

The Clarity of Scripture

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SECTION 1

Bibliology & Old Testament Survey

An Overview

Premodern

- Objective, ultimate truth
- Supernatural
- Authority from God

Modern

- Objective, ultimate truth
- Anti-supernatural
- Authority from science and reason



An Overview

Postmodern

- There is no authoritative world-view for all people
- There is no overarching purpose to the human story
- Absolute truth cannot be objectively known
- Tolerance and diversity are primary virtues
- Suspicion of any claims made with certainty or authority
- Hostility to every worldview that makes any universal truth-claim



The Casualties of a Postmodern Perspective

- They are skeptical of any and all claims to an authoritative worldview.
- They are skeptical of any claim to absolute truth about reality.
- They are skeptical of an overarching purpose to the human story.



Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a general and wide-ranging term which is applied to literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and cultural and literary criticism, among others. Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In essence, it stems from a recognition that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality.



Postmodernism

For this reason, postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person. In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually. Postmodernism relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal. PBS (Public Broadcasting Service)



Postmodernism

Postmodernism is "post" because it denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody - a characteristic of the so-called "modern" mind. The paradox of the postmodern position is that, in placing all principles under the scrutiny of its skepticism, it must realize that even its own principles are not beyond questioning. As the philosopher Richard Tarnas states, postmodernism "cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more than can the various metaphysical overviews against which the postmodern mind has defined itself."

- *PBS (Public Broadcasting Service)*



Postmodernism

“...the postmodernist isn't trying to express any clear viewpoint of his own. Nothing is ultimately denied or affirmed. No true postmodernist would ever deliberately argue that a given proposition is right or wrong. That's not the point of the exercise. The only goals are to eliminate certainty, question authority, obliterate clarity, and undermine the very notion of objectivity. That, you could say, is the postmodernist agenda. ”

- *Phil Johnson*



Postmodernism and the Church

Brian McLaren thinks Christians should worry less about being right, and worry more about being good. He spends several pages arguing that syncretism is not something we should fear; it's something to be embraced—and he frankly doesn't see why it's not possible for someone to be both a Christian and a Buddhist.



Postmodernism and the Church

"If the gospel isn't good news for everybody, then it isn't good news for anybody. And this is because the most powerful things happen when the church surrenders its desire to convert people and convince them to join. It is when the church gives itself away in radical acts of service and compassion, expecting nothing in return, that the way of Jesus is most vividly put on display...



Postmodernism and the Church

...To do this, the church must stop thinking about everybody primarily in categories of in or out, saved or not, believer or nonbeliever. Besides the fact that these terms are offensive to those who are the "un" and "non", they work against Jesus' teachings about how we are to treat each other. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor, and our neighbor can be anybody. We are all created in the image of God, and we are all sacred, valuable creations of God. Everybody matters. To treat people differently based on who believes what is to fail to respect the image of God in everyone. As the book of James says, "God shows no favoritism." So we don't either."

- *Rob Bell*



A Biblical Perspective

2 Timothy 3:1-5

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.



A Biblical Perspective

2 Timothy 4:1-5

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.



The Clarity of Scripture Defined

God is fully in control of His communications to human beings. When He intends to communicate with a human being, he is always able to do it successfully. But another name for successful communication is clarity. An unclear word is one that does not succeed, that fails to accomplish its purpose. But we know that God's word always accomplishes its purposes (Isa 55:10-11) Therefore, his word is always clear.

- John Frame



The Clarity of Scripture Defined

As a logical corollary to the Bible's representation of its revelatory and inspired nature, the purpose of this entire activity on God's part was to reveal his ways and works in a comprehensible manner to those to whom his revelation originally came. He "spoke and wrote" in order to be understood. And the prophets, apostles, and indeed Jesus himself, addressed their messages to all the people, and never treated them as intellectual pygmies who were incapable of understanding anything of what they said.

- *Reymond*



The Clarity of Scripture Defined

The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it.

- *Grudem*

The Bible is a plain book. It is intelligible by the people. And they have the right, and are bound to read and interpret it for themselves; so that their faith may rest on the testimony of the Scriptures, and not on that of the Church.

- *Charles Hodge*



The Clarity of Scripture Defined

The doctrine does not rule out the need for interpretation, explanation, and exposition of the Bible by qualified leaders. The doctrine does mean that Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person, deep enough for highly qualified readers, clear in its essential matters, obscure in some places to people because of their sinfulness, understandable through ordinary means, understandable by an unsaved person on an external level, understandable in its significance by a saved person through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and available to every believer whose faith must rest on the Scriptures.



Biblical Teaching about the Perspicuity of Scripture

- Scripture is Clear Because Scripture is Light

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

2 Peter 1:19

So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.



Biblical Teaching about the Perspicuity of Scripture

- Scripture is Profitable

2 Timothy 3:16–17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.



Biblical Teaching about the Perspicuity of Scripture

- Scripture is Addressed to Common People, not Religious Experts

Deuteronomy 6:4 a

“Hear, O Israel!...

Mark 12:37 b

...And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.

Ephesians 1:1

...To the saints who are at Ephesus...



Biblical Teaching about the Perspicuity of Scripture

- Parents Can Teach Scripture to Their Children

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.



Biblical Teaching about the Perspicuity of Scripture

- Even a Child Can Understand Scripture's Message

2 Timothy 3:14-15

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.



Biblical Teaching about the Perspicuity of Scripture

- Scripture Tests the Accuracy of Religious Ideas

Acts 17:11

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.



The Accessibility of Scripture

Deuteronomy 30:11–14

“For this commandment which I command you today **is not too difficult for you**, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.”



Clarity in Context

Scripture is always clear enough for us to carry out our present responsibilities before God. It is clear enough for a six-year-old to understand what God expects of him. It is also clear enough for a mature theologian to understand what God expects of him. But the clarity of Scripture... is person-relative, person-specific. Scripture is not exhaustively clear to anyone. It is not clear enough to satisfy anyone who wants to gain a speculative knowledge of divine things. It is, rather, morally sufficient, practically sufficient, sufficient for each person to know what God desires of Him."

- John Frame



The Teaching of Scripture

- **Psalm 19:7**

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

- **Psalm 119:130**

The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.



Responsible Scholarship

The existence of many disagreements about the meaning of Scripture throughout history reminds us that the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture does not imply or suggest that all believers will agree on all the teachings of Scripture. Nevertheless, it does tell us something very important—that the problem always lies not with Scripture but with ourselves. The situation is in fact similar to that of the authority of Scripture. Whereas we affirm that the words of Scripture have all the authority of God himself, we also realize that many people do not acknowledge that authority or submit themselves to it. Similarly, we affirm that all the teachings of Scripture are clear and able to be understood, but we also recognize that people often (through their own shortcomings) misunderstand what is clearly written in Scripture.

- *Grudem*



Definitions

- **Hermeneutics** - It is the science and art of biblical interpretation. Science because it is guided by rules within a system and art because of the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation.
- *Bernard Ramm*
- **Exegesis** - the process of interpreting a text of Scripture
- **Eisegesis** - A reading into the text of what the reader wishes it to mean. This system would have us understand a text not in terms of it's syntactical or semantic structures, but in the variety of ways in which the text is "actualized" in our minds.



Exegesis

...exegesis is the explanation; hermeneutics is the exposition of a given text. Theologically, exegesis establishes the meaning of particular statements or passages; hermeneutics has to do with the principles and scheme of interpretation.

- *Cairns*

Consequently, when one studies principles of interpretation, that is "hermeneutics," but when one applies those principles and begins actually explaining a biblical text, he or she is doing "exegesis."

- *Grudem*



Hermeneutics Practiced

- Study the Scripture in its plain historical sense – geography, cultures, authors, audiences, dates...
- Be careful to consider words, grammar, syntax
- Remember that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture
- The Scriptures must be studied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit



Personal Responsibility

Every man is responsible for his religious faith and his moral conduct. He cannot transfer that responsibility to others; nor can others assume it in his stead. He must answer for himself; and if he must answer for himself, he must judge for himself. It will not avail him in the day of judgment to say that his parents or his Church taught him wrong. He should have listened to God, and obeyed Him rather than men.

- *Charles Hodge*



Personal Responsibility

...let us consider the clarity of Scripture in relation to God's lordship attribute of authority. To say that God's Word has authority, as we have seen, is to say that it creates obligations in its hearers: obligations to believe what it says, to do what it commands, to write it on our hearts, and so on. The clarity of God's Word means that we have no excuse for failing to meet these obligations. To say that God's Word is clear is to say that we have no excuse for misunderstanding or disobeying it. So the clarity of Scripture has ethical implications.

- *Frame*

