

Reader Response

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The idea that the reader is the one who determines the meaning is known as the “reader response.” Each of us must decide if an interpretation is correct. However, this is based on the rules and principles of interpretation and sound knowledge of these rules and principles, which is applied in a balanced manner.

The “reader response” is not of that nature, though. All meaning is equal to another for those who hold to this position, and all are correct. We can have a set of verses, and 20 people may give different interpretations, and many may seem the opposite of others.

Those believing in the “reader response” will say that all are correct. Under this position, the text allows each reader to derive their own meaning from the text. This is where we hear “I think this means,” “I believe this means,” “this means to me,” and “I feel this means to me.”

The problem with this is that the text loses its authority; God and His author lose their authority over the text’s intended meaning. When God inspired the writer to express His will and purposes, there was the intention of one meaning, what the author, under inspiration, by the words he used. If anyone can come along and give it whatever meaning pleases them, God’s authority over the meaning is lost, and there is no real meaning.

The reader does have a responsibility in the discovery of the meaning. He must seek out the intended meaning of the author. He goes about this by grammatical-historical interpretation.

(Interpreting the Bible: Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics by Edward D. Andrews, Cambridge, Ohio: Christian Publishing House, Kindle, 2022, Page 38 of 504, Text and Paragraph Structure Modified)