M11A1 Errors of Interpretation

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MBS0010010021/11

Chapter 1 Errors of Interpretation

Many of the objections the apologist faces are matters of interpretation. While there are hundreds of types of errors of interpretation, they may be grouped under three categories: Errors Related To Prejudices And Biases, Errors Related To Meaning And Perception, and Errors Related To Collection And Integration.

**Errors Related To Prejudices And Biases**

As humans, our knowledge is limited. As a web programmer in the 1990, web technologies were in their infancy. I could learn, or at least be aware of much of what was available. But this soon exploded exponentially. It became impossible to completely keep up. As my skills grew there remained more and more that at best I’d merely heard of.

As we live in communities we subtly become infused by many of the biases around us. We don’t easily escape these biases. They influence our thinking. Biases influence our thinking of the Bible. We may even have pastor’s who aren’t fully born again and thusly preach a distortion of scriptures. They may or may not realize their biases. They may to an extent believe in the four Solas but not rely on the Spirit’s guidance in their study. In fact their biases may occasionally lead them to rely on completely different spirits to influence them.

Even among believers, it’s a basic tendency to distort the scriptures. Human thinking isn’t aligned with the divine. Romans 8:7 says “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” We have two hearts when born again. We intentionally *will* the old heart to shrink and the new heart to increase. Yet the old heart remains, in moments of weakness, to influence the new heart.

The Sadducee tried to challenge Jesus with a perhaps unanswerable question in in Matthew 22. Jesus’ initial response was, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God". The bias of their life assumptions ignored the word of God. They found it in their humanness to be illogical. They challenged Jesus on the basis of their biases.

Some things in scripture may be difficult to understand. More frequently we don’t seek understanding with God but seek instead to justify our grounds for misunderstanding. We seek to establish our biases into scripture, then deny scripture when our biases don’t fit snugly with scripture.

We must depend on the Holy Spirit in our attempts at hermeneutics, ignoring our biases.

As humans we have a strong sense of skepticism, we easily doubt. We especially doubt that which is good, we distrust the motives of people trying to help us. This leads us to hold at arm's length God’s offer of salvation to all. We feel that something free must be flawed. We’d rather earn it. Other religions such as Islamism prefer a works based salvation. It may only require one good work exceeding the accumulated bad works. Islim finds no free gift from Allah. Salvation must be earned. Many of us Christians ‘feel’ that salvation must be earned, despite it being offered as a gift. Acts 8:20, Romans 5:15

The nature of the natural human heart is careless rebellion against God, as in the well known song “I’ll do it my way!” as sung by Frank Sinatra. It is said that Sinatra’s last words to his wife in 2017, were “I’m losing.” I’m not sure what he sensed he was losing, but it’s a sad last thought. <https://www.readersdigest.ca/culture/famous-last-words/>

The third person populating the earth openly rebelled, killing his brother because he didn’t appreciate God’s instructions on worship. Cain worshiped the same God his brother worshipped. You could say they were both worshippers of the promised Messiah, similar as we out of many Christian denominations worship him today. But Cain rebelled, perhaps not recognizing rebellion in his act of worship. He chose “to do it my way.”

Jesus in his parable of the rich man and Lazerus in Luke 16 said in the metaphor of Abraham, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Moses and the prophets was an expression signifying scripture. We may so doubt scripture that we ignore the “way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Jesus expressly says in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John the Baptist, in faith tells us “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him..” (John 3:36)

People need some sense of a Bible background to make sense of the Bible. It’s story and message differs markedly from the thoughts of people unaccustomed to it. Maybe that explains the apparent modest results from Paul’s preaching on the Unknown God. Hey, don’t you understand *UNknown*!? The Bible’s message conflicts with our ‘*me first’* culture. And a up to 4000 year old culture seems out of step with way of thinking.

More and more even Christians think it’s better to live together a few years before marrying. You’ll be a better lover as a spouse if you’re not a virgin. Never mind the children sometimes born while “I’m trying the relationship out before getting married.” This logic they decide contravenes and exceeds the logic of that ‘ancient’ Bible.

I think it’s possible that gay marriage results from this popular choice to live together without marriage. Both ideas make sense to the Bible ignorant and the casually Christian church goer. The “I know better!” syndrome leads us to estrangement from the Bible.

The essential step to following God is to believe on Jesus. John 6:40 At this early stage we are infant believers, saved but understanding only the easier word of God. Paul and Peter call this the milk stage. (1 Corinthians 3:2, 1 Peter 2:2) Peter goes on to say “that ye may grow”. And Paul suggests that when you can bear it to move up to the “meat” of the word.

Many Christians seem to be gluttons for the milk; the meat seems tough. Many choose to remain immature. Or perhaps sometimes they have church leaders content to encourage them to rely on baby formula and strained baby food. There might be a little meat in these Gerber purées, but not sufficient for a believer after 20 years; or probably after two or three years. In Hebrews 5:11 Paul calls this “dull of hearing.” Satisfied with little. Content to remain immature. They have little ability to understand scripture.

I just had this brief twitter interaction:

 Ginny Lynn @life\_exchanged

 I wonder if sometimes we think the LORD doesn't speak to us today because

 we aren't listening to His voice.

 George Wade @GeorgeEWade Replying to @life\_exchanged

 Or we don’t listen carefully and so misunderstand Him. We let His voice get lost

 in the background noise.

Many interpret the Bible from philosophies of contemporary Feminism, Syncretism, Pluralism, Radicalism, Evolutionism, Humanism, Rationalism, etc. Patriarchy in the Bible is condemned, or at least frowned on. The apostle Paul is shunned on this point. Some people on twitter would remove Paul’s epistles from the canon. New Ager’s mix elements from many of the world’s religions and, I think, hold Christianity at arm’s length.

Evolutionists fault the lack of scientific detail in the creation story, preferring to relegate it to a primitive story with no connection to the omniscient, omnipotent God in the story. They see no revelation. The humanist focuses on only self. He believes only what makes sense to him without a scriptural study.

People misinterpret the Bible, centering on their prejudices and biases and leading them to doubt and distort. A large number never attend church except for weddings and funerals. Others add the highest holy days of Christmas and Easter. They lack any biblical background to understand scripture, or to want to understand. They may have a glancing curiosity. But the book is too thick. And Christians often disappoint them.

Those indifferent do recognize commitment. The Bible teaches commitment. The Bible, for instance, teaches purity. People are a bit taken aback when they learn my wife and I have been married fifty-two years. That many years seems unattainable in our culture. Co-workers avoid dirty jokes and curse words around me. They don’t hear these words from me. I don’t have to ask them to speak differently around me.

There are people who have long attended churches where they haven’t felt fed by the word of God. However, they sometimes listen regularly to broadcasting that gets deeply into Bible study. They sometimes switch to online church attendance. Sometimes they contact the broadcaster asking to be connected to a church teaching these Bible truths. Some are ready for spiritual meat. They’re tired of milk only.

 2 - Errors Related To Meaning And Perception

When we talk with friends we know the context of the conversation. Not so much so when we read. *Sweet* has to do with sugar content when we talk about the tea we’re drinking. *Sweet* refers to cuteness or innocence when we’re talking about an infant. To understand the Bible we must know both word meanings and contextual meanings.

Word meanings can sometimes be obscure in the King James Bible because over 6 centuries usages have changed some usuages. Comparing the text to a more modern version such as the NKJV or NIV can help here. This is especially useful for a new Christian. A version such as the Message can perhaps even help with context. The Message author calls his work a translation although many conservatives think of the Message version as a paraphrase.

When Jesus’ mother and brothers came to take the outspoken Jesus home to Nazarus he pointed to his disciples and said in Matthew 12:49 “Here are my mother and disciples.” But we also see in Matthew 19:26-27 that on the cross Jesus said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!”

Jesus obeyed his Father in heaven and remained committed to his mission to the world. At the same time he cared for and respected his mother, even during his grievous trial on Golgotha. His brother became a leader among the early Christians. He remained faithful to both his Father in heaven and his family. Out of complete context, he may seem disrespectful.

Sometimes the keys to understanding confuse us. Or maybe we see what we expect or want to see. Many Old Testament prophecies referred to the Messiah as a sacrificing redeemer at Jesus first coming. But these prophecies sometimes also extended to his second coming as King. The Jews of his time misread the events, focusing on his triumph as King. They sought glory, not so much repentant, worshipful obedience.

Sometimes we read the gospels and discover differences in details. We can react negatively, disbelieving because of these differences. Or we can realize that reporters of an accident or crime describe the scene somewhat differently, perhaps due to position or distance, obstacles, poor eyesight or hearing. We can also remember differently due to passage of time after the event. The difference in retails doesn’t negate the accident or crime.

We can be limited in understanding based on our life experiences. I can recognize a loving Father in heaven partly because I had loving, Christian parents. An adult who endured an abusive childhood, physically, emotionally, or sexually faces an obstacle when being taught that our Heavenly Father loves us, wants what is best for us.

Words can have more than one meaning. Some today understand love in a primarily sexual context. Others see it in a romantic context. Still others may see it in parental and friendship contexts. English doesn’t have a direct way to understand Greek agape love for all people, those we know and don’t know, those we like and those we dislike. Love carries the connotation of feelings to us today.

Salvation in the Bible can refer to freedom from the death penalty of sin though the merit of Jesus on the cross. It may also refer to the process of sanctification where we learn to live our life with a character more closely resembling that of Jesus. I like the following quote, my pinned tweet on twitter.

And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. — Desire of Ages

As humans, we are incapable of understanding God’s hatred for sin, *all sin*. We rank sin based on severity of consequences. For premeditated murder we want to electrocute them, preferably in an intentionally painful manner (although we’re usually satisfied with a quick death). For many crimes, we’re satisfied with letting them rot in prison and suffering from abuse by fellow prisoners.

The small sins like lies that save us from embarrassment we think of as mainly inconsequential. However, in Revelation 21:8 we read “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

Even as Christians we have trouble seeing relative goodness as bad behavior. Yet our best human behavior is as filthy, menstrual rags compared to the righteousness of God. (Isaiah 64:6) Until we appreciate the unbelievable smallness Christ resolutely became to bear our sins which deserve death, both small and large, to the ignoble cross, unable to see his Father nearby… Until we realize he did this to cover us with his robe of his righteousness, *if we let him*… Until then we cannot ‘begin’ to recognize the awfulness of sin. And only then can we begin to appreciate the magnitude of his grace and the gift of salvation he offers us.

Chapter 3 - Errors Related To Collection And Integration

The Bible is not your everyday textbook. Theological truths in the Bible are not categorized by sections. A given theological truth comes from groups of verses scattered throughout the entire book of books. Texts build upon other texts and the biblical truth cannot be extrapolated from only one or two texts.

I’d add that the understanding also relies on knowing the God behind the texts. The Old Testament shows an angry, judgmental picture of God to many people. While the New Testament many people embrace because of the picture of a God who manifests love and healing. This may help explain why some Christians are New Testament only believers. Yet God’s love abounds in the Old and judgement is found in the New, particularly the final judgment in Revelation.

We must beware to avoid picking and choosing verses to satisfy our personal biases. We must not attempt to blend all the verses on a topic to unnaturally conform to our biases. Calvin taught predestination. Jesus of course demonstrated non-descrimination, openness to all. It would be contrary to the demonstration of Jesus’ love to stop at his death and afterwards fix for some people the destiny of damnation into hell fire. Joshua said to “choose you this day whom ye will serve.” (Joshua 24:15) God chooses but we must also choose.

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26–28) They came from all groups of people and those who choose him are one in Jesus. He had already chosen them, regardless of nationality or social status. We have an obligation to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

We are blessed to have the whole scripture. It was given progressively over centuries. Before Christ, the Adam through to Abraham and to Moses and the Hebrews generations had the promise of salvation. We have the example of the holy life of Jesus and the fulfillment of this promise. *We have the epistles and revelations expounding on the teachings of Jesus*. These teachings were only dimly realized by the disciples prior to the resurrection and Pentecost. We are blessed and benefit from the whole scriptures.

For five hundred years the Christians studied these scriptures in completeness but also some confusion resulting from conflicting understandings. The dark ages, resulting from a wrong doctrine that only priests could understand the Bible, along with limited availability of the printed word, stymied this progression of understanding. Then the Protestant reformation and the printing press ignited a renewed study and realization of the grandeur of Grace and depth of biblical truth.

The Bible is sufficient for doctrine. We must be careful to avoid adding to it and careful to not dilute it. “Principles of Bible interpretations are not radically different from principles of interpreting normal prose and poetry.” -lecturer Bias may be the leading cause of misinterpretation. We must determine to know scripture from the whole word of God’s revelation to us.

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1. How this module helped your studies

I need to keep in mind that my background in the Bible is richer than most peoples’. They did not grow up hearing Bible stories at bedtime, having family worship. They didn’t experience grades 2-12 in Christian schools with Bible class every day and all subjects taught from a Christian perspective and the science curriculum creation based. I graduated from a Christian college taking required Bible courses and optionally studying homiletics. I taught in Christian schools for eight years. I taught Sabbath School classes for adults for many years and for thirteen years served as an elder in the church.

I have a Christian wife with whom I can discuss spiritual things, even during this pandemic. No, I’m not a theologian, never been a pastor. But I have a broader church and biblical understanding than many I may talk with.

I should be humbled, knowing that so many didn’t have my opportunities. I should not expect that their experience will make the understandings I’ve been flooded with suddenly clear to them.

2. What new lessons you learned

I learned that the lecturer and I may disagree about where he says “starting from this period [5th or 6th century], and continuing through Protestant Reformation, our understanding of doctrine has progressively been increasing.” Luther nailed his theses on the door in 1517. He’s considered the father of the Protestant reformation, although Wycliffe preceded him by maybe 150 years. For at least three quarters of a millennium I believe pure doctrine stagnated except for remote believers such as the Waldensians whom the official church persecuted.

I agree that our perception and understanding of the Bible will never be complete in this life. I even personally believe we will continue to learn about God through eternity.

I find also that there is very little so far to disagree with the material in these first nine courses.

In another area, I see in twitter discussions a resistance to the idea of sin and repentance. This comes from people who seem to see salvation as a once and done thing. 1 John 2:4-6 is cast aside and ignored. The law was fulfilled. We can’t obey the law so we can forget about obedience and sin as we naturally would. I’m not sure this is a linguistic response. It may more reflect man’s natural rebellion, even among those of us calling ourselves Christians. Maybe this is the tares and wheat syndrome.

3. Your critical evaluation on the topic. WE mean what is the shortcoming you see in the text, your suggestions for improvement.

Years ago I overheard a conversation between an old woman and the pastor’s wife. The old woman didn’t like Paul. He limited the role of women, or so she felt. This church was not of my denomination. But my denomination continually fights this issue in General Conference Session, another which starts this summer. I think that cautioning against the bias of feminism falls mostly flat in many, if not most conservative congregations.

I feel (not know) that if we could have long ago figured out a way to enable women without a patriarchal condescension. It would have been beneficial to raise the profile of women before feminism became the controlling issue it is today.

We should have done more than raised salaries of women church workers when the courts forced us to. We should have provided back compensation for the underpaid years, up to ten at least.

Without being proactive in the past, any argument in church for men as pastors is immediately slapped down today as misogynistic. We need a better framing on this issue than we have so far in this study. Maybe another course will better prepare us in this area of church disagreement.

While women in the SDA church aren’t ordained pastors, yet at least, women participate in most leadership positions. We still have few women elders. But in all other positions of leadership we have a mix in leadership. Half our board members may be women despite their paucity as elders. And women present the sermon on occasion.

I do think women in our church seeking ordination are for the most part equally conservative in matters of belief if not compliant in gender roles. I conversely believe the issue in mainline churches has widened the conservative/liberal gap. This feminism issue threatens to create a major divide in conservative churches. It’s already permeated most mainline church. It’s a coming tsunami and IF the Bible teaches a male ministry, the Bible is poised to lose on this issue. (Not be wrong but be ignored.)

 4. How does this lesson help you?

This lesson makes me aware of my privilege.

It makes me more aware that my belief may be considered biased by others. I should perhaps resist being overly argumentative and listen better.

As humans we have a strong sense of skepticism. I may possibly misunderstand what I read in the lectures. I have biases in both church tradition and church experience. My hurts in the church influence me despite the fact I’m fundamentally conservative. Although deeply conservative there remain areas where conservatives in other denominations stack texts as I might to arrive at different understandings.

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Date: 01-19-2022