

2015 is our CWR/PTM Year of the Bible. In March/April we offered the first chapter of a special feature dedicated to a deeper appreciation of and a more Christ-like way to read and understand the Bible. Here's Part 2!

PART TWO OF FOUR

Should the Bible be interpreted?

Fundamentalists who believe that the Bible is infallible and inerrant often claim that the Bible should not be interpreted, but its words believed and accepted without question. But the supposition that no interpretation of the Bible is either necessary or even allowed is usually not an invitation for a Bible reader/student to read and literally apply the Bible without help or assistance.

The "no interpretation is necessary" marching and chowder society often predicate their insistence on laying aside critical faculties when reading the Bible in favor of believing, without question, someone's interpretation

AS WE READ AND STUDY THE BIBLE FROM A CHRIST-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE, OUR STUDY IS TRANSFORMED FROM READING A RULE-BOOK INTO A FASCINATING JOURNEY ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD...

of the Bible who is revered as a religious authority. But the Bible itself invites inquiry—it does not demand that its readers check their brains before reading nor does it insist that its students suspend logic and reason before study.

Some believe that every word of the Bible is infallible, inerrant and literally true. Such individuals, often called literalists, believe anyone who sees metaphorical, or symbolic language, interpretations and applications within the Bible is

Reading and UNDERSTANDING the BIBLE SENSITIVELY and SENSIBLY

"watering-down" the Bible.

The Bible is not a collection of handy quotes that may be randomly plucked out of their context (a practice which is known as *proof-texting*) in order to provide support for an already-arrived-at theological conclusion. The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written by a wide variety of authors using different *literary genres*.

In order to properly understand the message of any portion of the Bible, that portion must be studied, understood and interpreted within its context.

The Bible is and has been many things to many people. Selections from the Bible have become, over time, what people have made them to be.

The Bible has been used and abused—it has been used to condone the practice of slavery, to permit polygamy, to promote racism, to oppress women and to justify war.

Each and every time the Bible is read and studied it is being interpreted. Everyone tends to read the Bible through their own lens of experience and culture. Everyone brings their own baggage packed with assumptions and prejudices to the process of reading and understanding the Bible.

For some, the act of "studying the Bible" is merely a subjective exercise of picking and choosing until they are able to prove what

they already believe to be true.

Even when we attempt to objectively study the Bible, we must be aware of the subjective beliefs that influence our quest.

Eisegesis = Reading something into (*eis*) the passage that isn't there. An exercise in subjectivism.

Exegesis = Discovering and understanding meaning out of (*ex*) the passage

Does the Bible have a theme?

Jesus is the center and the core—the primary message and theme of the Bible. Jesus is the gospel (good news) which the Old Testament leads to and the New Testament explains. The gospel hangs on Jesus' teaching and his revelation. Jesus is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6) and he came to reveal the Father. Jesus himself is the essence of a Christ-centered understanding and interpretation of the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of stories and experiences of sex, violence, lying, murder, war, barbarism, brutality, lust, greed, betrayal and for good measure, lots more sex and violence that spans several thousands of years of human history. Through all of the real and oh-so-human experiences recorded in the pages of the Bible, Jesus Christ is the common thread of faith, hope and forgiveness—the gracious and merciful Common Denominator that runs through the human story.

As we read and study the Bible from a Christ-centered perspective, our study is transformed from reading a rule-book into a fascinating journey about our relationship with God, viewed through the lens of Jesus Christ. Jesus told the religious authorities of his day who diligently studied their Bible (the Old Testament), "you study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40). □

—Greg Albrecht