
Words of Truth

“That’s Your Interpretation”

By: Brian A. Yeager

How many times have you shown someone what the Scriptures teach on a certain matter and they just respond by saying, “that’s your interpretation?” Years ago a man asked me if I knew for certain that a person needed to be baptized to be saved. I first clarified that we were talking about a sinner needing salvation and not an innocent child (Matthew 18:1-4) or erring Christian (James 5:19-20). We clarified that we were talking about a person who could know the truth, had sinned, and was never a Christian. I then just had him read these words of Jesus: “*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. **He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned***” (Mark 16:15-16). I said nothing. He had just read those Scriptures. His response, “that’s your interpretation.”

Over the years, I have often taught by just having someone read Scriptures as an answer to a question they ask. Over the years, I have often had a similar response as the man I mentioned above. I am sure that some reading this article have had similar experiences. This is a common excuse that has been used by people in error over the years to deflect the truth by claiming it is an interpretation difference. The word “interpretation” means: “the action of explaining the meaning of something” (New Oxford American Dictionary).

Throughout the Scriptures we find that men gave interpretations about things of God (Genesis 40:1-8, Daniel 2:5-45, Daniel 4:18-24, Daniel 5:16-26, and I Corinthians 12:10). However, we need to understand that when interpretations of something were given, it was never MAN’S interpretation. Prophets and teachers, even of old, did not tell what they thought God meant by something. Consider this: “*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:16-21).

We have no authority from God to give our interpretation of something He has stated. We cannot define God’s terms for Him. We must use the Scriptures, without twisting them (II Peter 3:14-18), to explain the Scriptures (II Timothy 2:14-18; cf. Acts 8:25-39 and Acts 17:1-4). Having

made all of that clear, I would like to address the seriousness of the statement, “that’s your interpretation.”

Serious Implications With The Charge Of Giving Our Own Interpretations

When someone charges you or I of explaining the Scriptures by giving our own meaning to them they are, knowingly or not, condemning us. If you or I step aside from what God said to give our thoughts we are erring (Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32, Proverbs 30:5-6, Galatians 1:6-12, and Revelation 22:18-19). Those individuals that make that charge are, whether they realize it or not, saying that your knowledge is flawed (i.e. Matthew 22:23-33).

When someone suggests that there are two or more understandings of a Scripture they are implying, knowingly or not, that there is more than one truth on matters. The Scriptures reveal that there is one faith (Ephesians 4:1-6). We read of “the faith” (Jude 1:3), not “the faiths.” Our Lord died to unite those in one body whom were separated under the Old Law (Ephesians 2:11-17). The idea that we can look at the Scriptures and arrive at separate conclusions is a denial of the fact that we can be one body in one faith. The fact is, we can read and understand the will of God alike (Ephesians 3:1-11). When something outside of the one rightful conclusion is taught on any Scriptural matter, that teaching is to be opposed (I Timothy 1:3-7).

Unity in diversity is also an implication of this idea that a person can hold their own interpretation of Scriptures. If you can have your meaning and I can have my understanding, then we can agree to disagree. This too is a falsehood that springboards off of the charge of having different interpretations. God does NOT approve of us holding differing views of things revealed in His word (I Corinthians 1:10, I Corinthians 4:17, II Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 2:2, Philippians 3:16, II Thessalonians 3:6, I Timothy 6:3-5, II John 1:6-11, and Revelation 2:14-16). Even in matters of authorized liberties, wherein we can lawfully practice different things (Romans 14:1-15:7), we cannot believe different things (I Timothy 4:1-5).

While there are other implications of this false concept, let me give you one more before we end this study. God commands us to understand His will (Ephesians 5:17). Those who claim that you can look at the Scriptures and walk away with multiple conclusions, are implying that we cannot properly understand God’s word. Jesus taught that one can hear and understand His teaching (Matthew 15:1-20). When people follow their own understanding of things, they end up believing and practicing false doctrines (Hosea 13:1-4). Let’s never state, plainly or by implication, something that would lead people to think that they cannot understand God’s will!

Conclusion

Helping people understand the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures will always be a task for those of us teaching the truth (Nehemiah 8:8). What we must never do is explain what we think God meant by something. If you cannot Scripturally prove what God means, don’t think that you can jump into His mind to share what you think He thought when He revealed something. His thoughts are not on the same level as our thinking (Isaiah 55:7-9). Rather, test everything and only hold to the conclusions you can PROVE (I Thessalonians 5:21).