

SHOULD THE BIBLE BE CRITICIZED?-1

January 3, 2016

The word criticism, in our culture, usually carries with it a negative connotation. However, criticism, in and of itself, is not good or bad. Merriam-Webster defines criticism as, “The art of evaluation or analyzing works of art or literature, the scientific investigation of literary documents (as the Bible) in regard to such matters as origin, text, composition, or history.” When applied in the grammatical sense, it is simply an exercise of judgment.

The Holy Scripture is full of faithful men and women who implemented the use of criticism toward people and situations. Even the Lord employed criticism of people and events, but was always righteous in His use (1Pet. 2:22). It stands to reason, if the Lord was critical of people and events, Christians today must also engage in righteous criticism. The great apostle Paul, the greatest evangelist the world has known, aside from our Lord, investigated circumstances and people so he would make the correct decisions regarding those matters. In fact, he criticized Peter for being hypocritical in his interaction with the Gentile Christians in Antioch, and because of his actions, Paul “withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 2:11).

Criticism can be misused, but it can also be beneficial. The godly couple, Aquila and Pricilla, critiqued the preaching of Apollos and found it to be lacking, according to Scripture. Based upon their use of criticism, they took the preacher aside and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26), helping to produce one of the greatest evangelists of the first century (Acts 18:24).

With that in mind, this article will examine literary criticism, and particularly higher criticism. The focus will be placed upon the definition and purpose, and common arguments and their weaknesses.

DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

There has been much confusion and controversy over the matter of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ criticism of the Bible. Those that have not given their attention to Biblical criticism, almost always view it as something that is bad and undesirable; however, Biblical criticism is very necessary if the authenticity of the writings is in view. That type of criticism is known as lower criticism or textual criticism, and is concerned with the form or text of the Bible and the goal is to restore the literature of the original texts, as closely as possible.

Problems arise when “higher criticism” is employed, which is used to ascertain the value of a document, in this case, the Bible. The purpose of higher criticism has been to question the authorship and inspiration of the Bible. The first major deviations from the traditional belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God took place during the post-Reformation period. During that time frame, men opposed to established religious authority such as, Bicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), and Galileo Galilei (1546-1642), forged the modern scientific attitude that exists in the western world today (Nix, Norman L. Geisler and William E. 1986. *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago, IL).

When higher criticism is applied, the desired affect is to discredit the inspiration of the Bible. In particular, when it is focused upon the Pentateuch of the Old Testament, the goal is to undermine the very foundation upon which the whole of the Bible rests. If the first five books of the Bible, especially the first eleven chapters of Genesis, can be discredited, then the entire work can be discarded. The reason for making attempts upon God’s character remains the same today, as during the time of the apostle Paul. Just like in that day, men today believe in their wisdom and are not interested in God’s. He wrote to the church in Corinth exclaiming,

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us

which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

When properly used, Biblical criticism is absolutely necessary. It reassures the reader that sound translations of the Bible have been preserved by god for our benefit. Next week’s *Cordova Connection* will address the arguments that are exercised in the use of “Higher Criticism,” and point out its weaknesses.