Preunderstandings

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Our Horizon

“Don’t bother me…I’m looking for a verse of Scripture to back up one of my preconceived notions!”

Our Horizon

- Describe your horizon…

Our limited perspective leads us to bring a set of preunderstandings to Scripture.
Definitions

• Preunderstanding = “A body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it” (D. S. Ferguson, in Klein 99).

Definitions

• Are preunderstandings good or bad?

Definitions

• Four types of preunderstandings:
  – Informational (knowledge)
  – Attitudinal (disposition, bias)
  – Ideological (world view, perspective)
  – Methodological (procedure)
  D. S. Ferguson, cited in Klein 100
Role of Preunderstandings
• What role do preunderstandings play in biblical interpretation?

• Some people argue that we should come to Scripture without preunderstandings.

Role of Preunderstandings
• How can we deal with our preunderstandings?
  – Become as aware of them as we can.
  – Be willing to let them be reshaped in the process of interpretation

Role of Preunderstandings
• Every time we change through reading Scripture, we show that the hermeneutical process isn’t a vicious circle but a spiral.
Theological Preunderstandings

• Read handout 3.1 (“Theological Starting Points and Hermeneutical Preunderstandings”).
• What theological traditions are behind the examples on the following slides?

The sovereignty of God is clearly emphasized in Scripture. He is represented as the Creator, and His will as the cause of all things…. God...marks out the path of all His rational creatures, determines their destiny, and uses them for His purposes. And though He endows them with freedom, yet His will controls their actions. . . . It is said that if the decretive will of God also determined the entrance of sin into the world, God thereby becomes the author of sin and really wills something that is contrary to His moral perfection. . . . _____ theologians…frankly admit that they cannot solve the difficulty…. The…origin and nature of the religious life of man…was rooted in a covenant, just as the Christian life is to-day, and that covenant is variously known as the covenant of nature, the covenant of life, the Edenic covenant, and the covenant of works.

The story gives us poignant insight into the plight of both Sarah and Hagar…. Both Sarah and Hagar are victims of a patriarchal society that stresses the importance of sons and of a narrative structure that revolves around the promise of a son. Sadly, but not surprisingly in such a context, they make victims of each other…. Sarah’s anger at Abraham, “May the Lord judge between you and me” (not “between Hagar and me”; Gen. 16:5), becomes an indictment of the patriarchal system, which pits women against women and challenges their intrinsic worth with patriarchal presuppositions about women’s role.
The _____ vision...is one that discovers God in and through the things of this world.... Because of _____’s belief that God’s saving presence is mediated through the ordinary, the material, the human, _____ can place great emphasis not only on the book of the church, the Bible (the Word of God in words of women and men) but also on the church itself as a sacramental reality, visible and invisible, both human and divine.... From the understanding of the sacramental nature of the church it is a small but logical step for _____ to understand that the church’s tradition, particularly as articulated in the...ministry of teaching...must be taken with utmost seriousness both as a source and a judge of theology....

The Bible gives specific guidelines for the shape of discipleship, for the form of the church and for the relationship of the church to the world. The basic models of the believer’s relationship to Christ (discipleship) and of the church as the binding and loosing community are to be found in Scripture and are to be followed and obeyed because they represent the mind of Christ. . . . Jesus stood at the center. He was a hinge, a watershed. Before him had been one kind of historical reality; after him, another kind. Before Jesus everything was in the nature of promise of things to come; in Jesus everything was fulfillment. The Old Testament was a shadow; in Jesus came the true reality.

[The] Scriptures, and subsequently the confessions, are normative for _____ theology in the application not of abstract and disconnected doctrinal truths, but of the Gospel. The Gospel, the teaching that God accepts the sinner as righteous for Christ’s sake, provides organic unity to both the Scriptures and the confessions.... The Gospel...becomes the theological standard for judging doctrine. In actual practice a contradiction between these two principles of Scripture and Gospel is rare, but it may happen. _____’s rejection of Hebrews, James, and Revelation from the New Testament canon was an application of this principle.... The law has no independent, autonomous existence in revelation, but is given for the very purpose of God’s justifying the sinner for Christ’s sake.
Essential and Negotiable

- Read handout 8.5 (“Essential vs. Negotiable”).
- Do part one, marking each item with E or N.
- Compare your results with others in a small group.
- Where do you find similarities?
- Where do you find differences?
- On what hermeneutical principles do you base your decisions?

Hermeneutics and Devotion

- If the object of hermeneutics ultimately is transformation, what is the relationship between the study of Scripture and devotional reading of Scripture?