
History of Redemption and Biblical Interpretation

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I. INTRODUCTION

General speaking, there are three major elements in hermeneutics and biblical interpretation, i.e. Revelation, Inspiration, and History of Salvation, parallel to the three principles of the Reformation, *sola scriptura*, *sola fidei*, and *sola gratia*, Revelation,

A. Revelation

Revelation is God's free act of communication, by which, God in his pleasure discloses his own mystery to man so man may have sound knowledge of Him.

B. Inspiration

Inspiration is a special mode of revelation in which God allows his word to be recorded in the form of human language, and under the operation of the Holy Spirit, God guides and preserves his servants to allow his revelation in the process of inscripturation to be without error nor fallible. For this reason we say that revelation and inspiration are merciful acts of God in which and by which he allows human mind to come to close contact with his mind and to let his mind enter and change human mind. The last of all is the history of salvation.

C. History of Salvation

Salvation is the focus and content of God's eternal plan in which God deals with his people along his creation by way of revelation and inspiration, it bears different nature. History of salvation, theologically speaking, is God's redemptive operation so that man may have a concrete, correct and accurate understanding of God's plan and will without excuses. For this reason, history of salvation also bears significant mandate and task in biblical interpretation. In other words, the revealed and inspired Word of God must be interpreted and understood in the historical context of God's salvation for man.

II. CLARIFICATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

History of Salvation, or redemptive history, is an unseen line permeating the inspired Word of God throughout the Bible in the course of God's revelation from beginning to the end. Beginning from God's creation in the Old Testament, God prepares and preserves eternal salvation for his people in Christ. God carried on this plan and continues expressing itself in the coming of Christ, the founding of Church upon the death and the resurrection of Christ, and proceeds to materialize its dominion throughout the world, from the Church age until the Eschaton, i.e. the realization of the Kingdom of heaven at the second coming of Christ.

In other words, history of salvation is the process and the consummation of the kingdom of God in Christ in human history. It is the core and apex of God's revelation, the disclosure and realization of all that exists, the heuristic key to all truths, now and then. In fact, history of salvation is not only the process/record of both what have happened, what is happening, and what is to come - the unfolding of God's plan in human history. This is the focal point of this paper.

III. HISTORY OF SALVATION AND ITS INTERPRETIVE MEANING

A. Christocentric or soteriocentric hermeneutical principle in biblical interpretation

By affirming God's redemptive work in the history of salvation, one stresses the fact that he who wants to know the truth needs to understand it in the category and context of the redemptive work of God in history. In other words, apart from salvation in history, no one can understand the truth. This is what we meant by Christocentric or soteriocentric hermeneutic principle in biblical interpretation, as reflected in the words of Paul, where he states: "For by him (Christ) were all things created. . . by him, and for him, he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church:

who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Col 1:16-18)

In fact, Christ, the Son of God, who has once come to this world in the form of human flesh, is the foundation of creation and all that is, it is also the foundation of the meaning for creation and all that is. For this reason, though universe may declare God’s mighty power in terms of general revelation; yet creation may not reveal nor express God’s love and righteousness without Christ and his salvation in human history. It then follows, there is no meaning of existence without Christ and his salvation. For this reason, Paul continues to say: For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him. . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. (Col. 1:19-20)

As God has reconciled all that exist to himself in the redemptive work completed in Christ. Therefore, only through Christ’s salvation we are enabled to know the mind of God who creates heaven and earth. As such, salvation, and salvation in Christ alone guarantees us the correct reading of God’s revelation and inspiration. This is why the saying, “apart from Christ and his cross, the truth finds no interpretation; and asides from salvation of Christ, all meanings becomes futile and absurd.” Life, its meaning and purpose, can only be understood and explained when man lives in a condition where conciliation was obtained in the redemptive work of Christ. This is exactly where salvation and redemptive history finds its pivotal place in hermeneutical and biblical interpretation.

B. Human quest for meaning

Theologically speaking, the interpretive function of history of salvation has been mostly limited within the domain of salvation, religion and morality. Nevertheless, once the meaning and the extent of salvation in Christ was fully understood, then its interpretive function can never be limited in that particular sphere. On the contrary, it shall be understood as having significance to cover all and any existence. Therefore, its

interpretive function automatically covers every sphere of human lives.

In other words, in dealing with anything about human meaning and value, we need to begin with the redemptive history of Christ. In so doing, we shall see that a basic aspect of human existence and activity is the quest for meaning; thus the task of biblical interpretation is paramount in such a quest. Without due consideration on the history of salvation, no ultimate meaning can be found and all efforts in the quest will be fruitless and futile.

In fact, when we examine the operation of human mind, we see that the mind starts its thought process with certain perspective, standing point or orientation as its operation base and motivation power. The starting point in the course of human thought and knowledge is never accidental nor mere incidental. It is a preconditioned choice. Furthermore, the success of Science and its quest for the truth and research of the reality always finds its affirmation in the process of its self-negation when it comes to a complete understanding of man's true and real salvation. It is in here the self and its development begins to realize the need of redemption. In is then in the beginning and at the end as well, man realizes that any human activity becomes tragedy of merciless self-destruction without salvation.

C. Meaning and Salvation

No one can deny the reality of tragic hardship in human existence. Nevertheless, in the midst of all complicated pursuit for complex meaning of human existence, we see a continuous thirst for salvation and deliverance for human existence, both present and beyond. All this pursuits finally find definite and solace answer in the salvation of Christ. For this, Paul exclaimed without reservation that: "in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." (Col 2:9-10)

IV. THE APPLICATION OF THE HISTORY OF SALVATION IN HERMENEUTICS AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

A. Purpose of proclaiming God's Word

Speaking from the Church and its pastoral ministry, biblical interpretation is one of the most important tasks of the Church. Whatever works in the field of mission and evangelism, the Church found the meaning of its existence mainly depends on its understanding and expounding of the truth through its reading and its interpretation of the Bible. Knowing that the end of biblical interpretation is nothing other than to implant the revelation and the truth (God has inspired in the Bible) in the heart of God's children, the Church proclaims the Word with the purposes to equip God's people: to be living witnesses for God's truth, to do his will, and to establish the kingdom of God on earth. It is for this reason the preaching of the Word and its interpretation becomes the first and utmost important task of the Church, especially its pulpit ministry.

B. Hermeneutical principles and biblical interpretation

In order to accomplish such an important task, the Church, throughout its long struggle for existence in history, discovers and sets up certain definite hermeneutical principles to rid itself off possible fallible practices in hermeneutics. Among others, the principle of *scriptura scripturae interpretis* is of the utmost basic and important. It is in this context, the Church begins to see the significance of the history of salvation in hermeneutics and biblical interpretation: Without history of salvation the principle of *scriptura scripturae interpretis* has no context.

V. MAJOR FOCI OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Assuming divine plan of salvation as the one and only system and line of thought in the course of God's dealing with man, we shall conclude that the completion and continuation of God's salvation for man becomes the heuristic key to God's revelation and inspiration. In this score, we further conclude that history of salvation is a basic principle of biblical interpretation; it is exactly the one that has the *scriptura scripturae*

principle at its heart as well as its framework of operation. For this reason the application of history of salvation in biblical interpretation have the following major focuses:

A. The revelation of God's eternal plan and its way of completion.

In affirming the history of salvation, we declare that all that which were recorded in the Bible are founded upon God's promise of salvation in Christ and the process of its completion at his death and resurrection. It is within such a system, God reveals his nature, mighty power, justice, love, and mercy to man. And it is also within such a context men are assured of having the knowledge of the truth and salvation through the inspired word of the God in the Bible. Under such a framework, we come to know God and his salvation in Christ. Further, under the promised work of the Holy Spirit, we are also assured of proper and correct reading of God's general and special revelation in the context of the salvation God has given us in Christ that brings unto salvation and its proclamation.

B. The significance of the Church in Salvation history.

Hermeneutically speaking, Christ and the Church are basic keys to biblical interpretation. As the Church is the concrete realization of God's plan of salvation in the world, it has eventually become the platform and context where the truth can be found and interpreted. The community of believers finds the meaning of the truth under the witness of the Holy Spirit and the preaching and guidance of its pastors. It is in this context, pastors and believers experience and testify to the process of the pastoral intercourse when the word of God is preached and affirm the existential meaning of the word of God. It is here the inscripturated word becomes the living word of the living God for our lives through its reading and interpretation.

If one finds biblical reading does not bring living message to the Church, then it must be caused by the fact that it has departed from having Christ and the Church at

its heuristic key and interpretive context. Consequently, the results of such reading and preaching are likened as apples of gold without pictures of silver, fall on the ground and rotten away. (Prov.25: 11)

C. The need and the affirmation of the live experience of God's people in redemptive history

(1) The legitimacy of the live experience of God's people as a part and continuation of the history of salvation

With proper reading and understanding of God's redemptive history, we learned that the people of God consist of all God's chosen people in the Old Testament and the saints of the New Testament. They also include all present and future believers. These people forms the assembly of the Messiah, is the Church of God Christ has redeemed. It is for this reason, the Church experiences and affirms God's salvation and continues God's work toward the end of Salvation history. It is also in this context, the Church becomes the foundation and pillar of the Truth. (I Tim.3: 15) and for this reason, history of salvation can only be understood in the context of the Church and its live experiences. Therefore, history of salvation has no context aside from the Church, and without the Church it shall eventually losses its holistic meaning. Such a practice shall consequently render no foundation for its endeavor. In such event, biblical interpretation becomes incomplete as it disjoints history of salvation and the Church. Therefore the Church affirms the legitimacy of the live experience of God's people as a part and continuation of the history of salvation.

(2) The simplicity and universality of the history of salvation

In fact, the existence of the Church certifies to the simplicity and universality of the history of salvation. Because there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, God's salvation in Christ

is sole and simple (Acts 4:12). The Church is Christ's one and only bride, as anyone who called upon the name of Christ is incorporated into the body of the Church, having Christ as her head. For this reason, the Truth and the word of God is affirmed in the body of the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is in this affirmation on the simplicity and universality of salvation in Christ, the interpretation and understanding of the Truth of believers everywhere may meet and be absorbed into the same river of the Christian truth throughout ages. Detailed understanding and interpretation of the Bible may vary from place to place and time to time, nevertheless all these difference and variety shall be overcome by the torrent of unity of the Truth as the river flows as the times goes by. The Truth shall prevail without discount until the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (Isa 11: 9 Hab.2:14)

It is exactly for such a reason the live experiences of the saints and their understanding of biblical truth through out the ages are essential parts of Christian witnesses to the word of God and its interpretation, though they are not necessary foundation for biblical interpretation. If fact, the live experiences of God's people on the word of God is exactly the continuation of God's history of salvation, they are some of the causes for our praise and worship.

- (3). History of salvation serves as a link between Christian live experience and the word of God

Though the testimonies of the believer's live experiences can never be treated as foundation of faith and its proclamation, nevertheless they are the continuation of the history of salvation in time and space, and as such, it shall be counted as a part of the fruit and witness of the operation of the Spirit through word of God in his Church so far they are incorporated into the course of the history of salvation. Therefore, the Church should not neglect such an important link in the course of its interpretation of the Bible in the proper application of history of salvation in order to open our mind

and heart so we may bring thanksgivings and glory unto God. In other words, in the course of biblical reading and interpretation, it is totally all right to use Christian witness in for as it is incorporated into the proper understanding of the history of salvation and exposition of the word of God.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Church acknowledges many principles of biblical interpretation, yet none of them can operate without proper consideration of Christ and his redemption. In fact, without Christ and his redemption, where shall we find true meaning and value for human life? This is our indispensable affirmation of christological and soteriological principles in biblical interpretation.

The fact that meaning and value can only be materially found in the realization of the salvation history in Christ, we speak from the standpoint of God's revelation, God has made Christ our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (I Cor 1:30). For this we exclaim, whom has we in heaven but him and whom shall we desire beside him in this earth? (Ps. 73:25).

We are redeemed and made whole in Christ. We have experienced and have become witnesses of the history of salvation. Therefore, as biblical readers and interpreters, how can we expound the Word of God without Christ and his salvation in our heart? For this reason, we shall not be ashamed of the Gospel, as it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16) This is exactly one of the most important characteristics of being a messenger of the Gospel and being called true evangelicals where we give proper recognition to the history of salvation in biblical interpretation.