



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

February 8, 2023



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

COURSE OVERVIEW: The purpose of this workshop is to increase the participants awareness of how their world view and moral reasoning is formed and how it influences their interpretation of Scripture. The goal is participants will be better equipped when interpreting Scripture by recognizing and questioning their personal biases and moral reasoning.

Introduction:

- **We interpret based on who we are**
- **The result can be a misunderstanding and/or misapplication of the Scriptures**



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

1. Truth – The Foundation!

a) What is truth?

- **Truth Defined:** Truth is an absolute objective standard by which reality is measured.
- **Truth exists:**
 - 1) Jesus says in John 8:32 “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
 - 2) John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”
 - 3) Matthew 4:4 “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”
- Truth lives outside of you and transcends your emotions.
- Truth is deeper than facts.



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1. Truth – The Foundation! (cont.)

b) The Source of Truth:

- **God’s Word – The place you go to find and discover truth.**
 - 1) **It is the location that God has established where truth can be located. It is your first place to go.**
 - 2) **God’s Word is the source of truth because of its inerrancy and infallibility.**
- **Before buying into what anybody else has to say about the matter:**
 - 1) **Does it agree or disagree with God’s word?**
 - 2) **Romans 3:4 says “...let God be true, but every man a liar....”**
- **The Bible declares God is Truth (Psalm 31:5, Isaiah 61:16)**
- **God’s Word shall stand forever (Isaiah 40:8).**



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1. Truth – The Foundation! (cont.)

c) Why Mankind Cannot be the Standard for Truth:

- Finite in our knowledge & understanding
- Sinful
- Emotional
- Living in a secularized culture

In Summary:

- Truth exists and it is an absolute objective standard by which reality is measured.
- God's Word is the source of truth because of its inerrancy and infallibility.
- Truth is discoverable, knowledgeable, and understandable.
- Truth lives outside of us and transcends our emotions.
- When our truth is not consistent with God's truth, our truth is wrong!



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2. Unconscious Bias:

a) What is Unconscious Bias?

- 1) Often called implicit bias, occurs outside of a person's conscious awareness.

b) How Unconscious Bias works?

- 1) These beliefs exist deep in our minds, and oftentimes, we fail to recognize that they even exist within us.
- 2) Over time, our brains associate things. They form neural pathways, which become stronger every time these associations are recognized and unconsciously affirmed.
- 3) Neural pathway - In layman's terms they are our brainwaves carrying thoughts to various parts of our brain and they do it faster than we can even notice.



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2. Unconscious Bias (cont.):

c) Formulation of our world view (The lens through which we view the world):

1) Family

2) Friends

3) Culture

4) Education

5) Media Outlets

6) Social Media

These influencers form the lens through which we view the world!



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2. Unconscious Bias (cont.):

d) Biases can affect our interpretation & application of Scripture:

- Unconscious biases can have a big influence on our limiting beliefs and behaviors.
- When this translates to our Spiritual lives it can affect the way we:
 - 1) understand Scripture,
 - 2) interact with others (Christians or not), and
 - 3) make decisions concerning personal and social issues.
- If not properly addressed, these biases will have a negative impact on our personal walk with Christ, the Lord's purpose for our life, and the Body of Christ as a whole.



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2. Unconscious Bias (cont.):

The top four Bible interpretation biases that most people possess as they approach the Scriptures:

Bias #1 in our Bible Interpretation – Our Life Experiences

- 1) Most of us have experienced things in this life (both for good and for bad) that have strongly shaped our belief systems.
- 2) This is inevitable since as human beings it is in our nature to respond to the things we have seen, heard or experienced.
- 3) However, these experiences can often color our understanding of Scripture.



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The top four Bible interpretation biases that most people possess as they approach the Scriptures (cont.):

Bias #2 in our Bible Interpretation – Our Religious Tradition

- 1) our “inherited” religious/theological tradition.
- 2) The church we attend/or churches we’ve attended often shape much of our thinking, ideas, doctrines and beliefs on what the Scriptures mean.
- 3) This is also true if we come from a non-churched or Catholic background.
- 4) Many doctrinal debates exists in the evangelical church today.
- 5) Your religious views have likely been influenced by very articulate Christian teachers, writers, and speakers with convincing arguments.
- 6) We often approach Scripture with a preconceived set of beliefs. And that’s not necessarily a good thing.



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The top four Bible interpretation biases that most people possess as they approach the Scriptures (cont.):

Bias #3 in our Bible Interpretation – Our Culture and Language

- 1) We are rarely aware that our view of the world is completely shaped by our culture and our language.**
- 2) One small example - the word “church” in the New Testament**
- 3) By the same token, all of our attitudes about work, money, marriage, women, careers, raising children, parents, dating, etc. are set by our ingrained cultural attitudes.**
- 4) It is very natural to bring our own cultural assumptions to the text and so misinterpret what the Bible says on these topics.**
- 5) Our cultural sensitivities may even be offended by what the Bible says on these and other topics.**



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The top four Bible interpretation biases that most people possess as they approach the Scriptures (cont.):

Bias #4 in our Bible Interpretation – Our Previous Biblical Knowledge

- 1) the knowledge we already have about certain biblical verses. (i.e. John 3:16)**
- 2) Too often we base our interpretation of a certain Scripture based on what we've always been told.**
- 3) It is much more difficult to approach the Scriptures with a fresh perspective and a willingness to wrestle even with well known verses.**
- 4) We think we know what the verse means, and yet very few of us have probably ever stopped to thoroughly understand the context in which that Scripture was given.**



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian

Secular Moral Reasoning:

- **Moral reasoning applies critical analysis to specific events to determine what is right or wrong, and what people ought to do in a particular situation.**
- **The brain processes day-to-day and moral decision generally the same way.**
- **Moral reasoning typically applies logic and moral theories, such as deontology or utilitarianism, to specific situations or dilemmas.**
- **Evidence shows that the moral principle or theory a person chooses to apply is often, ironically, based on their emotions, not on logic.**
- **While we likely believe we approach ethical dilemmas logically and rationally, our moral reasoning is usually influenced by intuitive, emotional reactions.**



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

a) Deontological Systems:

- 1) Based on the Greek verb *dei*, used in the sense “it is necessary, it should be done.”
- 2) Ethical systems based on rules for right and wrong, what ought to be done and ought not to be done.
- 3) Can be secular (if the rules are based only on human reason and intuition) or Christian (if the rules come from God’s Word, the Bible).
- 4) All Christian ethical systems take God’s commands in the Bible as rules that define right and wrong human conduct, and therefore all Christian ethical systems are deontological.



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

b) Teleological Systems:

- 1) Based on the Greek noun telos, meaning “end, goal, outcome.”
- 2) Ethical systems based on seeking the best results for an action.
- 3) The most common secular teleological theory is utilitarianism, which involves seeking the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
- 4) Ethical egoism, involves seeking whatever is best for yourself personally, a position that is clearly contrary to Jesus’s teaching, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39).
- 5) In contrast, a Christian ethical system should have a God-centered teleological aspect to it, because the Bible tells us the result we should seek is the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31).



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

c) Relativism:

- 1) **Ethical Relativism is the belief that there is no absolute right and wrong, therefore, ethical decisions should be based on what is commonly accepted in each person's culture or on each individual's personal preferences.**
- 2) **Ethical Emotivism - The view that there is no such thing as right and wrong.**
- 3) **Antinomianism - Based on the Greek prefix anti- (meaning "against") and the noun nomos (meaning "law"). We are not subject to any moral laws.**
- 4) **Situation Ethics - There are no absolute right or wrong actions, but a person should always do the most loving thing based on the facts in each new situation.**
- 5) **Because the Bible does teach that there is absolute right and wrong, Christian ethics cannot accept ethical relativism.**



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

d) Virtue Ethics:

- 1) Emphasizes not whether specific actions are right or wrong, but the moral character of the individual.
- 2) The primary concern is whether you are a virtuous person.
- 3) A Christian ethical system should emphasize virtue ethics because the Bible teaches that we should seek to develop a Christlike character:
 - Paul says that God predestined us “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29), and he also says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).
 - Peter, in fact, uses the common Greek word for “virtue” (aretē, meaning “virtue, moral excellence”) when he tells Christians to “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue” (2 Pet. 1:5).



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Secular Moral Reasoning - Conclusion:

- A system of Christian ethics based on the Bible does not fit neatly into any one of these categories alone.
- Rather, if our ethical system is derived from the Bible, it will be deontological and teleological, and it will also include a component of virtue ethics.
- A Christian approach to ethics will also exercise caution about adopting conclusions from the secular versions of these ethical systems.
- Secular systems assume that ethical principles must be developed by human beings using only human observation, reasoning, and intuition
- A Christian ethical system will not adopt moral relativism; the Bible does teach that there is absolute right and wrong as defined by God Himself.



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NEXT SESSION

**INFLUENCES ON OUR INTERPRETATION OF
SCRIPTURE – PART II**

February 15, 2023

6:30 p.m.



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics:

a) Christian ethics teaches us how to live:

- 1) Christian ethics asks what the whole Bible teaches us about which acts, attitudes, and personal character traits receive God's approval and which ones do not.
- 2) It is important to study Christian ethics so that we can better know God's will, and so that each day we can "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him" (Col. 1:10).



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

b) The ultimate basis for Christian ethics is the moral character of God:

- 1) God delights in his own moral character, which is supremely good, unchanging, and eternal.
- 2) His moral standards for human beings flow from his moral character, and therefore they apply to all people in all cultures for all of history.
- 3) God is love, so he commands us to love. He is holy, and he commands us to be holy. He is merciful, and he commands us to be merciful. He is truthful, and he commands us not to bear false witness.
- 4) God's moral character and the historical fact that he has given us moral commands provide the basis for a Christian answer to the question of how we can move from "is" statements to "ought" statements in ethics.



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

c) Christian ethics is based on the Bible:

- 1) One of the purposes of the Bible is to teach us how to live a life that is pleasing to God
- 2) Because it is the Word of God, the Bible is a higher authority in ethics than tradition, reason, experience, expected results, or subjective perceptions of guidance.

d) Christian ethics is essential to the proclamation of the gospel:

- 1) Jesus told his disciples “that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”
- 2) How can unbelievers repent of their sins if they do not even know what God’s moral standards are?



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

e) Christian ethics teaches us how to live for the glory of God:

1) The goal of ethics is to lead a life that glorifies God. Such a life will have:

- A character that glorifies God (a Christ-like character),
- results that glorify God (a life that bears abundant fruit for God's kingdom),
- behavior that glorifies God (a life of obedience to God, lived in personal relationship with God).

2) Although we are justified by faith in Christ alone and not by works, our day-by-day obedience as justified Christians is an important part of the Christian life.

3) Christian ethics asks what the Bible teaches us about which acts, attitudes, and personal character traits receive God's approval and which ones do not.



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

f) Obeying God brings numerous blessings to our daily lives:

- 1) The NT teaches at least 17 specific kinds of blessings that come to us in connection with living in obedience to God's commands in Scripture.
- 2) God intended that obedience to Him would not be burdensome (1 John 5:3) but would bring us great joy.
- 3) When Christians are not "conformed to this world" we discover that following the will of God is a path of life that is for us "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

g) Willful sin brings several harmful consequences to our daily lives:

- 1) It is not too popular to talk about sin today, but it is a huge topic in the Bible.
- 2) The New Testament mentions several harmful consequences that come from willful sin in the life of a Christian.
- 3) Christians should pray daily for forgiveness of sins (Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:9), not to gain justification again and again, but to restore our personal fellowship with God that has been hindered by sin.



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

- h) Christian ethics teaches us to consider four dimensions of any action, and nine possible sources of information:**
 - 1) Christian ethics is not concerned only with our right and wrong actions. We are complex people, and life itself is complex.**
 - 2) Therefore, in studying Christian ethics, God wants us to consider not only (1) the action itself but also eight other factors.**
 - 3) We need wisdom from God in order to evaluate these factors rightly in making a decision.**



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

- i) We should never think that God wants us to choose a “lesser sin”:
 - 1) Although several evangelical ethics books claim that, from time to time, we face situations of “impossible moral conflict” where all our choices are sinful and we must simply choose to commit the “lesser sin,” this idea is not taught in Scripture.
 - 2) It is contradicted both by the life of Christ, “who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15), and by the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13, which says that God will always provide a “way of escape.”
 - 3) The “impossible moral conflict” view easily becomes a slippery slope that in actual practice encourages Christians to sin more and more.



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3. Moral Reasoning - Secular and Christian (cont.)

Christian Ethics (cont.):

- j) Using the Old Testament for ethical guidance requires an understanding of the history of redemption:
 - 1) The Mosaic covenant, which began at Exodus 20, was terminated when Christ died.
 - 2) Christians are no longer directly subject to the laws of the Mosaic covenant but now live instead under the provisions of the new covenant.
 - 3) However, the OT is still a valuable source of ethical wisdom.
 - 4) Understanding the progressive development of the Bible from the old covenant (under Moses) to the new covenant (inaugurated by Christ) is especially important when thinking about the Bible's teaching regarding civil government today.



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

4. Mitigating our biases and natural reasoning when studying, interpreting, and applying Scripture:

We must simply recognize that they exist, and we must not allow them to unduly influence how we approach, study, interpret, and apply Scripture by:

- Not consciously trying to suppress bias
- Recognizing we all have biases
- Stopping and thinking! Learn to mistrust your first impressions
- Not ignoring differences – be curious
- Challenging negative assumptions and stereotypes
- Measuring levels of trust, openness, and honesty



Influences on Our Interpretation of Scripture

4. Mitigating our biases and natural reasoning when studying, interpreting, and applying Scripture (cont.):

When we feel our cultural, individual, or religious biases being threatened as we study Scripture, we should remember to PAUSE:

- **P** – Pay Attention to what’s happening beneath the judgement/emotion (Event vs Interpretation)
- **A** – Acknowledge or identify your reaction / interpretation / judgements / emotions
- **U** – Understand other possible reactions / interpretations / judgements / emotions
- **S** – Search for the most constructive/ empowering or productive way, according to Scripture, to deal with the situation
- **E** – Execute your action plan (Act consistently with what aligns with God’s Word)



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NEXT SESSION

THE TRINITY:

THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

February 27, 2023

6:30 p.m.