

Special S.N.A.P. Section

A Response To “Biblical Orthodoxy Requires The S.N.A.P. of Scripture”

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Chewning offers a very interesting perspective in the essay “Biblical Orthodoxy Requires The S.N.A.P. of Scripture.” What is most appreciated is his straight-forward, unambiguous position on the sufficiency, necessity, applicability, and perspicuity (i.e., clarity) of Scripture. In this response to Chewning’s essay, I support the concept of presuppositions but suggest that it be strengthened. In contrast to Chewning, I argue that Scripture is often unclear and that other sources are useful to supplement Scripture. I also comment upon Chewning’s choice of homosexuality as an example in his essay. Finally, I concur with Chewning that simple passages (e.g., “love your neighbor as yourself,” Matthew 19:19) should serve as our guide.

Presuppositions Have Presuppositions

“The presuppositions we hold regarding a subject will always govern the way we understand the matter, and everything tied to it. Our epistemological perspectives are ruled by our presuppositions” (Chewning (a), p. 2). This thought is presented in-depth by Chewning in his other essay “Relativistic Synthesis: Thwarting The Mind of Christ” where Chewning argues that our ontological or “genesis” level is frightening to most people because it contains the most basic presupposition of all, presuppositions regarding God and mankind’s genesis (Chewning (b), pp. 24-25). I support Chewning’s proposition, but I believe that it is incomplete. Even though our presupposition regarding God and mankind’s genesis are indeed *basic* propositions, these

presuppositions are also based on *presuppositions*.

For as Chewning rightfully states, "...all thinking is inherently presuppositional in character" (Chewning (b), p. 24), so too is it with one's thinking pertaining to God and mankind's genesis. For example, let us consider a simple circumstance of two people, one born in North America and one born in Saudi Arabia. The person born in North America is likely to choose Christianity as her religion rather than Islam, whereas the person in Saudi Arabia is likely to choose Islam rather than Christianity as her religion. Are their decisions based on a rational and thorough analysis of all religions? Probably not. Clearly, in most cases, choices of religion are based on cultural presuppositions. If this were not true, the proportion of people choosing the religion of Islam to Christianity would be similar in the Middle East, Asia, North America, and elsewhere.¹

This concept of presuppositions is extremely important and should be acknowledged, or at least implicitly understood, in any discussion among Christians, particularly in an academic arena such as the *Journal of Biblical Integration In Business*. Though

it is right and good for us to understand that there are presuppositions undergirding our religious thinking, this, for many, is even more unsettling than Chewning's self-described *frightening* axiom. Many are not comfortable with the thought that our selection of Christianity as the religion of our allegiance is largely due to presuppositions rather than a rational and undisputed greater truth.

The Bible Is Not Straightforward

The underpinning of Chewning's essay is that Scripture alone is adequate for knowing the mind of Christ and that, for the most part, Scripture is clear and unambiguous. In the opening of his essay, Chewning refutes three quotations, one of which pertains to the vagueness of Scripture: "Scripture is not always clear on the things it addresses, so we should be tolerant of other peoples' interpretations and applications of it in areas where there are differences." Though Chewning cautions that this type of thinking is "...capable of great heresies" (Chewning (a), p. 1), I am sure Chewning does not wish to advocate intolerance or imply that Scripture is easy to understand,

only that Scripture is comprehensible, albeit with prayer and hard work. As Chewning et al. writes, "A Christian approach to business is not a cookbook of simplistic recipes for resolving complex business problems" (Chewning et al., p. 5).

However, even this interpretation of Chewning's argument seems somewhat wishful. One need only observe the many different interpretations of Scripture on issues ranging from baptism, dancing, alcohol, working on Sundays, roles of women and men, wealth, and honesty. The treatment of money and wealth by Christians is indicative of Scripture's ambiguity. Chewning et al. writes that "God does want us to live well.² But the biblical perspective is that money is to be used to help the poor and build the kingdom, not to live lives of luxury nor to accumulate large sums of wealth" (Chewning et al., p. 19). Though this statement may be true, it is equivocal. How is luxury defined? Is it a one-car, two-car, or three-car garage home? What does it mean to accumulate large

sums of wealth? Most Christians living in North America arguably live in luxury and have accumulated large sums of wealth when compared with people living in the favelas of São Paulo, shanty towns of Johannesburg, streets of Calcutta, or slums of New York.

I agree with Chewning et al. that money should be used to help the poor, but how much? One might look to the Scripture's teaching of tithing (Deuteronomy 26:12) and conclude that 10% of one's income (before or after taxes?) should be dedicated to help the poor. However, one might also rightfully determine that Scripture teaches Christians to sell all that they have and give it to the poor (Matthew 19:21). What then is correct: 10%, 100%, or somewhere in between? Scripture is not clear. True, on this matter and others, one might have the mind of Christ and interpret Scriptures correctly. However, since it is impossible to know who it is that has the mind of Christ, and on what occasions, this provides no additional insight.

Scripture itself implies that the ways of God are difficult to ascertain and are sometimes

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incomprehensible. Paul wrote that “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully even as I am fully known” (I Corinthians 13:12). Isaiah writes that “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My [God’s] ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

We Need More Than Scripture

Since Scripture is not completely clear, Christians often and should rely on other sources to help conjecture God’s will. One may never know God’s will with certainty, but one can at least use all available resources in attempting to make a wise decision. In fact, sources other than Scripture might prove even more useful. Based on Chewning’s *sufficiency* of Scripture, he appears to disagree with this concept. However, Chewning’s previous writing in *Business Through The Eyes of Faith* indicates that he may not be completely adamant regarding the sufficiency principle, and he may agree that nature and people may also give insight into God’s will.

Because God both created and redeemed the world, the laws

of nature and biblical wisdom are complementary (Chewning et al., p. 13).

One of the rich resources available to us to help us use money well is the community of believers, the church. God calls us to live our faith not in isolation as individuals, but in close relationship with other Christians (Chewning et al., p. 21).

These two quotes from *Business Through The Eyes of Faith* seem more supportive of Aquinas’ belief that “...*reason*, on some occasions, should be the guide to *faith*” rather than the Augustine position that “People should not trust their *reason* until it has been informed by their biblically transformed *faith*” (Chewning (a), p. 3). I see wisdom in Aquinas’ statement, and I speculate that Chewning may also, based upon his writing in *Business Through The Eyes of Faith*. I agree with John Calvin’s analogy, as does Chewning (Chewning (a), p. 7), that Scripture is the lens through which we are to see and interpret all reality. However, it may also be true that sources other than Scripture (e.g., science, nature, a child, a loved one, etc.) may be a lens through which we can see

and know God. Albert Einstein once remarked, “The more I study science the more I believe in God” (Holt, 1997). This concept may be best expressed in the classic hymn “How Great Thou Art”.³

The Example of Homosexuality

It is useful to comment on the example given by Chewning dealing with homosexuality (one of two primary examples in his essay). The choice of this example is indicative of the presuppositions held by many Christians who are seemingly more concerned with potential sexual immorality than other potential sins. Granted, Christ did encourage prostitutes and adulterous people, but nowhere do the gospels tell of Christ explicitly condemning homosexuality. However, the gospels do record Christ spending much time warning of (and rebuking) pride, greed, deceit, covetousness, and wealth. Given that the Christian Business Faculty Association is comprised of Christian business scholars, the majority of which are probably heterosexual, another example, though more pointed, is more relevant. Christ’s teachings on wealth, retaliation, and giving serve as a better means for examining the log in our own eye.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:25).

Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (Matthew 5:39-42).

The **S.N.A.P.** of Scripture, if applied to these verses, might indicate that we Christians in developed countries should be concerned about our inability to enter heaven due to our wealth. In business, if we are wronged, we should not defend ourselves. In fact, if someone wishes to sue us, we should settle out of court, giving more than is requested. Further, we should never deny a person our product or resources (including money) due to poor credit, insufficient collateral, or an inability to pay. Presuppositions, however, often allow some Christians to rationalize why this portion of Scripture need not be explicitly followed, yet they condemn those

who do not explicitly adhere to their particular interpretation of homosexuality in Scripture.⁴ A grave danger of the **S.N.A.P.** of Scripture (e.g., thinking Scripture is fully understandable) is that we may believe that only our interpretation is correct and those who disagree are sinful.

Exhortation

Chewing provides a wonderful suggestion when he writes “we should allow the simple passages (truths) of Scripture to speak first, and build the harder doctrines upon them” (Chewing (a), p. 13). This concurs with Chewing’s proclamation that “...situations do influence the administration of God’s commands. We must understand that the letter of the law is not to take precedence over the spirit and intent of the law” (Chewing et al., p. 239). Love, though simple, is the spirit of the law (Matthew 22:37-40),⁵ and is the lens through which we are to see and interpret all reality, including the interpretation of Scripture.

REFERENCES

Chewing (a), R.C., “Biblical Orthodoxy Requires The S.N.A.P. of Scripture,” *Proceedings of the 1997 Christian Business Faculty Association Annual Conference.*

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ENDNOTES

¹This concept is developed more fully in section one of the essay “Christian and Wealth: Positive, Negative, or No Correlation” appearing in the proceedings of the 1996 Christian Business Faculty Association Annual Conference.

²This statement is also based on presuppositions since many Christians, including myself, could argue (using Scripture as support) that God calls Christians to a life of simplicity—not to live well (Matthew 6:19-21).

³“I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed...through the woods and forest glades I wander, and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees...I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze...Then I shall bow in humble adoration, and there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!”

⁴For a sampling of the various interpretations of Scripture’s teachings on homosexuality, see *Christian Scholars Review*, Summer 1997, and *The Good Book: Reading The Bible With Mind and Heart*, 1996.

⁵“Love the Lord your God...Love your neighbor as yourself...All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

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