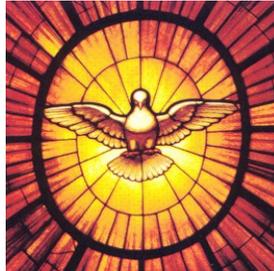




The Armor of Faith

Topic Summary: The Study and Discernment of Scripture ***Part IV: Spiritual Context***



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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Our panelists represent a rather broad background in catechesis gained in support of various parishes as well as a variety of age and spiritual interest groups. So, welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

During our last discussion, we reviewed some examples where understanding historical and cultural context may help us comprehend the fullness of the message scripture brings to us. By considering historical and cultural context, we are able to read deeper and connect events as to how one event may give insight to or reinforce understanding of another. We also saw how these threads connect from the Old Testament to the New.

As we mentioned, this effort of discernment is a bit of a challenge. We might be tempted to believe that for us to fully understand the meaning of scripture, we must be historians, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, or an expert in linguistics. Of course, it is impossible for one person to have all that knowledge, but we are fortunate, because there are many who have walked before us. We have the benefit of the fullness of the deposit of faith as collected, analyzed, and taught by the church from the early days of Christianity to our modern times. We have the benefit of this collective commentary. Still, as we mentioned, we must be careful of the source of information, for there are also those who wish to interpret scripture according to their agenda rather than what God truly desires for us to see.

As we discussed in relation to events such as those recorded in Acts 15:15-26, we see the role of the church to examine the fullness of the truth and meaning revealed by scripture and the Holy Spirit. From the time of the early church fathers to this very day, the Catholic Church acts within its magisterial role as the interpretive and teaching authority of scriptural meaning. Much hard work has been done for us over thousands of years, therefore, we should take advantage of church resources as we spend our time with scripture.

Of course, even with the assistance of others, we might find elements of scripture which we do not quite understand. Usually, it is because of something we miss in the context, but just like various levels of mathematics or science, it may take some time before we begin to connect the dots before we get to the fullness of what God wants us to comprehend.

(Question 1: One approach to the reading of scripture is to simply go it alone in the same fashion we might approach a magazine or novel. What are the potential pitfalls of simply going it alone in terms of what scripture we choose to read and study?)

(Question 2: One approach to avoid the danger of assuming understanding by our own estimation (cf: Romans 12:16) is to seek the guidance of a priest, catholic theologian, or catechist. Of course, some of the most pleasant times are when we can curl up with scripture in a quiet comfortable place. Under such circumstances, we do not always have the benefit of a priest, catholic theologian, or catechist to read and discuss scripture with us. In such cases, to what references might we turn to guide us in understanding?)

(Question 3: Sometimes, even with the benefit of homilies, footnotes, documents of the church, and scriptural commentaries approved by the church, the fullness of meaning still does not completely register with us. In such cases, where might we turn to guide our understanding?)

(John 14:15-17, 26)

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, 17 the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.....26 The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you.

(John 16:13-15)

13 But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not

... speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. 15 Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

(Question 4: We are told, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth will guide us to all truth. In what ways do we believe the Holy Spirit will guide us to all truth? Will He send us a letter? Will He send us a text? Will He call us on the phone? Will He stop us on the street? How might we expect He will guide us?)

(1 Corinthians 2:3-15)

3 I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, 4 and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive [words of] wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

6 Yet we do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. 7 Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, 8 and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written:

*“What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,
and what has not entered the human heart,
what God has prepared for those who love him,”*

10 this God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God. 11 Among human beings, who knows what pertains to a person except the spirit of the person that is within? Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms.

14 Now the natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually. 15 The spiritual person, however, can judge everything but is not subject to judgment by anyone.

(Question 5: In this passage, we are told that Paul spoke of the things freely given us by God, not through human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit. How are we to recognize the difference between wisdom by our own estimation from the wisdom brought to us through the Holy Spirit?)

(1 John 4:1-6)

1 Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, 3 and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist that, as you heard, is to come, but in fact is already in the world. 4 You belong to God, children, and you have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They belong to the world; accordingly, their teaching belongs to the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We belong to God, and anyone who knows God listens to us, while anyone who does not belong to God refuses to hear us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.

(Question 6: Here, we are told to test the spirits. One test we are given is whether the spirit acknowledges Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Is this the only test we need apply? If not, how else might we test the spirits?)

(cf. Galatians 5:22-26)

22 In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. 26 Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another.

(Question 7: He we see the qualities of the Holy Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We are also encouraged that if we follow the Spirit, we should not be conceited, provoking one another, or envious of one another. How might we apply these qualities to testing the spirits?)

(John 8:1-11)

3 Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. 4 They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" 6 They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. 7 But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. 10 Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more."

(Question 8: In this scripture, we see reference that the question posed to Jesus was a test so that the Pharisees would have some charge to bring against him. What was this trap that was being set for Jesus?)

(cf. John 18:31)

31 At this, Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law." The Jews answered him, "**We do not have the right to execute anyone,**"

(cf. *Tractates on the Gospel of John (Augustine): Tractate 33.4*)

Accordingly, as a teacher, He brought truth; as a deliverer, He brought gentleness; as a protector, He brought righteousness. **That He was to reign on account of these things, the prophet had by the Holy Spirit foretold.** ...Whilst, therefore, in respect of these two — namely, His truth and meekness — His enemies were tormented with malice and envy; in respect of the third — namely, righteousness — they laid a stumbling-block for Him. In what way? Because the law had commanded the adulterers to be stoned, and surely the law could not command what was unjust: **if any man should say other than the law had commanded, he would be detected as unjust.** Therefore they said among themselves, He is accounted true, **he appears to be gentle; an accusation must be sought against him in respect of righteousness.** Let us bring before him a woman taken in adultery; let us say to him what is ordered in the law concerning such: **if he shall approve her being stoned, he will not show his gentleness; if he consent to let her go, he will not keep righteousness.** But, say they, that he may not lose the reputation of gentleness, for which he has become an object of love to the people, without doubt he will say that she must be let go. Hence we find an opportunity of accusing him, and we charge him as being a transgressor of the law: saying to him, You are an enemy to the law; you answer against Moses, nay, against Him who gave the law through Moses; you are worthy of death: thou too must be stoned with this woman.

(Question 9: As the Pharisees were confounded by the answer which Jesus gave, they left, one by one. Still, we must also recognize that there was One there, who was without sin and who could have cast the first stone. What does scripture say He did? What do we see as the message of the Spirit versus the letter of the law?)

(cf. Matthew 7:1-5)

1 "Stop judging, that you may not be judged. 2 For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. 3 Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, **but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?** 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? 5 **You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye.**

(Question 10: We can discern the message about what this story tells us about our quickness to judge without tending to our own failings. Does this mean that since we are all sinners, that the law has no meaning?)

(cf. Matthew 5:17-20)

17 "**Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.** 18 Amen, I say to you, **until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place.** 19 **Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys**

and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 20 I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:17, NABRE Footnote n) This statement of Jesus' position concerning the Mosaic law is composed of traditional material from Matthew's sermon documentation (see note on Mt 5:1–7:29), other Q material (cf. Mt 18; Lk 16:17), and the evangelist's own editorial touches. **To fulfill the law appears at first to mean a literal enforcement of the law in the least detail: until heaven and earth pass away nothing of the law will pass (Mt 5:18). Yet the "passing away" of heaven and earth is not necessarily the end of the world** understood, as in much apocalyptic literature, as the dissolution of the existing universe. The "turning of the ages" comes with the apocalyptic event of Jesus' death and resurrection, and those to whom this gospel is addressed are living in the new and final age, prophesied by Isaiah as the time of "new heavens and a new earth" (Is 65:17; 66:22). Meanwhile, during Jesus' ministry when the kingdom is already breaking in, his mission remains within the framework of the law, though with significant anticipation of the age to come, as the following antitheses (Mt 5:21–48) show.

(cf. John 8:10-11)

*10 Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? **Has no one condemned you?**" 11 She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "**Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more.**"*

(cf. Romans 7:4-6)

*4 In the same way, my brothers, **you also were put to death to the law through the body of Christ, so that you might belong to another, to the one who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God.** 5 For when we were in the flesh, our sinful passions, awakened by the law, worked in our members to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we are released from the law, dead to what held us captive, **so that we may serve in the newness of the spirit and not under the obsolete letter.***

(cf. *Tractates on the Gospel of John (Augustine): Tractate 33.6*) What is this, O Lord? Do You therefore favor sins? Not so, evidently. Mark what follows: Go, henceforth sin no more. **Therefore the Lord did also condemn, but condemned sins, not man. For if He were a patron of sin, He would say, Neither will I condemn you; go, live as you will: be secure in my deliverance; how much soever you will sin, I will deliver you from all punishment even of hell, and from the tormentors of the infernal world. He said not this.**

Quotes:

From both, then, men are in danger; **both from hoping and despairing**, from contrary things, from contrary affections. Who is deceived by hoping? He who says, God is good, God is merciful, **let me do what I please, what I like**; let me give loose reins to my lusts, let me gratify the desires of my soul. Why this? Because God is merciful, God is good, God is kind. These men are in danger by hope. And those are in danger from despair, who, having fallen into grievous sins, **fancying that they can no more be pardoned upon repentance, and believing that they are without doubt doomed to damnation**, do say with themselves, We are already destined

to be damned, why not do what we please with the disposition of gladiators destined to the sword. ... Accordingly, for the sake of those who are in danger by despair, He has offered us a refuge of pardon; and because of those who are in danger by hope, and are deluded by delays, He has made the day of death uncertain. You know not when your last day may come. Are you ungrateful because you have today on which you may be improved? Thus therefore said He to the woman, Neither will I condemn you; but, being made secure concerning the past, beware of the future. Neither will I condemn you: I have blotted out what you have done; keep what I have commanded you, that you may find what I have promised.

– St Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John: Tractate 33.8*

Final Thoughts:

During our discussion today, we addressed some more examples where understanding context becomes important to our discernment of the message God has for us. Even if we have the benefit of Linguistic, Positional, Historical and Cultural Context, we may still find ourselves squinting to discern what God desires for us to understand. The evil one cares not how we miss the mark in our discernment, only that we do.

In our time with scripture, there are many helps. Still, if we find ourselves struggling, then, we have one very important person to whom we may turn to assist us and that is the Holy Spirit. As we discussed, the Holy Spirit will lead us to the truth, but our heart must also be open to listen to Him. We must also expect that our understanding may not always be immediate, but as we pray for His assistance, He will not deny us. He will lead us to His holy truth.

Wrap Up: Well, our hour is up once more. As we continue our discussion next time, we will look into the Catechism of the Catholic Church to see what advice it has for us in relation to our reading of the Bible. We hope you will be able to join us as we continue our discussion with part V concerning the study and discernment of scripture.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: The Study and Discernment of Scripture – Part V: The Catechism On Reading Scripture