

Bible Study Notes

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Generally if you're the only one with a specific interpretation of the Bible, and others think it says something else, you are on shaky ground. There are some ground rules for biblical study, and the 'recipe' for looking at scripture is from John Wesley. He said that he was a man of "one book".

A "quadrilateral" is a four-sided figure; here is John Wesley's basic definition of biblical interpretation in four steps:

Scripture

- Scripture must be the first authority and contains the only measure by which all other truth is tested. The other three parts of the quadrilateral must be tested by this one.

Tradition

- Wesley cautioned people to not under-value the importance of traditional evidence. In other words, traditional church views should play a part in your understanding of the scripture. There have been many good theologians throughout the church's 2000+ year history and their views should not be discarded lightly. It is not, however, limited to "the old stuff," but new theological understandings should be considered, if scripturally accurate.

Reason

- God does not require us to turn our brains off in order to have faith or to understand the Bible. Although scripture is the first and most important factor in its understanding, God gave us a brain, so we should use it. Reason, however, should not be disconnected from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Wesley said that although reason cannot produce faith, when impartial reason speaks we can understand the new birth, inward holiness, and outward holiness.

Experience

- Apart from scripture, experience is the strongest proof of Christianity. Again, Wesley insisted that we cannot have reasonable assurance of something unless we have experienced it personally --"What the scriptures promise, I enjoy". The blind man said "one thing I know, I was blind and now I see". While tradition gives evidence to something from a long way off, experience gives evidence to it on a personal level.

It is important for us to look at the Bible in this manner, especially as we study scripture that is prophetic in nature.