

PROTESTANT DOCTRINE OF PRIVATE BIBLE INTERPRETATION EXAMINED

Roman Catholicism teaches that scripture must be read in the light of Church teaching. Protestantism teaches you must decide for yourself what scripture is teaching. Protestantism takes this stance because it holds that the Bible alone has authority in religion. It denies the Catholic claim that the Church is infallible and has authority equal to the Bible.

Instead of the Bible being interpreted for you by the pope and his cronies, the Protestant faith believes that you have to read it and interpret it yourself in the light of divine guidance. If the Bible is the only authority in faith and morals like that faith asserts then it follows that every person has a duty to go straight to the book to learn about God and his will and to take nobody else's word for anything. Protestantism uses scholars to understand the Bible but they say this is not a denial of private interpretation. God helps people understand his word and one can benefit from what God tells other people. If you agree with them, you are simply making their interpretation your own and it is still private interpretation.

It is more rational to do what Protestantism does and take the scholars into account instead of just letting the pope and the Roman curia tell you what to think about the Bible as if they were infallible psychics.

If the Bible is the only authority then each person is to read it for themselves for it says it can be understood by anyone with the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). To listen to another interpreter instead of studying it on your own would be making that person the supreme authority – which is also disobedient to God who warns that we must be careful for there are so many wolves in sheepskins about (Matthew 7:15).

The Bible itself says that certain portions of it are difficult to understand and have led some astray. 2 Peter 3:16 says this of Paul's letters though Paul would have regarded this as unfair (2 Corinthians 1:13). (By the way, Ephesians 3:1-5 doesn't say that all the apostles and the prophets wrote could be understood but only that the mystery of Christ they declare would be understood.) But if God's revelation is hard to understand then it is hardly a revelation is it? A book that is not clear even in part is not the word of God. God says that he wants the Church to be one in agreement (1 Corinthians 1:10) so that means there is only one revelation but the Bible says several times that it is not difficult to understand. Matthew 15:8,9 says that our human opinions can make God reject us which tells us that the Bible must interpret itself and that is how we can understand it for to introduce foreign interpretation is adding to it.

Catholics argue that the obscurity of portions of the Bible and Peter's declaration that no prophecy is a matter of one's own interpretation (2 Peter 1:19-21) prove that the Protestant doctrine of private interpretation, that each person is to interpret the Bible on their own, is false. Catholics say, "The mysterious and vague nature of the Bible makes it require an infallible interpreter, the bishops and the pope, and such is needed when the Bible forbids private interpretation". See Question 114, Radio Replies, Vol 1).

Protestants retort that they do not believe that one has the right to interpret scripture any way they wish. One must read everything in context and in the light of what the rest of scripture teaches and be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Private interpretation means learning from God what the Bible means. God has the power to tell you what an obscure passage means. If you misunderstand or have a different interpretation from somebody else that is your resistance to the Holy Spirit so it is humanity that causes divisions and not God. If the Catholics are honest, even if the Church is the authorised interpreter, the Church has changed many of the old interpretations because of new discoveries and new evidence which would indicate that the Church has no more power to understand the Bible than anybody else has. This would indicate that the Bible is not inspired at all when it can be obscure and confusing and when you need to be very clever to prove to yourself that it never contradicts itself and fits archaeology. You have to make sure that the book is the word of God before you have the right to believe in it for God said that he comes first and that he himself is the meaning of life.

The sects which disagree on the interpretation of the Bible can be said to be guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit. The schisms and arguments would not disprove private interpretation for people are reluctant to submit to God. The Catholic Church believes that God speaks to you and guides you directly when you read the Bible with a holy and open heart as much as Protestants do. The only difference is that the Catholic is to ignore the guidance if it conflicts with the pope and Protestants ignore it if it contradicts the Bible and commonsense (the latter to a small extent). There is much disagreement in the Catholic Church over Bible interpretation and it is so unfair that it condemns other religions for doing what it does itself and says it disproves private interpretation. If it disproves it and Protestantism then it disproves it in Roman Catholicism and Roman Catholicism too.

Since sinners can't do real good for Jesus said bad fruit comes from bad trees. The good work of a sinner means, "I do this

good not because it is good but because it just suits me for I am not giving up my sins. I want my cake and to eat it though I can't do that". The Bible says the saved always do some good works which only they are capable of. It follows that every saved person will have the power to do the best good work, give God's light to others. So, if anybody who is saved does not agree with the real meaning of the word of God then that person is insincere and a fraud. The saved who believe themselves to be sincere cannot associate with those who differ from them on a religious level for that is making truth equal to error. You would have to know the Bible teaching on salvation before you could be saved for the Bible has to speak of salvation to you. To listen to a minister or whatever is not listening to God. Thus, the popular Protestant notion that a Roman Catholic can be a saved person in spite of being in a satanic Church is seriously mistaken.

Protestants hold that the obscure parts are just badly expressed by the author and when that happens God makes sure what he is putting into their heads is expressed clearly somewhere else in the Bible. How can an infallible interpreter be needed when the Catholic Church has only interpreted seven texts? Moreover, the Church says that this infallible interpretation does not involve psychic powers but she has to research the ordinary way and the conclusion is preserved against error. So when that is the way it goes about it why should the Church be granted a monopoly on Bible teaching?

The Catholic Church says that if private interpretation is God's law then why can't you judge books not to belong to your canon and drop them out? The Christian reply to this is that if you are really open to the Holy Spirit you will not do that for he will tell you he wrote the books through human authors. The Catholic Church will then respond to this by saying that every sect disagrees with the next and asking how do we know which one is being guided by the Spirit? But the Catholic Church itself says that faith in the Catholic Church has to be communicated privately to each individual by the Spirit in order for faith to appear. So what difference does it make? It isn't teaching anything different in that from the sects. We see that the Church is surreptitiously claiming that the Holy Spirit should only be believed to be communicating grace to you if you are inclined to become or stay a Catholic. If the Holy Spirit is thought to guide those who are truly open to him, to the religion that is the truth, it is unfair to point to the disagreements among those who claim to follow him as evidence that private interpretation is bad news.

Catholics say you have to see the Bible as reliable and that its doctrine makes sense and then see that it speaks of an infallible Church and that leads you to the Catholic Church and to believe it when it says 72 books belong in the Bible and are without error (Catholicism and Fundamentalism, page 126, 127). This all involves private interpretation for you have to see these things for yourself. You have to invoke the Holy Spirit to help you. The Protestant doctrine of private interpretation is rejected though it is the foundation of the Catholic religion too! The Church has to hide its belief in it for the principle automatically gives you the right to form your own Church if you reach different conclusions from the Catholic Church and are convinced that you are open to the Spirit who wants you to take this action. That it is hid at all shows that Catholicism is too fond of power.

The answer to people who say that Private Interpretation is wrong for there were few Bibles before printing came in is that God meant the word to be read to the people.

The Bible is its own infallible interpreter. The Bible says that it can be understood without another infallible interpreter (Nehemiah 8:7, 12; 2 Corinthians 1:13). God would not write anything that could never be understood.

The Bible commands the Church to be united (1 Corinthians 1:10) which it would not do unless scripture has only one true interpretation which anyone who loves what is true can find. (It is people who create false interpretations not God.) If Rome is right to say that the Bible is too obscure at times to be much good then it is not the word of God for it says the Bible can be understood. The hard to understand bits can be understood when the rest of the Bible is studied. It seems unclear to the beginner like every book does but when one is careful and studious one can know what it teaches. God may guide the beginner to learn from those who have read and the beginner finds what they say in the Bible. Catholics sometimes say that nobody can work out what is in the Athanasian Creed about the Trinity from the Bible. This can be true without it meaning the Bible is not the sole word of God (despite page 24, Church and Infallibility). The Creed can be a help to see what the Bible means. The Trinity is a doctrine that cannot be expressed without confusing people.

It is not just the Christian who can interpret the Bible by the guidance of God. The unsaved can do this too for they cannot turn to Jesus for salvation unless God speaks to their hearts in his telepathic way. God might speak even to people he has predestined to damnation but the Bible says that the unsaved cannot understand the things of God.

The Bible and Christian history that the heart is deceitful above all else so you can think you are saved and not be. So, it would be arrogant and proud to claim to be able to interpret the Bible by divine power if only true Christians could do it.

Conclusion

We shouldn't believe the claim of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to be equal in authority to scripture when it wants to be.

WORKS CONSULTED

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS CATHOLICS ARE ASKING, Tony Coffey, Harvest House Publishers, Oregon ,2006
Catholicism and Christianity, Cecil John Cadoux, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1928
Catholicism and Fundamentalism, Karl Keating, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1988
Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties, Gleason W Archer, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982
Evangelical Catholics, A New Phenomenon, Stanley Mawhinney, Christian Ministries Incorporated, Dundrum, Dublin, 1992
How to Interpret the Bible, Fr Francis Cleary, SJ, Ligouri, Missouri, 1981
Lectures and Replies, Thomas Carr, Archbishop of Melbourne, Australian Catholic Truth Society, Melbourne, 1907
Lions Concise Book of Christian Thought, Tony Lane, Lyon, Herts, 1984
PAPAL SIN, STRUCTURES OF DECEIT, Garry Wills, Darton Longman and Todd, London, 2000
Reason and Belief, Bland Blanshard, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1974
Roman Catholic Claims, Charles Gore, Longmans, London, 1894
Secrets of Romanism, Joseph Zachello, Loizeaux Brothers, New Jersey, 1984
The Bible Does Not Say So, Rev Roberto Nisbet, Church Book Room Press, London, 1966
The Church and Infallibility, BC Butler, The Catholic Book Club, London, undated
Traditional Doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church Examined, Rev CCJ Butlin, Protestant Truth Society, London
Vicars of Christ, Peter de Rosa, Corgi, London, 1993
Whatever Happened to Heaven? Dave Hunt, Harvest House, Eugene, Oregon, 1988

BIBLE QUOTATIONS FROM:

The Amplified Bible