TALKING POINTS

The Gift of Prophecy
Quarter 4, Lesson 8
"Interpreting Prophetic Writings"

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MEMORY VERSE: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."
Luke 24:27, NKJV

LESSON STUDY INTRO

This week we will study the importance of interpretation and some basic rules to interpret inspired writings correctly.

1. Proper interpretation is essential (Sab, Sun)

- Despite (and indeed, because) the Bible is an inspired book, its teachings require explanation.
    - Paul counseled Timothy to "rightly divide" the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15); Philip had to explain the Scriptures to the Ethiopian eunuch (Ac. 8:30, 31; Qtly, Thu, par 4). Much of Jesus' ministry was to explain the Scriptures (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-45; Is. 42:21).
        - "You have heard it said…" (Mt. 5:21, 27, 33)
        - "But I say…" (vs. 22, 28, 34).
- The Bible itself is its own best interpreter.
    - It has been said that the Bible is not a collection of 66 books, but of one book with 66 authors.
        - Recognizing this, we realize that only when we study the Bible as a whole can we discover its consistent, harmonious truth.

    The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. GC 598.3

    - When the Bible uses figures and symbols, it also explains them
        - Sometimes within the same book (Dan. 2:31-34)
        - Sometimes in another book (Dan. 7:3 w/ Rev. 17:15)
- The main goal of interpretation is to discover what the author *intended* by what the author *wrote*.
    - There is a **right way** and **wrong way** to read a passage. Not everything goes!
        - See Lk. 10:25-28 – "What is your *reading*…?"; "You have answered *rightly*…" – that is, in harmony with what the original author was trying to convey.
        - So how can **we** be sure to interpret *rightly*?

2. There are three basic rules of interpretation (Mon, Tue)

- Internal context, external context, and differentiating policy from principle.
    - Internal or immediate context refers to word meanings, grammatical structure, surrounding paragraphs, etc.
        - See Col. 2:14-16 – "handwriting," "festivals," "new moons"
    - External context refers to other passages, cultural backgrounds, historical settings, etc.
        - See Dt. 31:24-6; Rom. 7:12; Eph. 6:1, 2 – "writing," "book of the law," "against us," "law is holy," "*is* right," "*is* the 1st comm."
    - A policy is a rule; a principle is the reason behind it. While many of the policies of the Bible are still applicable, time and circumstances have changed the relevance of others; yet the principles – the reasons behind those policies – are just as relevant today, and must be re-applied in our current context.
        - 1 Cor. 11:2, 5, 13 – the "tradition" (v. 2) of women's head coverings as appropriate public behavior was so well known that Paul could say "judge among yourselves." While times may have changed regarding that particular practice, there are other practices that are now deemed appropriate in certain situations (such as wearing a tie, for example).

3. Our ultimate goal must be to follow the truth (Wed-Fri)

- Unless we desire to practice the truth, God will not reveal it to us (see Jn. 7:17).
    - This is also true of the writings of Ellen White. In order to avoid misinterpreting and misapplying the writings of Ellen White, Friday's lesson gives some important tips:
        - Begin with a prayerful, positive, open attitude (Ac. 17:11)
        - Consider both the internal and external context
        - Understand and apply the principles
        - Study "everything" on the subject in question (see Lk. 24:25)
        - Make sure she *actually said it!* (see 3SM 82.5)

CONCLUSION

> Why will not men see and live the truth? Many study the Scriptures for the purpose of proving their own ideas to be correct. They change the meaning of God's Word to suit their own opinions. And thus they do also with the testimonies that He sends. They quote half a sentence, leaving out the other half, which, if quoted, would show their reasoning to be false. God has a controversy with those who wrest the Scriptures, making them conform to their preconceived ideas. 3SM 82.3