

FINDING AND GIVING

The late Seth Wilson once said: "Every Christian has a right to *find* a meaning in Scripture, but no one has a right to *give* it meaning".

I agree with this statement, but perhaps it does need some clarification. The Scriptures are inspired of God and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training (2 Tim. 3:16). Since people are invariably at different levels of maturity and understanding, we will invariably differ on our understanding of the Scriptures. The Roman Catholic Church has sought to solve this problem with an infallible interpreter. At a time when unbelievers like Voltaire, Darwin, Ingersoll, and others were attacking the Catholic faith from one direction, the Protestant Reformers were attacking it from another. Consequently, the Catholic Church tried to stop all controversy by simply proclaiming the Pope to be infallible. This happened at the First Vatican Council in 1870. When the Pope makes an official declaration, all Roman Catholics are required to quit thinking and accept what the Pope says.

Protestants sought to eliminate arguments by means of an infallible interpretation. Scholars from each denomination came up with an official creed to which all members of the denomination must subscribe. Once again, members of the denomination are not allowed to question these creeds.

Jesus achieves unity in a radically different way. The word "radical", as you know, comes from the Latin word "radix", which means "root". Jesus goes to the root cause of division and changes the heart. All those who receive Jesus Christ into their hearts become "new creations" (2 Cor. 5:17). The change is so "radical" that Christians are described as being "born again". Like members of a spiritual family, everyone who is born again, loves everyone else who is born again (See 1 John 5:1). Obviously there will always be different levels of maturity and understanding in the family of God. When the Father speaks, every one of His children has the right to *find* meaning in His words, but no one has a right to *give* it meaning. For example, when the Father says to avoid all kinds of evil (1 Thess. 5:22), the five year old boy will think differently about these words than his fifteen year old brother.

We must emphasize that Bro. Wilson's words are not applicable to all people, but to Christians. Children in God's family are endowed with special insight. God hides things from the unbelievers who are wise and prudent, and reveals them unto believers who are "babes" (Matt. 11:25). A man without the Spirit cannot understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). The sons of God are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14). When we are "born again" we receive the guiding influence of His Spirit. Yet, as we have already stated, in every family there are different levels of understanding and maturity. Families are not held together by "knowledge" but by "love". Children of the Father are not accepted because of what they know, but because of who they are.

In Corinth, for example, there were some who were ignorant about eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8). In Rome others were ignorant about "food" and "holy days" (Rom. 14). People do not cease to be brethren, however, simply because they are ignorant. God is in the process of bringing all of His children to maturity. He who has begun a good work in us will complete it (Phil. 1:6). We are to grow in knowledge (Col. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:18, etc.) but we are saved by faith.

The Scriptures in many places refer to the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives as "fruit" (Rom. 7:4; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; Col. 1:6; etc.) Obviously, fruit does not grow immediately. Sometimes it is years before a perfectly healthy seed produces fruit. So also in the world of the Spirit. New converts, like newborn babes, are family members even though they are not yet mature.

Yes! There are times when spiritually gifted teachers must rebuke with authority, just as Paul rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:11 - 13). Yes! There are times when unstable men distort and twist the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16). In such instances, those who are truly born again, will truly repent. Jesus said it succinctly: "My sheep listen to my voice" (John 10:27). Saul of Tarsus obeyed explicit instructions from Jesus when those around him had no idea what was being said (Acts 22:8).