus 14:21-22.

Salvation from sin requires a defiance of man's views on the matter and a simple trusting of the plain meaning of God's Words. If 'Zion' does not mean 'Zion' and 'Israel' does not mean 'Israel' then why should we believe that: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John 3:36, can be taken literally?

This is the logic of this sinful questioning of God's Word on the basis of our own foolish notions.

Learn from the father of the demented child. "He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," Mark 9:19-24.

His faith was rewarded.

"When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose," Mark 9:25-27.

So it will be for all who believe God's Word.

"And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book," Revelation 22:6-7.

4. WE ARE EXPECTED TO REJOICE IN IT.

Understanding God's Word, believing it to be simply true, obeying it no matter how foolish that may be deemed by the world and looking forward with joyful anticipation to its complete fulfillment and consummation is how we should live.

Moses illustrates for us this joyful, victorious faith in God's Word.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned," Hebrews 11:23-29.

The expected outcome of the struggle of the ages is a joyful and uplifting thing for God's people to contemplate.

Those views which deny the truth of prophecy and seek to impose a false view can only discourage the people of God and rob them of faith in the ultimate and glorious victory of Christ over His enemies.

Does this not explain the ignorance, the darkness, the lack of knowledge there is amongst God's people regarding this glorious truth and the accompanying weakness, bondage and worldliness that abides upon the church today?

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept," Matthew 25:5. Is there not a spirit of slumber upon God's people today? Particularly, is there not, as is depicted by the Saviour in this parable, a spirit of indifference to the return of the Bridegroom?

That is not how it was in the early Church.

"So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 1:7.

"And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come," 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," Titus 2:13.

That was the spirit of the Church in the days of the apostles. Can any say that such a spirit pervades the Church today? A knowledge of, an expectancy of that great day is sadly lacking today.

This stems from the imposing of man's silly and sinful notions in the place of the plain Word of God.

Modern prophetic notions have not brought joy to the people of God. They have, however, brought joy, of a



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

sort, only to the devil!

May God awaken His people to the simple and glorious truth of prophecy.

Rev. Ivan Foster.

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