

Hermeneutics: The Role of Often Unrealized Factors

No two interpreters are ever exactly the same. That is an impossibility. Even when people are quite close and of the same persuasion doctrinally, they still will not see eye to eye on everything.

These are just a few factors to consider: Interpreters differ in temperament, approach, total grasp and perspective of biblical subjects, education, understanding history from a biblical perspective (worldview), and the degree or level of verbal and written communication skills. Two may be very close in how they view things, but not exactly the same.

Here is an example of two Protestant exegetes and how they differed on points that most would not even consider to be major interpretive factors.

“Zwingli had had more of a humanist training than Luther and had not passed through such an intense inward struggle as Luther had. Luther was interested in the *how* of salvation, Zwingli paid more attention to the *why* of salvation. Zwingli emphasized the will of the sovereign God, and Luther the sinner’s justification by faith. Neither denied what the other emphasized. But they did differ in their understanding of the Lord’s Supper. Luther took Christ’s words: this is my body in a literal sense. Though he denied that the bread and wine change into the body and blood of our Lord, he taught that the body and blood of our Lord is present in and with the bread and wine. This doctrine of consubstantiation, as it came to be called, Zwingli did not accept. Instead, he approved of the view of a Dutchman, Cornelius Hoen, which took Jesus’ words to mean: this signifies my body.”

The differences between these two men are made known through a comparison that Kromminga clearly identifies. These are factors that must be considered because they can dramatically affect the interpretation of any given text. Obviously, these differences are based exclusively on the paragraph that is cited.

- 1) Their level and type of training differed.
- 2) Their life experiences differed.

3) They emphasized different aspects of theology. What we emphasize or under-emphasize plays a vital role.

4) They differed in approach. One being more literalistic than the other. One may be labeled as hyper-literalistic; the other could be labeled as someone who over-spiritualizes the text. Are they both wrong? Are they both right? Is one of them wrong and the other right? I guess that depends on your approach and other often over-looked factors.

(D. H. Kromminga, A History of the Christian Church, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948, 193)

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