

# BULLETIN

## SEMINARY EXTENSION

### DEPARTMENT

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#### Literalizing and Spiritualizing

Two extremes in Biblical interpretation are literalizing and spiritualizing. Both have their place in preaching but both offer a snare to the interpreter. Care should be exercised at all times to maintain the right relationship of scripture to its meaning. Literalizing passages is proper only if the literal meaning of the text suits the context (the whole paragraph in its setting). One extreme danger lies in trying to make literal language out of figures of speech. It is unfair to any writer to make his figures literal. We know, for example, that Jesus is no lion, although Revelation speaks of him as the "Lion of the tribe of Judah;" that he is no four footed lamb, although he is "the Lamb of God" in John's Gospel and in Revelation.

But the literalist would take Hebrews 9:12 as indicating that the scriptures teach that in heaven there is a physical temple built after the order of the earthly temple and that Christ took his own blood (physical blood) and deposited it in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly temple. The writer was actually drawing a parallel from a well known situation. His parallel was figurative but the truth was literal. To know its meaning one needs to study the meaning of the whole book, and

the general argument which the apostle is making in the ninth chapter.

Usually the literalist falls into great error for he follows his own bias more than he realizes. For example, Paul says that we are justified by faith apart from works (Romans 4:5). Then James says we are justified by faith and works (James 2:24). Separate the two statements from their contexts and there is no way to reconcile the difference. The literalist would be forced to "explain away one passage or the other."

The literalist will try to see differences between "filling of the spirit" and "endowment of the spirit," between The Kingdom of God, The Kingdom of Heaven, and The Kingdom of Christ. The literalist also tries to carry out the idea of words to their extremes. The Bible speaks of our salvation with many words: redemption, reconciliation, atonement, justification to name a few. These words can be used legitimately but their meaning can be made too literal. For example, take "redemption" which means "to buy back with the payment of a price." Christ redeemed us by his death. From whom did he buy us? To whom did he pay the price? Did he once own us? To answer these questions

one must be a literalist. The ridiculous answer is that God had to pay the devil a price, or that he had to pay himself. Any exegete should strive to avoid literalism of this sort.

But spiritualizing is just as erroneous. This is the process of many homiletical commentaries; they try to find a sermon in every phrase or clause of the Bible. This method is characterized by seeking hidden meanings to passages which on the surface appears to be rather plain. Some of it is harmless enough such as the explanation about Zacchaeus who was up above Jesus, but when Jesus looked up, he had to come down in humility (being of small stature) so that Christ was exalted. This has been the spiritualists pattern of salvation's process. Again, Christ cleansing the temple is an example of what he will do for any life (most devotional commentaries). One of the outstanding sermons of a well known evangelist is, "Protect your home." His text is Deuteronomy 22:8. The word battlement is made to mean walls of protection. There are four (one for each side of the house), the Family Altar, The Church, Right Conduct, and Discipline. Good preaching, isn't it? But the text has no such meaning. This is spiritualizing.

What is wrong with this approach? It seems harmless enough and very useful. It does not lead the hearer to the scripture, it follows no authoritative pattern. One just could as well use the story of "Little Red Riding Hood," or the poems of Longfellow, or ditties of Edgar Guest. This method is shallow. There are no hidden meanings in scripture. Such a process will eliminate the real meaning of the Bible. Reject these twins as unscriptural and dishonest.

Next--How to Read and Understand,  
Part I.

Explanations and Exploits

The director attended the Southern

Baptist Convention in Houston, attended the Western Rural Life Leadership Conference in Ft. Worth, and the Eastern Rural Life Conference in Louisville during May...He is currently writing his thesis...directing three associations in the Stewardship Campaign.

Extension Center plans are available. This fall will find us better prepared than at other times. We have class books for the teachers and treasurer's books. Every center will use them.

College credits are being offered in several colleges and universities for correspondence and extension courses taken through our Department. We will be happy to supply the names of these institutions to those who desire to follow up their correspondence study by attending college. We have found that the stimulation of study has led many of our students to enter colleges and seminaries. Since our teaching is college teaching by qualified instructors, many colleges are giving credit for our work.

All prices quoted include text books. Enroll another and confer in your study.

Claim Me If I Am Yours  
Description of "Un-named lessons"

Old Test. I: Lessons 4, 5, and 6. These lessons are on notebook paper-5 holes on side-written in ink. If these are yours let us know.

Sermon Preparation: This must be from a service man at it has two air mail stamps attached. Lesson 1 written in ink on tablet paper. Also lesson 1 written in pencil on yellow tablet paper.

New Test. I: Lessons 1 and 2 were sent to us with no name. These are on type paper written in ink. Also lessons 3, 4, and 5 written on notebook paper with 5 holes on the side in light blue ink.

TOTAL CORRESPONDENCE STUDENTS --  
MAY 28, 1953..... 831.