

2020 Initiative: Conversations Tour
Theological Engagement & Pentecostal Hermeneutics
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The issue: How do we hear what God is saying to us in His word?
[Hermeneutics: the art and science of interpreting texts]

In Pentecostal scholarly circles, debate rages:

1. We only need the tools evangelicals use, historical critical approaches, for they get us closest to authorial intent (what the author intended to say, i.e., the inspired message of the text);
2. There is a Pentecostal hermeneutic, which recognizes the interpretive significance of the Spirit's presence and the testimony of the Spirit-filled community.

Review:

Traditional Pentecostal reading: "Lord, speak to me"

No historical distance between the reader and text

1. Scripture interprets Scripture: find similar words/ideas elsewhere in the Bible
2. Verification Principle: Bible validates experience; experience validates Bible
3. Text should be read as literally as possible: e.g., world created in 6 24-hour days
4. No Scripture is of private interpretation (2Pet. 1.20): accountability to others

Historical Critical Approach: recognizes the historical nature of the Bible; supplies tools to reduce the distance between the ancient text and modern reader (e.g., Hebrew and Greek grammar, social context) so that author's voice may be heard

The historical approach searches for *what God did and what God said* from the Bible. Obviously, we want to know what has been revealed about God because we want to know God.

Advantages of this method:

1. Narrows the interpretive range to more likely interpretations
2. Prevents highly speculative readings of the text (e.g., could prevent heretical readings)

Disadvantages of this method:

1. Search for authorial intent remains somewhat speculative (authors are dead)
2. Scholars, using the same tools, do not always agree on interpretation

Which begs the question: is the Holy Spirit locked into authorial intent?

Recent Trends

Newer approaches in Biblical Studies quite helpful for a Pentecostal reading of the Bible

1. Oral nature of the Biblical text:

Bible was written to be heard by the gathered saints

This is significant for us as we seek to engage the Scriptures: "Warning, do not read the Bible alone"

2. Literary nature of the Biblical text:

e.g., Narrative approach

Reading the biblical narratives as story, identifying the characteristics of ancient storytelling to assist us in interpretation and retelling

This is significant for us, because the nature of story draws the listener in, inviting individual interpretation and application.

And there is a Biblical story that should reshape our stories

Joel Green: we must be careful to preach the Biblical story rather than use the Bible to illustrate the stories of our culture

(Joel Green, "The (Re-) Turn to Narrative," ch. 1, in J. Green and M. Pasquarello, eds., *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003)

A Pentecostal Hermeneutic

1. Uses the tools so we may hear the Word of the Lord in Scripture, because if we are going to recognize the voice of the Lord today, we better know what His voice sounds like; we better know what He has been doing in the world.
2. Trusts the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a different way than some evangelicals do: Evangelical Hermeneutic: The one with the tools, the scholar, has a reduced sense of need for the Spirit in interpretation. The Holy Spirit inspired the Word, but now we have the tools to figure out what He inspired.

A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: open to the Spirit guiding the interpretation itself, rather than the Spirit just helping us use the tools; the Spirit may bring an interpretation different from what the author intended

3. Reads/hears the Word from the vantage point of a Pentecostal community, with its traditions, emphases and experiences – in other words, a Pentecostal reading

Final Question:

How might we navigate some of the social and theological issues facing our fellowship? (e.g., eschatology, alcohol, same sex attraction)

Acts 15 shows how the Jerusalem Council arrived at a decision about a social issue:

as they met together to discern God's will, there were three components:

Spirit, Word, and Community

They discussed the Word, they analyzed the experiences of members of the community, and the Spirit guided them

(see Chris Thomas, "Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in Lee Roy Martin, ed., *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013).