

**From Jesus to the Scriptures (and Back):  
Meeting the Crisis of Scripture as People of the Word**  
Lay Bible Institute - Fall 2016  
Rev. Dr. Peter H. Nafzger

**Part 4: Interpretation**

**Biblical Interpretation in the Modern Debate**

Two Prevailing Attitudes

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Scripture alone = MY interpretation of Scripture alone

2. \_\_\_\_\_

“As someone who began his academic career as a natural scientist, I am intensely aware of the fact that allegedly neutral ‘observation’ is actually theory laden...The demand for detachment is quite simply an illicit claim to an objectivity that cannot be held in practice.”

(Alister McGrath, “Reclaiming Our Roots”)

**Entering the “Circle”**

“Interpretation is a circular process” (Martin Franzmann)

“Qui non intelligit res non potest ex verbis sensum elicere” (Luther)

(“Whoever does not understand the subject cannot make sense of the words”)

**The Image of the King**

Irenaeus against the Valentinians (ca. 180): “They endeavor to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support. In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth. By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their opinions... Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skillful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should re-arrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or a fox, and even that but poorly executed; and should then maintain and declare that *this* was the beautiful image of the king which the skillful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog, and by thus exhibiting the jewels, should deceive the ignorant who had no conception what a king’s form was like, and persuade them that that miserable likeness of the fox was, in fact, the beautiful image of the king.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>*Against Heresies* 1.8.1 in *ANF* 1:326, (*These Are Written*, 221-222).

Irenaeus' version of the rule of faith (Canon 1): "The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father "to gather all things in one," and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that...He should execute just judgment towards all."<sup>2</sup>

### How Shall We Interpret this Image of the King?

1. Together as the people of God—never as \_\_\_\_\_
2. Recognize that we are not \_\_\_\_\_ readers/interpreters
3. Approach the Scriptures with a humble and "teachable" disposition as \_\_\_\_\_, not masters

"It is not for us to sit in judgment on Scripture and divine truth, but to let God do his work in and through it, for it is something which we can learn only of God. Of course, we have to give an account of our understanding of Scripture, but not in such a way that it is forced or wrested according to our own will, but rather so that we are taught by Scripture."

"No one is able to understand Vergil in *Bucolics* unless he has been a shepherd for five years. No one is able to understand Vergil in *Georgics* unless he has been a farmer for five years. No one is able to understand Cicero in his letters (as I teach) unless he has worked under a distinguished government for twenty years. Know that no one has sufficiently tasted the sacred Scriptures unless he has governed churches for one hundred years with the prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ and the apostles. Do not lay a hand on this divine Aeneid; rather, bow before its feet. We are beggars; this is true."<sup>3</sup>

4. Ask of every phrase, verse, chapter, book:

How does this help me understand God's work in \_\_\_\_\_?

### Summary

"These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."  
John 20:31

---

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I.10.1. in ANF 1:330.

<sup>3</sup> Luther, WA *Tischreden* 5:168. (No. 5468). My translation.