

## Jason Upchurch - Q & A - Aug 2022 - Part 4 - Hermeneutics Prayer Politics Predestination

1) When do you decide when to follow the Bible literally, or know that it's an allegory? Such as cut out out your eye if your eye causes you to sin. Matt 5:27-30

This is a great question. This gets into how we interpret the Bible which is called hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the Bible.

How do we know how to interpret something? Do we read poetry like Song of Solomon the same way we read the Paul's epistles? No. Do we read the newspaper the same way we read a text message from a friend? No. Do we read a text message from a friend the same way we read one from our boss? No.

It's interesting, when we're communicating to contemporaries we automatically know how to interpret things.

So think about this statement. "I literally spent an hour in line at Costco to buy 2 things. They call it customer service - they keep using that word but I'd don't think it means what they think it means."

In 2 sentences, I've thrown a whole barrage of literary genres at you. I gave you exaggeration: Today, when someone uses the word "literally" it actually means figuratively. We all know that. People don't really use the word "literally" literally anymore.

They might have been in line to buy 2 things - that is literally literal.

And there was an allusion to a movie: you keep using that word, but I don't think it means what you think it means from where? The Princess Bride.

All that happened in 6 seconds and we can process all of it. Almost exactly in the way the person intended it. The reality is that this happens in the Bible as well. The authors write in different genres and the genres can change rapidly and we're not always given a heads up for when it changes.

You'll read through the gospels and Jesus will go from:

Parable - which is it's own interpretive genre.

Straight statement - which we might take "literally."

Apocalyptic prophecy - the moon will be turned to blood and the sun darkened - that's an allusion to the OT just meaning that there are massive changes happening

Narrative - Jesus walked with so and so to this place.

All of that's in there and sometimes it's in rapid succession.

So how can you learn to understand these things? Let me give you 4 ways.

1) The easiest way to know what genre it is to read the Bible over and over and over. And get a feel for how the whole thing is working. Sometimes the NT quotes the OT directly, sometimes it's just a passing hint or an echo of the OT. You ever read the OT and then the NT and you're like "wait, that sounds exactly like this thing I just read." In all likelihood the NT author is expecting you know the OT reference like I expected you'd know the Princess Bride reference.

The Bible repeats itself and its storyline very frequently and just expects us to know this and uses language and phrases to tip us off that it's happening.

You ever known people who were trying to learn English and it's really hard for them because of all the weird sayings we have? They know what the words mean, but they don't make sense without years of practice. That's how reading the Bible often is. It usually just takes time.

2) We should try to take the Bible plainly. Our goal is not to take the Bible literally, in a rock solid sense, at all times. We don't take parables literally. We don't take all of the book of Daniel literally as though there really is a

big massive statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron that a literal big rock comes and knocks over. That's figurative for something else.

What I would say is that we take the Bible plainly. What is it plainly trying to tell us. Sometimes that helps us get a better understanding.

So we need practice, our goal is to read it plainly.

3) I might encourage people to get a book on interpreting the Bible.

The ESV Study Bible has a good little introduction on interpreting the Bible. There's a book called *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert Plummer. You could get a book called *Playing by the Rules* by Robert Stein. I don't agree with all their conclusions, but they give helpful insights into this. God's people have been struggling with this since the Bible was first written down.

4) Keep a study Bible handy when you read the Bible. The notes will often address areas that seem difficult to work around.

If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. How would we know if we should literally tear out our eye? That seems pretty radical, doesn't it? No one in all of church history has actually torn out their eye to solve a pornography problem, that I know of anyway.

What about greet one another with a holy kiss? Is that hyperbole? It's a command, just like tear out your eye. Is it as radical as tearing out your eye? Maybe for some of you with space bubble issues.

But the best way is to simply read the Bible over and over.

2. What is the extent of Christian intercession? When Jesus prays that the Father would forgive the sins of the people crucifying him or Stephen prays that God would not hold the sin of those stoning him against them, does God answer that prayer?

**Turn to Acts 7:54-60** This is a great question. We could add to this Job praying that the Lord would forgive the sins of his children. There are other examples.

So the heart of the question is: do our prayers actually forgive other peoples' sins? **Read**

Well, let's work through this. A lot of times when we're faced with a difficult theological question it's helpful to step back and just talk about what we do know. There are only so many interpretative options we can make.

It could mean that that someone's sins are actually forgiven just by us asking God to do it. That's one option probably the least likely because a person has to believe in Jesus for themselves to have their sins forgiven.

**John 1:12-13:** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Second, we know that only through the blood of Jesus are sins forgiven. If the blood of bulls and goats don't take away sin - and Hebrews says they don't - then certainly our blood doesn't take away sin, then neither do our prayers. Our prayers do not work atonement in any way.

Third, in the examples mentioned - Jesus and Stephen and Job - was the prayer answered? Well, I think we have answer yes.

Many people standing at the base of the cross were forgiven for their sins. In the case of the centurion he was converted moments after the death of Jesus.

It's actually a beautiful picture that we sang earlier in the song Jerusalem:

See the king who made the sun  
And the moon and shining stars,  
Let the soldiers hold and nail him down  
So that he could save them.

That's powerful. They were saved by the blood of the man who they were killing. How were they saved? By faith that Jesus the Son of God died for their sins.

Even Job's children, though killed in various calamities, are all pictured in a positive light, loving each other and never being charged with sinfulness. It appears that they lived godly lives. And look at **8:1. Read**

Who's that guy? That's the apostle Paul. Were his sins forgiven? Yes they were. On what basis? By faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

I think when we see these prayers that God would not hold sins against someone what it appears they are getting at is praying for salvation. These are prayers and intercessions that God wouldn't remove just this one sin. But that he would remove all their sins through salvation.

The Bible makes clear there are different levels of punishment in hell, but what would it really matter if someone were in hell for 10 billion sins, rather than 10,000,000,001? It wouldn't make much of a difference. Our heart is not that people suffer a little less for persecuting us but that they would receive the fullness of eternal joy with Jesus forever because not only are their sins forgiven, but that his righteousness is imputed to their account. Not based on their works, but based on the work of Jesus.

So to summarize: I believe this is a prayer of salvation, following the heart of the Lord Jesus. And it is especially dear because it is a desire specifically to see those who persecute us come to saving faith.

3. Does God predestine our salvation and sanctification or just our salvation? **Turn to 1 Thess. 4:3-4, 5:23**

So a few weeks ago we talked about the predestining work of God in salvation. That before the foundation of the world God chose who would be saved and that in the course of time he brings to faith all those whom he has chosen. Not only does he plan our salvation, but he secures it through the work of Jesus and then applies it through the work of the Holy Spirit. And God, by his own power, keeps us saved.

But what about our sanctification? Does God predestine that? And the answer is: kind of. There is a sense in which God is sovereign over absolutely everything that transpires - he is sovereign over nations and nature, over atoms and molecules and galaxies and the hearts of people. So in a generic sense, yes. That's what it is for him to be God.

But, as best I can tell, the Bible never uses the specific word "predestine" in reference to our sanctification. But it certainly uses strong sovereignty language. **Read 4:3-4, 5:23-24**

So who is striving for holiness here? Is it us or is it God? Yes. There is a sense in which we are called to holiness, but also a sense in which God is working in it too.

See in salvation, because we're spiritually dead, God has to do the whole work of bringing a dead sinner to spiritual life. He gives us faith and joy and new birth.

But in sanctification, since we are now filled with the Spirit of God, we too are called to work. So we strive for holiness, but it's God working to make us holy.

**Phil 2:12-13:** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So we work and God works.

**2 Cor. 3:18** And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

So on the one hand the more we know about the Lord and his glory and grace, the more sanctified we will be, and yet that work comes about by the Spirit.

Whenever we talk about sovereignty there is just some element of mystery how God harmonizes our responsibility and his operation. We know we're responsible and that he's sovereign. And we just rest in that truth.

4. What is our responsibility to participate in politics/government. Specifically when it comes to public debating/discourse. Given the context of our heavenly citizenship.

So I'll try to narrow this down to public debate/discourse specificity. But first I think it's helpful to understand that politics and government is not some sort of untouchable issue for believers.

In a broad sense, we all participate in politics and government on some level. Even if you choose not to vote or don't like talking about politics, that's a political decision that you make. Politics and government are essentially the same thing: how do we live in light of governing authorities? Or how do we want to be governed? So we all participate in some way, even if that participation is by withdrawal. And that's an option that many believers have taken.

Maybe you like talking about government, maybe you don't. But at the end of the day our faith in Jesus - the **Lord** Jesus - affects every single area of our lives. Jesus is King of kings. And he's Lord of what? Lords. Those are political statements.

Jesus says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to who? Him. All authority. Not some. Not just in the church. Not just in your home and heart. Absolutely all authority.

And one day every knee will bow before Jesus. And as his servants we can be salt and light into every sphere of life, including government and politics.

One of the motivating factors for me to run for city council was asking the question: would I rather have 5 Christians on city council or 0 Christians on city council? I hope this is kind of a no-brainer. As those who follow Jesus and know the way the truth and the life and are informed by truth I think we know how God would want a government to operate. I'm not talking about making everyone a Christian because we enact Christian laws or something. I'm talking about doing things or not doing things for the good of all people regardless of what they believe.

As Christians in the 21st century we have a more difficult task because most of the world is some form of democratic republic. There are elections and voting. For most of world history people lived under monarchies. This was a legitimate form of government that God established. Adam was a type of king, Abraham was a king, David was a king, Solomon was a king, Daniel was second line to the king, Joseph was second in line to the king, Esther was a queen, Nehemiah was a governor, throughout the book of Acts the people who get saved are often in politics or government or military and nowhere are they called to repent of this.

Democracy provides challenges that a monarchy does not, of course, because now we have to decide whether we vote for someone. And what does it mean when we vote? Is it 100% stamp of approval on this person or policy? Is it a lesser of two evils? It's difficult.

What about debating and public discourse? That's the precise question. The short answer is that I think we need to talk about government and policy, just like we talk about work ethic and parenting and education and finances. These issues will come up and we should take the opportunity to discuss them with one another and with other believers.

Not argue, not snipe at people, not dunk on them, but to discuss them from an informed Christian worldview.

**Turn to 1 Pet. 3:13-17.** This is a passage we turn to when thinking about persecution for our faith. As you're turning, know that in the 2 chapters leading up to this section Peter has given a comprehensive vision for the Christian life in society.

In chapter 2 we live holy lives, pleasing to the Lord so that the Gentiles - unbelievers - will see the holiness of our lives. We are subject to every human institution - including kings and governors - and we honor them all. Wives live quiet submissive lives in their homes to honor their husbands and husbands live patiently and gently with our wives. We never repay anyone evil if they attack us. Sounds pretty simple, right? Even unbelievers would love that, right? Wrong. **Read 13-17**

We usually quote this in the context of people just randomly persecuting us. But the context is persecuting us for living righteous lives. And get this: our response is to honor Christ in those moments, to make a defense with gentleness and respect. A defense for what? Being persecuted for all the things Peter just talked about: our views on marriage, our views on holy living, our views on how we respond to the government.

Nothing is off the table when we're talking with unbelievers. And marriage and roles and children are all on the table in discussion of holy living in an unholy world. We should tell people why we live with our wives in an understanding way. Wives should tell people why they honor their husbands. We should tell people why we want to be the best citizens.

But wait there's more:

**Prov. 29:7:** the righteous man knows the rights of the poor, a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.

You and I know what the rights of the poor are through the Bible. Well, where do we usually see rights violated or upheld? In the political world. In government. So we can and should talk about rights and poverty and fairness and justice. We should seek to encourage people.

And to be clear, I'm not talking about arguing with people online. I'm a politician and I'm online and it's the least fruitful of all discussions.

I'm talking about reasoning with people face to face in gentleness. And not responding to fools in their folly.

What about abortion and euthanasia? Well, if you really believe that's a child being murdered then you should say or do something.

**Prov. 24:11** says rescue those who are led away to death. Do something about it. I think at the very least this means seeking to convince people that murdering babies is a bad thing. That means public discourse. But it also means someone has to take up the legal means to change.

Here's something that I heard that was interesting: Do you know the overturning of Roe V Wade did not come about by the preaching of the gospel or mass conversion? It came about because of political actions.

Were Christians praying and God working? Of course. But nonetheless, laws don't change and judges aren't appointed without political action.

So all that to say: yes, we should discuss government just like we should discuss all kinds of things. With gentleness, respect and a view to Christ who is King over all things and wants mercy and justice and impartiality to rule.

5. Who is allowed to lead/serve communion. Are the qualifications different than teaching? And then same question about baptism/wedding.

So the Bible doesn't give us a lot of guidance on who officiates the sacraments. In a high church - a church that follows a formal liturgy like the book of Common Prayer, like Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans - they would reserve the ability administer the sacraments to ordained elders. Depending on the denomination that occasionally an ordained deacon could do it as well.

They would say this because they view doing the sacraments - the act of baptizing and the act of presiding over the Lord's Supper - as a ministry of the Word of God. Similar to preaching. And since preaching and teaching in a mixed congregation is limited to men and done most often by pastors, they would say these sacraments fall under the same guidelines.

Now, there's a sense in which I kind of agree with that. I think most of us have an instinct that the elders should baptize or do the Lord's Supper. And there is no verse that says only elders and deacons can officiate the sacraments. But when we look at the Scripture we do see some obvious patterns.

First, is the ones doing the baptism are all men and they are almost always people who have been commissioned to do ministry in some manner. The apostles baptized, elders baptized, Phillip - who was a proto-deacon in **Acts 8** - baptized the Ethiopian eunuch.

So there is a pattern we see of qualified men who have been commissioned in some way baptizing.

We also have no record of women baptizing other people in any occasion. Could they have? Maybe, but it's a striking silence. So then you have to ask why didn't women baptize? Is there an element of baptism that is reserved only for men? It seems that baptism, because it is so closely linked with pastoral ministry of determining who is or is not part of the church is usually qualified men.

The 2LBC even says qualified men, though it doesn't say pastors specifically.

The Lord's Supper is a little different. Because we do a homily, and most churches do a homily - a short sermon - that is reserved for men. **1 Tim. 2:12**: I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man. Since a homily is basically teaching, that's outside the bounds of biblical justification.

Now, let me just address a what-if scenario that I'm guessing happens. Even one brings up what-if scenarios so let's just talk about them.

What happens in a women's maximum security prison where there are no men, no technical church but where ladies really do come to faith in Jesus? Can a woman get baptized by a woman? Can they take some version of the Lord's Supper?

What about a missionary situation where a woman leads people to Jesus and they desire to get baptized and there's no pastor or church anywhere around? Could a woman baptize and/or do the Lord's Supper?

I think the answer to these kind of scenarios is yes. And they are legitimate in the sense that people are trying to be as faithful as they can be given the situation. But, I would say that the constant drive should be toward confirming to the Word of God and seeing those sacraments played out in the context of a local church under the authority of elders.

Weddings are a little different because this crosses over, to some extent, to civil society. The civil government doesn't regulate baptism or communion, but it does regulate marriage - for better or worse.

But a wedding is a religious gathering where there is preaching and teaching and covenants happen. Even state law says that a licensed minister has to perform the vows.

So a woman justice of the peace, or even a woman pretending to be a pastor could perform a wedding and the state would recognize it and we would too, really. The state only requires that they be licensed to perform the ceremony. How do you get a license? Basically you church says it's okay for you to perform the ceremony. There's no certificate, no class. I was "licensed" in the eyes of the state to perform weddings the moment I became an elder because the church assumes that's what elders and pastors do and so they say its legitimate.

I believe it should be a pastor/elder who officiates weddings. Why? Because what is actually happening, whether people know it or not, is that a divine covenant is being enacted between a man, a woman, and God. Any time you see covenants being enacted in the Bible the religious leaders specifically are involved. \

So all that to say, although there is no verse that specifically states it needs to be an elder, I think the nature of what we're doing in baptism and the Lord's Supper and weddings in teaching and officiating vows that I agree with the Second London Baptist Confession that it should be qualified men who lead these things.

**Pray**