

The Bible and Critical Thinking

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Oftentimes people are asked to state the position they hold on a given issue. When the answer is given the response is, "That's this scholar's position, or that scholar's view." The question here concerns not "whose" position one holds, but rather "what" position he holds. Any position one holds ought to be his own, as the result of his own independent research. Any conclusions he has drawn ought to be the only conclusions warranted in light of the evidence before him. There may be others who have drawn the same conclusions from a consideration of the same evidence, but this does not mean that two independent scholars hold one another's positions because they have drawn the same conclusions from the evidence before them.

The Law of Rationality and Biblical Research

I cannot speak for others, but I can speak for myself. In the research underlying my positions, as reflected in my preaching, teaching, and writings. I draw heavily from the biblical languages, exegetical and hermeneutical principles, the laws of valid reasoning (logic), and in a very concerted way, the law of rationality; i.e., that one ought to draw only such conclusions as are warranted by adequate evidence. This approach is identified in educational institutions as "critical thinking." I realize that there are those who think there is little or no place in religion for critical thinking, discursive reasoning, logic, or rationality; that one ought to feel free to hold any position that appeals to him whether he has sufficient evidence or argumentation to substantiate his position or not. One's "reason" for holding a particular position or view is the real point at issue here.

Reasoning and Belief

No man has the right to expect his position to be accepted or respected if he cannot produce adequate evidence to substantiate it. If one holds a position he thinks valid and sound, then he must present the evidence or logical argumentation warranting the conclusion he has drawn. Simply affirming that he “believes” a certain thing to be true is not enough. A Christian preacher or teacher has no more right to expect his assertions to be accepted without substantiation than does an agnostic or atheistic professor.

“Shall we be rational or irrational in our belief?” This is a very important question. Shall we draw the conclusions, and only those conclusions, warranted by adequate evidence; or shall we hold whatever positions we please no matter how logically inconsistent or indefensible they may be? By the same token, one cannot seriously challenge or refute a position with which he disagrees by simply pronouncing it “wrong,” nor can he make an argument any less true by declaring, “I don’t do it!” To insist that belief doesn’t need “reasons” is to reveal a totally inadequate concept of biblical belief. God has not asked us to believe anything for which he hasn’t given us adequate evidence. One comes to the conclusions he does because the evidence logically leads him there, not because he has “leaped in faith” to the conclusions he desires to hold; such a practice is irrational and strikes at the very heart of the religion of biblical revelation.

Matters of Difference

It shouldn’t be a matter of concern that someone thinks differently than someone else on certain matters; this can be very healthy in that it sends one back into his research and reasoning process for a second look. This is what critical thinking is all about. The Christian apologist should be ready always to give an answer (*apologia*) for the hope within him (I Peter 3:15). Greek thinkers as Plato and Aristotle would have defined the Greek word *apologia* as a logical presentation of argumentation in defense of a proposition one holds to be true. People who think critically are often going to think

differently. This should not be a matter of concern. What should be a matter of concern is that some refuse to 'think' at all; and in the stead of critical thinking one finds subjectivism, emotionalism, and blind credulity.

To write off a matter as, "a matter of opinion" doesn't remove the difficulties of irresponsible thinking. Such a tactic doesn't make one any less wrong if his opinions are, in fact, wrong. According to NT Scripture we are to "prove all things" and hold fast to that which is good (I Thess. 5:21). This means that we should think critically, do the research, and draw only such conclusions as are warranted by adequate evidence.

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