

Response Paper - Strauss Ch. 2

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In Chapter Two of *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today*, Mark L. Strauss seeks to define not what the Bible is, but what it is not. He goes into different ways people have interpreted and used the Bible over the years to suit their perceived needs and purposes, and talks about how these are not accurate impressions of what the Bible is or does and why. Before he gets into his larger main points, he begins with debunking the idea that the Bible is a book at all, rather than a library of books, and how even that idea affects our usage and interpretation of the Bible.

The first large point that Strauss goes into is that “the Bible is not a magic-answer book.” He states that the problem is that treating the Bible as though a particular passage can be brought out to mean something without understanding its original context is an unlikely way for God to speak, saying he asks his students the question “does God speak to us through random verses taken out of context” with his understood answer being that it is not likely. After this section, Strauss states that the Bible is not simply a list of commands to obey, as the Bible “wasn’t written *to* us, it was written *for* us.” He advises everyone to think about the commands in the vein of “Paul commands Timothy to drink a little wine for the sake of his health” rather than “Paul commands us to drink wine instead of water.” he also acknowledges that there are many things presented his commandments in the Bible that are perplexing, and we have “little or no idea why they were given.”

In a similar vein to the Bible not being a list of commands, Strauss states that it is also not a list of promises, although there are many good ones. Again similar to above, he advises that everyone needs to think about the original group or person the promise was given to, and the situation it was given in, as well as the conditions put on the promise, and the response that the promise received. The last “the Bible is not” statement that Strauss makes is that “the Bible is not a textbook of systematic theology.” Although the Bible is deeply theological, it is not laid out systematically. It is both progressively revealed and contextually located. Stress also states that it’s selective, not comprehensive. He speaks about how because the Bible is from a much earlier time than us, a lot of times, although the Bible might have the answer, it does not have the question. For example, the Bible came before cloning or global warming, as well as many other hot topic issues.

This chapter was an interesting read, and was quite useful. That said, Strauss stated in his section on the Bible not being a magic-answer book that “some readers may object” to him saying that God is not likely to use verses to tell you what to do with your life outside of what they originally meant. I do think that I am one of the readers who objects. Although I agree that the Bible cannot and should not be used like a magic 8 ball, and that it is incredibly important to confirm, I have heard way too many stories from others, and experienced way to many times of mine own where the Lord brought a particular passage to mind for myself or others that was pertinent to the situation or directed something. Even the example he brought up with his Father seemed to indicate that it was not just the Scripture that his father took into account. Perhaps I am not fully understanding him or I am in the wrong, but that is my current opinion.