

Take the Guesswork Out of Biblical Interpretation – Part 4

“Principle of the Whole vs. the Parts”

One of the errant systems of conventional “Christian” interpretation of the Bible is trying to examine all the parts individually and collectively in order to attempt to arrive at a unified understanding about what the written Word says and means. All 66 books in the Old and New Testaments and all the diverse parts within are considered, studied, and debated to try to come up with the best answer as to the overall theme of the whole Bible. We will now demonstrate why this type of system has been, and is, doomed to failure.

Examples of the Whole vs. the Parts

Suppose you were to walk into a large room and observe 5,000 car parts individually scattered on the floor. Are these individual parts of a car? No. Why? Because it doesn't look like a car or operate as a car. We can examine every single part as to its meaning and characteristics, but they collectively are still not a car.

Either one of these two ideas are true:

1. The sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

– OR –

2. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts and greater than any part.

In this example, the whole car is greater than the sum of all its parts, because the whole car gives definition and relevancy to each part. Each part is understood only in respect to the whole.

Let's take the example of a carrot. There are thousands of individual nutritional components that make up the whole carrot. Examining each component apart from the whole carrot may be interesting, but means little as to how each part combines with one another to create the whole carrot. The combination of the parts collectively and individually can never equal the whole carrot and not be understood apart from the whole. Our Creator made the whole carrot that is unified and gives meaning to its individual components.

Let's take another example: a sports team. A sports team operating as a whole unit is greater than the sum of all the individual players and is greater than any one player. The individual players together cannot be understood apart from the whole team operating as one. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Fallacy of Starting with the Parts

Starting with the parts of the Bible to try to make sense of the whole Book cannot, and has not, successfully helped us to understand what it says and means. The diverse **opinions** evident today in the conventional Bible-believing Christian faith demonstrates little certainty and is actually misunderstood as to what the Bible actually says and means. For example, if the interpreter starts with the parts and adds unproven and speculative presumptions like the Bible is God's redemptive story for all "humanity," then conclusive but potentially errant conclusions may be made. Isn't that the reason and driving force behind today's global missionary movement? But if that presumption is not correct, then the Bible will not be understood.

The racially-inclusive "gospel" may be a wildly popular idea, but does it fit the testimony of Scripture and the verifiable facts of basic history and genetic science, for example?

The Solution

The only solution is to **discover the whole story of the Bible** so that we can make sense out of all its parts. How do we do that? Stay tuned for Part 5.

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