

119

MINISTRIES

“The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below.”

Why We Need Scholars

Sometimes in our teachings we'll cite relevant data and research from scholars and theologians. You have perhaps noticed that we often directly quote Hebrew and Greek scholars in addition to Christian, Messianic, and Jewish theologians in support of the positions we take.

People often disagree with our positions on theological topics, which is totally fine. We encourage people to test everything, even us!

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Test **everything**; hold fast what is good.

However, we've noticed that *sometimes* people don't actually test what we say. Instead of attempting to refute our positions with facts and evidence, our arguments are often simply dismissed without basis.

Why does this happen? Well there are several reasons. But perhaps one of the most frustrating things that people will sometimes say to dismiss our arguments is that we rely on scholarship. There are some believers who seem to have a serious distrust of scholars for whatever reason.

Some of this distrust is due to conspiratorial speculation. It's sometimes said that anyone who has gone to seminary or has earned certain credentials has been brainwashed as part of some agenda of the New World Order to deceive the masses. (Yes, we are being serious—we have literally been told such things.)

Most of the time, however, the reason people have for dismissing scholarship is a little more reasonable, at least on the surface. It is often said that we simply don't need man to teach us. We should just read the Bible for ourselves—“God gave us the Holy Spirit to direct us!” they'll say. While that is a very true statement, it may not always be as direct or straight forward as it seems.”

To be clear, we would absolutely agree that we *should* read the Bible ourselves. We also do not advocate blindly believing what someone says just because they have an acronym behind their name. Obviously,

our own ministry has gone against the grain of the majority position within Christian scholarship on certain topics. But dismissing scholarship altogether defies logic and reason for several reasons.

For instance, unless you know biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, you literally cannot *truly* read the Bible for yourself! What do we mean by that?

Well, think about it for a moment. If you do not know the biblical languages, you are forced to rely on scholars who *do* know the languages to translate the Bible for you. So the claim, “I don’t need scholars—all I need is my Bible!” is a self-defeating statement. Scholars gave you the translation or translations of the Bible you use!

Some might say, “But I have a concordance and a Hebrew and Greek lexicon!” Again, that is great. But guess who gave you all those resources? Scholars. And those resources often need to be updated and expanded from time to time. Scholars are essential to giving us the tools we need to learn and grow on our own.

Another problem with this statement is that it’s based on the assumption that God intended the Bible for private, individual interpretation. According to the evidence we have in Scripture, that simply isn’t true:

Nehemiah 8:1, 7-8

All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra **the teacher of the Law** to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord (YHWH) had commanded for Israel [...] The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—**instructed the people in the Law** while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear **and giving the meaning** so that the people understood what was being read.

Here we have a community of God’s people learning from designated teachers. Not only did they read the Law to the people, but also...they *gave the meaning* so the people could understand God’s Word.

Again, we encourage everyone to read the Bible themselves, but we have to realize that God gave the Bible to a community, not to individuals to figure out on their own. We need each other. That means often depending on others with particular skills and knowledge to help us. That means being humble and realizing that we do not have all the answers and there’s always more to learn, particularly from “teachers of the Law”—those who’ve studied and are able to explain what the text means.

Listen to what the apostle Paul says about the need for teachers in the community:

Ephesians 4:11-16

And he [Messiah Yeshua] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds **and teachers**, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The Messiah gave us teachers to help us learn and grow. Think about that. If we had no need of teachers—if all we needed was our Bible and the Holy Spirit to guide us—why did the Messiah gift certain believers in the area of teaching? You see, the Holy Spirit *does* guide us—and oftentimes we will be guided to solid teachers whom God uses to equip us in His Word.

Part of the reason we need teachers is not so that we're told what to think, but *how* to think. Being trained on how to think and how to study is often of more value than being told what to think; it is a critical ingredient in being enabled to exercise discernment when we're considering and testing different doctrines and interpretations.

Teachers and scholars—if they care about the truth and know what they're talking about—will give us the tools to help us think clearly and rationally so that we aren't tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. They help us look at issues from every angle and objectively assess the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments on all sides.

To be clear, you don't have to have official scholarly credentials to be a teacher in the body of Messiah, but all Bible teachers would do well to study the work of scholars.

Why? Well, what's the real value of scholarship? What's the value in someone going to school and earning scholarly credentials? Why should we add weight to those who've done such work?

In his article, "What Does Earning a PhD Mean," Dr. Mike Heiser outlines a few reasons why scholarship is of tremendous value.

The first reason is that becoming a "scholar" forcibly exposes a person to the broad range of knowledge of a given field. As Heiser says:

"A real PhD program forces you to gain deep and wide exposure to a discipline."

-Dr. Mike Heiser, "What Does Earning a PhD Mean?" www.drmsch.com

The second reason we add weight to someone with scholarly credentials is that they and their work have been thoroughly tested by other experts. Again, as Heiser puts it:

It means you've been orally roasted by field experts in class and via other examinations on various aspects of your domain knowledge. Think of it as a two-hour interview that may just forestall death (written prelims come later). In short, you have to have reasonable command of what you're talking about. If you say goofy things that aren't data-driven, you're gone. It's always about data, not stroking your professors. I know that firsthand, as several of my papers and my dissertation took minority positions on things. But I had data and didn't just parrot what had been said by the minority for centuries. Being innovative didn't eliminate me. Many experts like to think about new things (or old things in new ways).

-Dr. Mike Heiser, "What Does Earning a PhD Mean?" www.drmsch.com

This point from Heiser is crucial. You'll likely hear from skeptics of scholarship the baseless accusation that being a scholar means that you've been brainwashed into holding particular doctrines and ideas. But, nothing could be further from the truth!

Again, the world of biblical scholarship isn't so much interested in *what* you think as in *how* you think—are your theories and ideas backed up by actual evidence and logic and data? That's what's important. It's not about being told what to believe; it's training and testing of one's own ideas to see if they hold up to scrutiny. The world of scholarship puts the biblical exhortation to “test everything” in full practice.

Dr. Heiser writes:

By way of summary, this is what a PhD (a real one) gives you: domain knowledge and the guidance that comes with peer review / interaction. It doesn't mean you know everything or will always be right. But it does mean you know a whole lot and won't be wrong with the staggering frequency that people without the PhD experience will be.

-Dr. Mike Heiser, “What Does Earning a PhD Mean?” www.drms.com

When it comes to relying on scholars, some might argue that it's unwise to listen to scholars who hold or don't hold certain beliefs. For instance, what if the scholar is a religious Jew who, like the majority of modern religious Jews, doesn't know Yeshua as Messiah? What if he's a Christian scholar who, like the majority of Christian scholars, doesn't believe we should keep a literal seventh-day Sabbath? What if the scholar is an atheist or agnostic?

This is where we ought to make a distinction between spiritual mentors and scholars. We recognize that everyone has a bias and their own views. And again, the fact that someone has scholarly credentials doesn't mean that they're never wrong.

However, we can still appreciate and benefit from the scholarly work of those who don't always agree with us. We can listen to the Jewish scholar, the non-Sabbath-keeping Christian scholar, and even the atheist scholar talk about ancient languages, historical context of the Bible, archaeology, the way a certain biblical passage should be understood according to sound hermeneutical rules, etc. And we can respect their expertise. They aren't our spiritual mentors but scholars in their respective fields, and whether or not they agree with us on every doctrine doesn't really make a difference with a lot of things that we can learn from them on other subjects.

Indeed, an expert in Hebrew is an expert in Hebrew, whether he or she is a Christian, Jew, atheist, or whatever. So, our advice here, for whatever it's worth, is simply to be discerning. Make the distinction between someone who is a spiritual mentor and someone who doesn't share your beliefs but whom you can learn from. As Paul puts it, “Test everything; hold fast what is good.”

Ultimately, we need to support and be grateful for the teachers and scholars that God has given to the body of Messiah. And we should pray that God would raise up more scholars in our own communities who love Yeshua and the Torah. While our position is still a minority position among scholars, it's growing and gaining traction in many circles, and that's reason to rejoice.

We'll leave off with this quote from Old Testament scholar, Dr. John Walton:

It is not surprising that God's Word contains infinite depth and that it should require constant attention to study with all the tools we have available. God is not superficial, and we should expect that knowledge of him and his Word would be mined rather than simply absorbed. This means that all of us will be dependent on others with particular skills to help us succeed in the

enterprise of interpretation. This is not elitism; it is the interdependence of the people of God as they work together in community to serve one another with the gifts they have.

-John Walton, "The Lost World of Genesis One" p. 171

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

EMAIL: Info@119ministries.com

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/119Ministries

WEBSITE: www.TestEverything.net & www.ExaminaloTodo.net

TWITTER: www.twitter.com/119Ministries#