

Basic Hermeneutics: "Games People Play"

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? (Luke 10:26)

Perry B. Yoder relates an interesting dialog between Humpty Dumpty and Alice, from the book, *Through the Looking Glass*, written by Lewis Carroll:

"...There's glory for you!" (said Humpty Dumpty.) "I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant there's a nice knock-down argument for you!" "But 'glory' doesn't mean a 'nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected. "When I use the word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."¹

¹ Yoder, Perry B. *Toward Understanding the Bible*. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982, 1.

Yoder speaks about "Games People Play with the Bible." They are, in fact, dangerous games that people play when interpreting the Bible:

1. The first game is called the "Interpretational Games." The reason why there are so many interpretations is simply because we do not use the same interpretive guidelines or rules. The author states that "this babel of conflicting interpretations stems from people not all using the same ground rules..."

2. The second game, Yoder calls the "Author Game." Simply meaning that the Bible plays a subordinated role in the interpretive process. The reader, he says becomes the "active force"; whereas, "the words of the Bible become passive." This game, like the first game is deadly. The reader inserts his ideas and makes the Bible say what he wants it to say. Yoder says, "The individual reader has become the author..."

3. The third game is called "The Opinion Game." This game becomes deadlier; in fact, it could be said, that bad methodology breeds more bad methodology. An interpreter must advance proper and safe methodologies—interpretive

methodologies that keep us from making deadly mistakes. "The Opinion Game" basically starts with an interpreter that is committed to what he believes is an "infallible opinion." The author says, "there is a difference between *believing* that something is right and its actually *being* right."

4. The fourth game is called "The Caveman Game." These folks, unfortunately, are too common. They have scripture that they believe supports their erroneous ideas. They will then proceed to pound those ideas on people like a caveman would pound his club on a rock. We should endeavor to avoid doctrine that produces a bad spirit. Truth does not produce a bad spirit. Cavemen will not really hear the ideas of others, because error also produces an intolerant attitude.

5. The fifth game is called "The Born Again Game." Yoder explains it this way: "The fallacy of this game is to mistake the level of understanding which leads to becoming a Christian with the level of understanding which leads to Christian growth and maturity." Basically stated, we need to grow, learn, mature,

so that we become spiritual adults that can handle and understand a "strong meat" message.

6. The sixth game is called "The Literal Game." Yoder says that "a literal interpretation cannot be applied consistently..." There are those that take things too literally and miss the real message. The Bible contains different types of genre and must be interpreted accordingly. Hyper-literalists will have trouble with figurative and symbolic language. We cannot force a literal interpretation on everything. We interpret literally unless a passage demands something different.

7. The last game is actually "game-free" and is called "The Game-free Bible Study." This rule instructs the interpreter to discard any and all interpretive games. "The Game-free Bible Study" is encouraged to allow the author and the text to give the intended meaning to the reader. The reader plays games when he becomes the arbiter of meaning. That is a deadly game. Let's not play these bad games with the Bible.

Jesus answered, "What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?"
(Luke 10:26 CEV)

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