

On Interpreting Scripture

by Art Katz

Art Katz emphasizes the importance of literal interpretation of Scripture to preserve its intended meaning and significance.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, John 1:1, 2 Timothy 2:15

Topics: "Reverence for God's Word", "Interpreting Scripture"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the unique nature of Scripture, urging believers to approach it with reverence and a desire for true revelation from the Holy Spirit. He warns against the dangers of misinterpreting the Word through allegorical or metaphorical lenses, which can lead to a distorted understanding of God's intentions. Katz highlights the importance of discerning the literal meaning of Scripture, as it carries profound implications for our relationship with God. He calls for a return to the original intent of God's Word, cautioning against the trivialization of its significance. Ultimately, Katz encourages a deep commitment to safeguarding the truth of Scripture in both spirit and practice.

Transcript

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The Bible is another kind of literature. It is utterly unique. I have been a reader all my life long, but there is nothing like the Scripture for conveying depths of meaning in so few words. The scriptures are terse, compact, and intense, and that puts a great demand upon us to draw out the meaning—which is not the least of God's purposes for giving us the written Word. He wants us to be students of the Word; He wants us to draw out the meaning by the operation of His Spirit and by our dependency upon Him. So much, if not everything, is the issue of revelation. And revelation is the issue of Spirit. And God is not going to give revelation to arrogant personalities, to those who want knowledge only that they may flaunt it, or exhibit it, or show themselves off. The revelations of God are precious, but they are requiring. "To whom much is given, much is required."

Who of us has not been guilty of misusing the Word of God? We can do this by not accepting the Word of God on its literal face value, but interpreting it in metaphorical and allegorical ways, which is to say

spiritualizing the Word of God. There has been more damage done by this liberty than we can ever understand. Once you take that kind of liberty with the Word, of giving it your meaning because it suits your fancy, or it is in keeping with your mindset, what does that do in terms of your relationship with God Himself? "In the beginning was the Word." God Himself is the Word, and when man exalts himself as God's interpreter, he always stands in danger of exalting himself above the Word, which is to exalt himself above God. It is deadly. So this issue of correctly drawing out the meaning of the scriptures needs to be done with the deepest reverence for God. Nor is there a single meaning or interpretation for any one text. The Word of God is so rich that it allows for many different applications and meanings.

You can find allegorical meanings. An allegory is where something stands for something else. You take a literal word and you impart to it a spiritual or significant meaning, and there is a place for that, but not a first place. Our first responsibility is to discern God's literal intention for that word. Allegorical interpretation must never displace the literal interpretation. For example, in the history of the Church, there has been an enormous rejection of the literal statements of God for Israel. I am persuaded that the early church fathers [and later ones!] did not want to see Israel glorified. They did not want to see a restored nation, or that it would become the locus of God's millennial kingdom and glory, so they interpreted every such reference as to mean the Church; that Zion does not mean a particular location in Jerusalem, but only something symbolic, allegorical, and metaphorical for the Church. Now you can preach wonderful messages that way and inspire the Church, but it would be a pity that in the process of that we have lost the literal intention of God.

Another reason why literal meanings have been traditionally avoided is that the implication of the literal meaning is too radical in terms of its requirement upon us. So we want to get off the hook, and one way to do that is to give the scriptures a poetic and spiritualized meaning. And so, we have to fight to restore the original intention of God for His Word. What if the word "glory" becomes for us a cliché? Better that our lips were sealed than that we should speak the word rather than cheapening it or demean it by too much and too shallow a reference. When we say we are jealous for the glory of God, we better have a sense of what that glory means, because if it has only become a cliché and a phrase, we will not be capable of the suffering that precedes it. In other words, if we allow the word to lose its real value, we have lost the only thing that would have been the incentive to suffer to have obtained it. This is the nature of truth in God, and let us be jealous to safeguard His word, both in spirit and in truth.

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