

THE CHALLENGE: TO IMPREGNATE BUSINESS TEACHING WITH BIBLICAL INTEGRITY

Dr. Richard C. Chewning
Baylor University

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you...” (John 15:7)

Dr. Chewning reminds us to examine the presuppositions with which we approach Scripture and its application. He also offers principles for minimizing exegetical problems as well as practical suggestions for helping us grow in our efforts to integrate.

It is axiomatic that those who love Christ and work in either business education or the marketplace will want to see God's precepts permeate the practice of business. Agreed, but we have great difficulty describing what is involved in accomplishing it. Why? Does Scripture-based education require special training? Are there definite skills required to unite God's Word with business courses and research? This essay addresses the toughest difficulties integrators wrestle with and offers three suggestions for teaching with biblical integrity.

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS WE BRING TO SCRIPTURE

Knowingly or unknowingly, we bring to the Scripture a number of presuppositions that shape both our attitude toward it and how we interpret it. For example, some view the Bible as God's revelation regarding salvation but do not believe that the Bible is intended to provide guidance in other spheres of life. Theologically, this is called *sphere sovereignty*-God is sovereign in a single sphere of reality but not in other arenas of life.

Likewise, the principles we employ in interpreting the Bible profoundly impact the way we apply “truth.” A more profound reality, however, is that most users of the Bible are not even aware that they have a particular way of interpreting it. We all do, though. We either absorbed our methodology from a “spiritual mentor” or unconsciously formulated it on our own.

For example, some Christians approach the Bible (formally or informally) with a “dispensational” mind-set. Formal dispensationalists this question.) The answer can be yes; the answer can be no. The answer depends on whether the pronounced “biblical truth” is supported and validated by other Scripture.

Those who cross over the line of orthodoxy into neo-orthodoxy or liberalism greatly complicate the interpretative (hermeneutical) issues they encounter. These people face a host of existential issues involving the meaning of language, the role of personal experience, phenomenological realities, and socio-critical issues. Similarly, our view on total or partial depravity governs whether or not we let “truth” gleaned through general (natural) revelation guide our interpretations of truth embodied in special revelation.

FACING THE EXEGESIS CHALLENGE

Exegesis is our interpretation or explanation of a particular passage or verse of Scripture. Its difficulty and challenge confront us with Arminianism vs Calvinism, infant baptism vs believers baptism, antinomianism vs theonomy, the millennial controversies, and a host of other church-

dividing matters. If those who devoted their lives to the gospel ministry couldn't resolve these exegetical differences over the centuries, how are the less formally trained going to live together in harmony, and especially as they seek to impregnate business teaching with God's truths?

Many people would describe this problem as a professional dilemma, but it is not really a dilemma. It is our opportunity as a fellowship of believers to lead the way into a process that can glorify God and edify His family. God puts a high value on harmony and unity in His family (Ephesians 4:1-6; Colossians 3:14; Psalm 133:1-3). With this in mind, the following three principles are offered as a means of minimizing exegetical problems.

First Principle: Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is no platitude. Seek the active involvement of God in your study of Scripture, your efforts to associate His truths with your academic discipline, and your expressions of the fusing of Scripture with business in both speaking and writing. Pray over your labors. Too often we do our work on “automatic pilot,” striving to cruise along on our own strength with an attitude of self-sufficiency.

When Christ spoke the following words He was making a statement to be applied in every sphere of life: “I am the true vine...abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; *for apart from Me you can do nothing*. If you abide in Me, and *My words abide in you*, ask...and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.” (John 15:1-8 NASB emphasis added; also see Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-19; 1 John 2:6).

Christ has promised us that the Holy Spirit will abide with us, teach us, and guide us in all we do when our labor is in keeping with His Word and will (Luke 11:13; John 14:15-17; 14: 25-26; 16:13-14). In fact, Christ repeatedly invites us to ask and call for His help when we abide in Him and His words abide in us (John 14:13-14; 15:7,16; 16:23; James 1:5; 1 John 5:14; Prov.2:3-6).

Second Principle: Always interpret Scripture in the light of Scripture.

We are to live by “every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3; John 6:63,68). And the Word of God cannot, because of God's own nature, contradict itself or lead to what is not true. Yet there are people who distort Scripture and even use it to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). How are we to avoid error while striving to follow the whole counsel of God? There is a practical way to guard the integrity of Scripture and our fidelity to it.

Let Scripture interpret Scripture. This means three things. First, we should be very cautious when using a single verse or passage of Scripture to make a point. Unless we can confirm what we are interpreting and saying by additional biblical texts that make the same point, we should take heed. In the abundance of Scripture is our security. As the same truth is confirmed over and over by the Word of God, our certainty of its meaning is increased.

Second, be certain that what is being offered as an interpretation does not contradict other biblical revelation or undermine recognizable verities. And third, ask the question, “Am I reforming the Scripture or being reformed by it?” Don't force the Bible to make the point you may want to make. Be willing to give up the point, or change it, if the Bible will not substantiate it. We are the ones in need of reform. Let's let the Bible reform us.

Third Principle: Be subject to one another.

We are immersed in a culture that overemphasizes individualism. As important as the individual is in the Bible, the community of believers is also very important. Scripture clearly teaches that we complement one another and need one another (1 Corinthians 12:4-26; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:1-16). We are also taught that we are to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21; also see Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5). These biblical truths have some significant implications for those of us who want to impregnate our business teaching, research, and writing with biblical integrity.

May I suggest that if you do the following three things, you may expect to experience God's blessings on your work:

1. Discuss with colleagues thoughts on integrating the Bible and business. Run the risk of being “sharpened” (Prov. 27:17).
2. Let one or two colleagues read all your efforts to integrate Scripture and business before you send it to a publisher. Ask your colleagues for constructive suggestions. Scripture has much to say about seeking and taking wise counsel (Psalm 1:1-2; Proverbs 12:15; 15:22; 20:18; Isaiah 11:1-2).
3. Submit your essays and articles to the CBFA *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* with the foreknowledge that the intentions of those overseeing the journal are to encourage and assist you while promoting the development of biblical integration with business. The editorial team wants to help you.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that successful coalescence of biblical truths and business principles will not occur without *a lot of time being spent in the Bible*. The Word must be prayed over. It must be studied. It must be reflected upon in the presence of our academic interests. The finished product-business interests and practices impregnated with biblical truth-must be tested and refined in the crucible of the prayer closet, collegiality, and the marketplace.