

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/5/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

In seminary, we learned that there are two conflicting approaches to studying (and preaching) on the Bible. The first is eisegesis (pronounced *eye-seh-gee-sis*) which literally means “to lead into.” It is a way of interpreting a text that brings in one’s personal presuppositions, agendas, or biases. Eisegesis is much more likely to focus on just one or a few verses because they will say what the student already believes, or to take the words in a very literal way. In a sense, eisegesis has already decided what the text means before even reading the text, or takes it strictly at face value. The other approach is called exegesis (*ex-seh-gee-sis*), which mean “to lead out.” Exegesis tries to let the meaning come from the text and takes into consideration its original historical context, and looks at the texts around the passage, as well as other portions of the Bible as a whole. Exegesis requires an open mind and seeks to let the passage inform the reader, rather than the other way around.

A basic example is this: Isaiah 53:5 says, *But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.* Many Christians look to this text when they are seeking physical healing. In fact, this is perhaps the most taken-out-of-context passage in the Bible. For them, it seems to say that, because Jesus suffered and died for us, we will be healed. But that’s eisegesis. Those who read it this way are bringing their desire for physical healing into their understanding of the text. If you dig in to the passage a bit more, or do some exegesis, you’ll see that Jesus’ suffering was “for our transgressions...crushed for our iniquities.” The healing here is a spiritual one, not a physical one. It would be strange if Isaiah was talking about transgressions and then stuck in something about bodily healing. These words are about sin; not physical ailments. The verse that follows helps to clarify this: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* Again, it’s about relief from sin. Further study will tell you that the word translated “healed” can also be translated “saved.” So, though the eisegete wants the passage to promise physical healing, the exegete finds that this passage is about Jesus dying for our transgressions.

Here’s another example of eisegesis vs. exegesis: if you think women should stay in their proper place and not become pastors, you’ll like the eisegesis of I Corinthians 14:34: *Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says.* Your position is clearly made in this statement from none-other-than the apostle Paul. But if you do some exegesis and look at I Corinthians 11:5, Paul gives guidance to women who pray or prophesies in the church with her head uncovered. They are to keep it covered, but Paul gives no condemnation there of sharing messages from the Lord. Your eisegetical approach to this passage certainly supports your position about the role of women, but now it puts chapters 11 and 14 in conflict with each other. Further exegesis from Paul notes that in Romans 16:2, Paul sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, his “co-workers in Christ Jesus.” They were a husband-and-wife missionary team who traveled the world sharing the gospel and teaching the good news of Jesus together. Further, Paul lists Priscilla first,

indicating that she is the primary person in that team. In Philippi, Paul started a Christian church with the leadership of Lydia, a seller of purple cloth (Acts 16). In Galatians 3:28, Paul writes: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Paul gives men and women equal place in the body of Christ. So, Paul doesn't seem to have an issue with women speaking in church except in Corinth. Additional study beyond the Bible reveals that there were problems with newly converted women in Corinth bringing some of their pagan practices with them into the church and encouraging others to adopt these behaviors, though they were in opposition to Christian teaching. Thus, Paul in I Corinthians 14:34 encouraged that the men he had instructed in Corinth to be the ones to teach and that the women, especially these new converts should simply listen to them. This was an isolated case and not the whole of Paul's teaching about the role of women in the church.

Though it's tempting to read a text eisegetically so that it comes out or supports what we want to believe, doing so often means that we are misled away from what God intends for God's people. All of us would do well to, not just read the Bible, but study it—in its context and in light of the whole message of Scripture. Picking and choosing verses in isolation has done great damage to the Church, its people, and, most importantly, those who might have been part of the Church. Exegesis leads to good teaching and application; eisegesis leads to bad. If we wish to live our lives more fully the way God wishes us to, it is so very important that we seek to receive from God's word and not try to force it to fit what we want.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey