

New Testament Life and Times

Reading the New Testament as

- History --
- Literature --
- Theology --

Leander Church of Christ

November 15, 2020

Notes available from <https://ClassNotes.LeanderChurch.org>

Today, 11/15/2020	Next Sunday, 11/22/2020
How can we read the NT like (and why is it important?) --	
HISTORY	History of the Jews between the Persian and Roman Empires
LITERATURE	
THEOLOGY	Jewish Context of Jesus and the Early Church
Foundational <i>(set the stage)</i>	FASCINATING <i>(watch the play)</i>

NTiiW - 2 The New Testament as History

VIDEO(s) -

[NTiiW_v02x_HistoryIntro_1m51s.mp4](#)

(web version: <https://youtu.be/8a25lJ1lZic>)

History: H1

- Objections mentioned/refuted:
 - Teenager / parental memorabilia basement
 - Task irrelevant to personal situation
 - What text means *today* is important... not what they may have meant 2000 years ago
- Foundations are important
- Babylonian/Persian/Greek... Hasmoneans... Romans... Sadducees...
 - 597-539 Babylonian
 - 538-323 Persian/Greek (A the G)
 - 320-200 Ptolemies
 - 200-142 Syrian (Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Judas Maccabaeus)
 - 142 -- Hasmoneans

The land of Israel is a small country. You can walk its length, north to south, in a few days, and from its central mountains you can see its lateral boundaries, the sea to the west and the river to the east. But it has had an importance out of all proportion to its size. Empires have fought over it. Every forty-four years out of the last four thousand, on average, an army has marched through it, whether to conquer it, to rescue it from someone else, to use it as a neutral battleground on which to fight a different enemy, or to take advantage of it as the natural route for getting somewhere else to fight there instead. There are many places which, once beautiful, are now battered and mangled with the legacies of war. And yet it has remained a beautiful land, still producing grapes and figs, milk and honey.

History

VIDEO(s) --

[NTiiW_v02x_ImportanceOfNT_1m00s.mp4](#)

web version: <https://youtu.be/81OQ5zSWNEs>

History

- *Sola Scriptura*

- The formal cause or principle of the Reformation.
- A theological doctrine held by some Protestant Christian denominations that the Christian scriptures are the sole infallible source of authority for Christian faith and practice.

History, view of...

- Video -- [NTiiW v02x ModernityPostModernityCriticalRealism 2m40s.mp4](#)

- Web version: <https://youtu.be/d-AjvxTDnJs>

- **Modernity**

- Believed it was like looking through a transparent window that allowed one to see perfectly through to the other side as long as it was sunny.
 - Truth is easily found if you have good sources and good methods.

- **Post-Modernity**

- The window is really a mirror and all you see is little more than your own reflection, though you may get lucky if you unconsciously peer through one of the cracks and catch a glimpse of something behind the mirror.
 - Truth may be out there, but you'll have a hard time telling it apart from your own reflection.

- **Critical Realism**

- The mirror has a dark tint caused by the gaps in our knowledge and the shading of our own location, and part of our own reflection does indeed appear on the window, but we really can see something through it that is not ourselves, nor part of our own making
 - Truth can be seen, but never crisply or perfectly.

History – Modernity, Post-Modernity

- Modernity – Post-Medieval, roughly 1400's – 1950
 - Early Modern – Gutenberg, literacy, Renaissance, Protestant Reformation
 - Later Modern – Industrial/American/French Revolutions, Internal Combustion, Urbanization, Age of Reason
 - Order, reason, stability, **absolute truth**
- Post-Modernity – 1960's?
 - Skepticism, self-consciousness, reappraisal
 - Anti – {Scientific rationalism, inevitability of progress, absolute truth}
 - **Dismisses “Grand Narratives”**
 - Schrödinger's cat

History <end>

- VIDEO

- [NTiiW_v02x_JewishHopeFulfilledInJesusStory_1m15s.mp4](#)

- Web version: <https://youtu.be/FUnM2LR59bQ>

NTiiW - 3 The New Testament as Literature

Literature

- RVL: The Bible was written in particular times, in particular cultural settings, to people who thought in a certain way. They prefer a Story over Definitions or Systematic Explanations. If you ignore all that and read the Bible with only Western eyes, there will be Truth in it which you never see.
- FOTR: Blessing for the czar / Render
 - [Bless The Czar](#)

Historical Connections...

- Later, when Peter came to Antioch, I had a face-to-face confrontation with him because he was clearly out of line. Here's the situation. Earlier, before certain persons had come from James, Peter regularly ate with the non-Jews. But when that conservative group came from Jerusalem, he cautiously pulled back and put as much distance as he could manage between himself and his non-Jewish friends. That's how fearful he was of the conservative Jewish clique that's been pushing the old system of circumcision.
- And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Fictitious Email

Dear Prof., I'm a bit confused about the paper you told us to write: 'How Does Knowing Historical Background Help Us to Understand Mark 12.14–17?' I mean, when Jesus says, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's' (KJV), surely he means Christian folks should simply be honest and pay their taxes. What else is there to understand? Sorry, but I just don't see the point of the question. *****

From: Professor Dana Schuler, To: Alan_Daley@aol.com, Date: 1/18/2016 at 2:25 p.m. , Subject: NT history

Sorry to disappoint you, but this is one passage where knowing some historical background is crucial.

First, remember that the question is actually a trap set for Jesus by the Pharisees and Herodians, not a sincere question about whether Jews (let alone Christians) should be upright tax-payers. How does the trap work? Well, if you read Josephus (Ant. 18.23; Wars 2.118; 7.410) you'll see that some zealous Galileans had a motto, 'No king but God', and since paying taxes to Caesar meant recognizing him as king, **paying taxes was in fact a type of blasphemy or cowardly betrayal of their religion**. So when Jesus is asked about paying taxes to Caesar, he's put in a Catch-22. If he says, 'Yes, pay them', Jesus will look like he's compromised and sold out. If he says 'No, don't pay them', then the Herodians can have him arrested on charges of sedition as forbidding the payment of taxes, which was an offence—precisely the claim they fabricated against Jesus at his trial (see Lk. 23.2).

Second, notice Jesus' response: he doesn't try to bluff his way through an answer. Instead, he requests a denarius, and asks, 'Whose image and inscription are on it?' (See attached image.) Now various coins were minted in Palestine, mostly without imperial images, usually with floral designs; only Pontius Pilate printed coins depicting pagan cultic utensils (see Kindler 1973, 37–8, 94–103). But this denarius is probably a Tiberian tribute penny which had on one side an 'image' of Tiberius's bust with an inscription that read, 'Son of the divine Augustus'; then on the other side it said 'High priest', accompanied by a depiction of Tiberius's mother Livia posing as the goddess Roma. The rub is that **if Caesar is 'divine', and if this is his image, then it is a violation of the second commandment** (see Ex. 20.4; Dt. 5.8). In other words, Jesus is saying, you guys are carrying around pagan money which is an affront to our religion, so give the pagan king back his pagan money.

Third, perhaps there is even more to it. Perhaps Jesus is saying that Caesar should receive taxes because he should get EVERYTHING that he deserves, and he means everything! Much like how the father of Judas Maccabaeus could urge his fellow-Judeans to 'Pay back the Gentiles in full'—by which he meant violent retribution (1 Macc. 2.68)! So, far from acquiescing to the view that Jews or Christians should pay taxes, **Jesus is being subversive**, affirming a critique of pagan power over Israel, and avoiding the trap set for him.

Now do you see the value of historical background knowledge?

The grace be with you

Prof. Dana Schuler

Literature -- Meaning

- A proper place to start is with the idea of 'meaning' itself.
- What do we mean when we say that biblical texts have meaning?
- What are we looking for?
- Where do we find it?
- Here we enter into the morass of debate about where 'meaning' resides: is it ultimately
 - with the author, or
 - with the text, or
 - with the reader, or
 - some combination of all three?

Literature --

- Authorial Intent – What did the author mean to communicate to his original readers?
- Video – [What is the A.I.M. of Bible Study? \(Moore\)](#)
 - Web version: <https://youtu.be/9L1KITcC1II>
- Problems
 - Different language
 - Different culture
 - Understood their universe very differently from how we understand ours.
- Have you seen a boomer lately?
 - Facebook
 - Shipyard
 - Marsupial

Literature – *Sensus Plenior*

- Texts can carry surplus meaning beyond the author's consciousness. Any writing can become more significant as it enters new social, political, and religious spaces. So, what if authors wrote about things that took on a life of their own, long after they were gone? What if people attribute meanings to a text that at one level appears to be based on that text but at another level obviously exceed the author's original intention? <...> This is akin to what is called in patristic exegesis the *sensus plenior* ('fuller sense') of scripture, by which an 'inspired' text actually says more than the author realized at the time.
- C. S. Lewis: An author doesn't necessarily understand the meaning of his own story better than anyone else.

Literature – Requirements (How To Balance?)

First, we need to do justice both to the fact that texts do not represent the whole of the author's mind and to the fact that they nevertheless do tell us quite a bit about him or her. Second, we need a theory that will do justice both to the fact that the author intended certain things and that the text may well contain other things—echoes, evocations, structures, and the like—that were not consciously present in the author's mind. Third, we need a theory that will do justice both to the fact that the reader is deeply involved in the communicative event and to the fact that the text is an entity on its own, not a plastic substance to be moulded to the reader's whim. If that is the case, then we should acknowledge that the author must be resurrected but not deified; that texts genuinely carry meaning like a hard-working mule, yet a text also inspires meaning like an iconic muse; and, while readers have rights, this does not license anarchy.

NTiiW - 4 The New Testament as Theology

Theology (1)

- Video -- [NTiiW v04x 0130-0345 UltimateAuthorityGodNotText 2m14s.mp4](#)
 - Web version: <https://youtu.be/Qo1naBpNtag>

Theology (2)

- Video -- [NTiiW v04x 0438-0712 MustUnderstandHistoryAndTheology 2m33s.mp4](https://youtu.be/CS1rhXhUpl0)
 - Web version: <https://youtu.be/CS1rhXhUpl0>
 - “The problem of ignoring the historical context of the New Testament is that one can impose other narratives and schemes which become the controlling backdrop for understanding the New Testament’s message. If we take seriously the contingent historical nature of the New Testament, its ‘back-then-ness’, the fact that **while it was written for us it was not written to us**, then we will recognize the essential need to situate the New Testament in its social, religious, and historical context.”
 - **“Discerning the theological claims** of the text frequently follows from reconstructing the social context behind the text.”

Closing (1)

Class: Lecture vs. Discussion

Today: Foundational material. Explain the rationale behind reading scripture in the context of History, and Literature, and Theology.

Next Sunday: Examples

Closing (2)

“What is written in the Law?” Jesus replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus said. “Do this and you will live.”

- “...with all your mind”
 - Let’s engage our intellect *fully* to understand and appreciate the gift the Spirit has given us in the Word.
 - We are enjoined by the Lord to love Him with all our mind.
 - Note: No one has said this is easy.
 - Remember what Mr. Beaver told the children.

C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

“Aslan is a lion - the Lion, the great Lion.” “Ooh” said Susan. “I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion”...“Safe?” said Mr Beaver ...“Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't *safe*. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.”

B
A
C
K
U
P

S
L
I
D
E
S

(ONLY IF TIME) [and/or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PWc2jyV40Y>]

Question...

- Which approach best characterized Alexander Campbell?
- What effect did it have on him and on other early Restoration leaders?
 - Modernity?
 - Post-Modernity?
 - Critical Realism?

Searching for the Pattern – John Mark Hicks

- The method, in summary, is this: nothing may be done in the work and worship of the church that is not *positively* authorized by command, example, or necessary inference. Absent any positive authorization (remember expediency, discerned through necessary inference, is also a positive authorization), it is forbidden. Historically, this is called the *regulative principle*, which the Reformer Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland, restorationist Puritans in England, and conservative Presbyterians in Scotland and the United States also utilized. Churches of Christ often referred to the regulative principle as “the law of silence” or some other similar descriptor.
- The way churches of Christ have used this principle involved particular rules for its implementation and application. We began with a fundamental conviction: *there is an exclusive timeless pattern in Acts and the Epistles for the work and worship of the church* analogous to, though not as detailed as, the pattern God gave Moses for the tabernacle. *Yet*, in our history, we have debated exactly what was included (by way of requirement or expediency) and excluded. Consequently, we have debated whether multiple cups are an expedient or one cup was required for observing the Lord’s supper. To settle such questions, we affirmed that *positive authorization only comes through explicit commands, good or approved examples, or necessary inferences*. Only what is positively authorized is permitted in the work and worship of the church. *Yet*, in our history, we have debated whether women should wear head coverings in the assembly as Paul commanded, whether the example of lifting holy hands was permissible, and what kind of bread is used on the table of the Lord since unleavened bread is an inference. We insisted that *every act without positive authorization is forbidden* because the pattern was exclusive and God told us everything we need to know and do in Acts and the Epistles. *Yet*, we built church buildings, employed located preachers, and supported institutions (from retirement homes to children’s homes to colleges) which have no explicit authorization.

Searching... <continued>

- Consequently, *we decided authorization may come through the principle of expediency*. While, for example, located preachers are not explicitly authorized, it is expedient for churches to employ them for the edification of the local congregation. *Yet*, not everyone agreed this was an expedient authorized by Acts and the Epistles, and it seemed, according to some, to actually supplant the authority of the elders and reduce the participation and responsibility of the members of a congregation. As a result, we had to decide how expediency works. *Expediency authorizes unspecified particulars that fall under a generic command*. When there is a generic command, example, or principle (inferred from a biblical text), all particulars necessary to or practicable for fulfilling that command are authorized unless they are forbidden elsewhere. Consequently, a located preacher was thought an expedient for fulfilling the edifying work of the church. The generic principle was edification, and a located preacher was an expedient for accomplishing that work. *Yet*, some thought the function of elders excluded located preachers because the located leaders are the shepherds of the church rather than hired preachers. Some, then, concluded it was a violation of the pattern of the church to hire preachers, and others thought it was an expedient.
- If this feels complicated or overwhelming, you are not alone.
- At times, expediency is difficult to recognize. So, we employed some other rules to help. For example, *a specified particular is an expedient if a coordinate to that particular is authorized elsewhere*.