

Scriptures and Doctrine :: The Scofield Bible: Blessing or Curse?

The Scofield Bible: Blessing or Curse? - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/18 11:31

I recently received a private question about the validity of C I Scofield and his bible. It was not posed in quite such a confrontationist manner as I have expressed it, but I pose it thus to provoke thought polarisation.

Here is my response. Do you agree or disagree?

I used Scofield for about 10 years as a young Christian and his eschatology was mine. I developed a reputation as a teacher of such things, complete with charts and detailed timetables. :-o In the early 1970s I came to realise that I had received all of my 'eschatological light' from Scofield and none from the text itself. As a hypothesis Scofield 'worked' but I began to think there might be other hypotheses which might also work. I was influenced, to a degree, by exposure to other views held by godly men. In the end I put my Scofield on the shelf as a reference book.

Scofield's whole premise is something which I came to challenge. Was it the purpose of the Scripture to enable us to create a timetable of events? Was this ever the purpose of prophecy? I also came to resent the insertion of Scofield's comment into the text; it became impossible to read the scriptures without Scofield interference. I once heard that some Christian Brethren were offended by the fact that Scofield inserted the 'words of man' into the text of 'the word of God'. Tyndale had refused to do this; I think other translators, bible-creators would have been wise to follow Tyndale's example.

The real crunch was my increasing appreciation of the wonders of the New Covenant. Once I had seen the matchless completeness of what God had done and made available in Christ I could never really accommodate the idea of a Jewish 'ps' stuck on to the end of the world's history. This had the effect of aligning me with many Reformed scholars; a rather novel experience for me!

I am currently 'unconvinced' by Scofield and any 'dispensationalist' position. There were some who were much more extreme than him; E W Bullenger was one.

In conclusion,

1. Scofield's Views are unproven and unconvincing to me. I am not troubled by friends who adopt this view, as long as they don't constantly bend my ear to prove that he was right.
2. Scofield's Bible was an aberration and began a trend which continues to this day of men inserting 'paragraph headings' and other 'interpretations' into the sacred text. Perhaps it shows my high view of scripture, but I honestly don't know how they had the effrontery to do it. But then I object to the so-called words of Jesus in red!

I think Scofield Bibles, and Dakes' and MacArthur should be banned for young Christians. They will create lines of thought which inevitably become ruts, and anyone knows how difficult it is to get out of a rut once they are in it. I am happy for these scholars to have their opinions but let opinion be separated from the scriptures; young Christians in particular will not distinguish between inspiration and interpretation.

Even if a young Christian is not convinced by Scofield dispensationalism, he will have to reject the Scofield insertions in his Bible. This will make it increasingly to read the text of scripture as anything more than a proof document. The Bible becomes a commentary on Scofield, (Dake, MacArthur.) His devotional reading will become an eschatological battle rather than a drinking from the pure stream. Let the text be unadorned and let the scholars put their ideas into separate books.

Re: The Scofield Bible: Blessing or Curse? - posted by dougkristen (), on: 2004/6/18 11:39

I like what you wrote, especially the idea of "separate books". As a new Christian almost 19 years ago, I received a Chain Reference Bible and it does not have any doctrine added to it, only a "chain" reference to other scriptures in the Bible related to that verse. Which I thought was helpful to let scripture interpret itself. While I came to Christ by reading many prophecy and Hal Lindsey books, I have since disregarded his writings. There is a lot of doctrines out there and just reading the pure stream (sola scripture) is best.

Grace,
Doug

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2004/6/18 11:45

Is not Scofield's bible more than prophecy, ie his reference system which is famous for?

Here are a few pictures of him in the photos section:

(<https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/myalbum/viewcat.php?cid69>) C.I. Scofield

Re: The Scofield Bible: Blessing or Curse? - posted by Jimm (), on: 2004/6/18 11:47

Mr. Bailey

I entirely agree with your statements sir. I was not aware of this fact, "Scofield's Bible was an aberration and began a trend which continues to this day of men inserting 'paragraph headings' and other 'interpretations' into the sacred text."

I was doing a bible study with my family yesterday, and as they read the text, they were compelled to read the "heading" of the text. With this heading as a subconscious point of reference in your head, you are forced to interpret the scriptures in a certain way. I did not say anything because I am beginning to attain a reputation of being pessimistic and as a person who looks for problems in the world. It is very comforting to know that I am not the only one who feels this way. Thank you.

In Christ

James

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/18 12:46

Quote:

Is not Scofield's bible more than prophecy, ie his reference system which is famous for?

Hi Greg

Great photo. Where are you getting these from? Can you see the set of the man? He doesn't have a 'maybe' in him. ;-)

In a strict sense all Bible believers are dispensational. The Old giving way to the New Covenant is a dispensational statement, but while I would see this as biblical 'dispensationalism' Scofield and his fellow-travellers (and Newberry was certainly one) created a dispensational eschatology based on the parenthesis theory that there is a gap between the 69th and 70 week. I find this unnecessary and remain unconvinced.

I don't see how anyone can really say 'the dispensationalists are wrong'. I don't know, but I am convinced 'they don't know' either. It is the certitude with which they propound their opinion that I find irksome. When was the last time you heard a dispensationalist say 'in my opinion the current best-fit hypothesis would be'.

My basic point remains that I think they have misunderstood the nature and purpose of biblical prophecy.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/18 12:48

Quote:

It is very comforting to know that I am not the only one who feels this way. Thank you.

Hi James, (please call me Ron or Philologos)
pedants of the world unite! ;-)

Re: - posted by rookie (), on: 2004/6/18 13:28

Brother Ron wrote:

"I think Scofield Bibles, and Dakes' and MacArthur should be banned for young Christians."

Me thinks your up to something. Stiring the pot!

I agree.

IN Christ
Jeff

Not such a striaght arrow! - posted by Jimm (), on: 2004/6/18 13:50

Hey Ron

I didn't realize that I was being pedantic when referring to you by your last name. I guess it's a bit of a "culture shock" for me over here; back home (Africa), it was almost blasphemy for a person to refer to an adult by their first name. My dad was very close to all his brothers and he referred to even the youngest one (there was a 20 year difference) as sir (as it is translated). Over here, I am beginning to see that it actually makes some people feel as if I am exalting them beyond measure, and that I am being too formal. In light of the fact that it causes more harm than good, I will try to lighten up from now on.

Your buddy

James

Re: Not such a striaght arrow! - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/18 14:01

Quote:

-----In light of the fact that it causes more harm than good, I will try to lighten up from now on.

Hi James

The pedantic comment related to your 'fussyness' with the Bible text rather than formalism. What part of Africa is 'back home'? I have visited Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe and S Africa. I know the pattern of respect for 'gray hairs'; our western culture is impoverished by comparison. It is good as long as it doesn't become slavish.

As regards 'lightening up'. Just be yourself; you're with 'family' here.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2004/6/18 18:28

Quote:

-----Great photo. Where are you getting these from?

I actually got the scofield, g campbell morgan and moody photos from an old book on D.L. Moody's life by J. Wilbur Chapman. There are great pictures all the way through the old volume so I decided to scan some in. I am trying to amase more old vintage photos as part of the SermonIndex perservation facet of this ministry. Its quite inspiring in some cases and also interesting to see these men, as you noted yes Scofield does look quite serious and doesn't look like he's going to bug that much in his theology.

Quote:

-----I don't see how anyone can really say 'the dispensationalists are wrong'. I don't know, but I am convinced 'they don't know' either.

I have heard someone say we are all abit dispensational in our thinking whether we like it or not. I am not one to through out these men, they are a great fruit to the Church of Christ and the brethren (dispensationalists) are worthy of study and admiration. When it comes to estchatology I tend to ignore most pat answers and come to my own conclusions.

Re: I am from Zimbabwe! - posted by Jimm (), on: 2004/6/18 18:43

Hey Philologos

I think the subject says it all.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/18 18:46

James

karibu san.

I have strong links with Ameva Farm and Bible School in Chegutu. Do you know that area?

No kidding! - posted by Jimm (), on: 2004/6/18 18:49

Philologos,

I have family there. I used to visit often. I know the Bible school you speak of. I will send you a personl message after dinner to elaborate.

James

Re: Legal Backgrounds - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/20 4:56

Just a thought... have you noticed how often Systematic Theologians have come from a legal background? Augustine, Tertulian, Calvin, Scofield, Finney? Wesley lectured in logic and rhetoric.

I have worked with (and 'managed') lawyers so I am not unfamiliar with the breed. Sometimes there is a relentless logic which insists of everything being 'neatly tidied' away. It is the finality of the 'tidying away' that disturbs me; although I suspect I suffer from the same malady. ;-)

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2004/6/20 11:09

Quote:
-----Just a thought... have you noticed how often Systematic Theologians have come from a legal background? Augustine, Tertulian, Calvin, Scofield, Finney? Wesley lectured in logic and rhetoric.

Yes thats a very interesting observation. I for some reason do appreciate this well thought out theology and determination in studying the scriptures. It's like what Leonard Ravenhill said about discipline in our day, "we have none". Ohh to have discipline like the men of old to study the scriptures and compare scriptures for hours and hours. Even many of the speakers on this site many that are in the trend of keswick theology had great discipline and well thought out studying of scriptures.

But something keeps coming back into my mind as I write this, the words of the apostle paul: "but we also have a wisdom that is no of this earth". Surely that is the most important wisdom to aquire the one that comes from above.

Even as I have been reading puritans of late, its amazing there way of logically explaining scripture and laying it out in such a complexity of thought with different viens of thoughts interweaving which would leave most of the modern day listeners lost at the 2nd point.

Re: The Scofield Bible: Blessing or Curse? - posted by Nasher (), on: 2004/6/21 5:17

Hi Ron, here's what I agree with you on:

Translators inserting the 'words of man' into the text of 'the word of God' is wrong (i.e. it's not right!)

Men inserting 'paragraph headings' and other 'interpretations' into the sacred text is wrong.

here's what I question you on:

"I think Scofield Bibles, and Dakes' and MacArthur should be banned for young Christians." - I think I understand where you are coming from, I see a society today amongst Christians, especially young Christians, where they no longer want to think, reason and get right into their bibles, they want to have it all-in-box-on-a-plate-with-a-straw! The trouble with that is the people who put it all-in-box-on-a-plate-with-a-straw are not perfect! We (I include myself) seem to forget (or ignore would perhaps be more accurate) James 1:5

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

This is not to say we should read other books or ask other Christians about certain passages, but we should always remember that when we read other books, comments or listen to teachers, that what they say is not always the word of God!

It's like you say Ron "don't believe a word I say, unless it is from the scriptures"

With this in mind I think that study bibles etc. should have in very big words in the introduction something like:

"The notes I have added are not the word of God, they are to provoke some thoughts in your mind, remember James 1:5

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

I think I also understand you when you object to the words of Christ in red, as you say "I have a very special bible - I have the words of the Holy Spirit in black!" People may think that the words of Christ are more important than the rest of the bible, whereas all the words (including Christ's) have come from the Holy Spirit. The only reason I like them is when I'm trying to find where He said something or other and I find it a little easier.

You say "Let the text be unadorned and let the scholars put their ideas into separate books." Are you saying that the bible shouldn't be divided up into verses and chapters either?

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/21 14:31

Hi Nasher

Perhaps my statement was too strong. But imagine receiving a 'love letter' from your wife that had been annotated and 'interpreted'. Would you feel a little affronted that someone had had the nerve to do such a thing? I rest my case. ;-)

One of the great advantages of some electronic texts is that you can hide the verse divisions. I do it often. Some annotated versions can be valuable for study, but for just listening to the voice of God I would prefer the unadorned 'love letter'.

Chapter divisions and verse breaks are a mixed blessing. David Pawson (an English preacher) will usually only give chapter references in his preaching. He purposely avoids verses saying that people don't quote the Bible any more they just quote texts. He usually asks this question; do you know what John 3:16 says? When folk say 'yes' he says and do you know what John 3:15 says? I had an old friend preacher who would often say "I'm not going to tell you where it says that. Read your Bible until you find it.". This may seem like an extreme position but it is 'textualism' that has caused so much damage to Bible teaching.

Re: - posted by Agent001 (), on: 2004/6/22 14:32

Hi Philologos,

I do think your statements were a little too strong. ;-) I would rather say that all serious students of the Bible should be aware of the dangers inherent in these aids and always keep in mind that the text is the most important.

I wholeheartedly agree with the reasons behind your strong statements though:

1. **Red-Letter Bible:** It creates a false impression as though some words are more important than others.
2. **Verse Divisions:** The danger is to think in units of "verses," not the whole context of the passage.
3. **Annotated Bibles:** The danger is to equate the authority of the Bible with that of the annotation, and to cause unnecessary dependence upon annotations rather than directly interacting with the text.

Nevertheless, these tools are still helpful for the beginners who have found reading through the Bible rather intimidating.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/23 4:45

Quote:
-----3. Annotated Bibles: The danger is to equate the authority of the Bible with that of the annotation, and to cause unnecessary dependence upon annotations rather than directly interacting with the text.

Nevertheless, these tools are still helpful for the beginners who have found reading through the Bible rather intimidating.

Hi Sam

I have been known to have strong opinions on one or two issues. ;-) It is extraordinarily difficult to dislodge structures when they are erected in the mind. You only get one chance to make a first impression. I would prefer to see the plain text and the helps for young Christians set out plainly in a separate publication so that there will be no confusion as to what is inspiration and what is interpretation.

I have 2 copies of my KJV Cambridge Bible. One has no bible-markings at all; not even a extra dot. The second is a mass of joining lines, underlinings and little notes that I have inserted over the years. I use one to listen to what God is saying today and the other when I am studying.

The trouble with saying 'they should be banned' as I did was that you cannot hear my accent. It was not said through clenched teeth, but as a quiet conclusion to my own little reverie. :-D I still think Tyndale was absolutely right in refusing to put comments into the margins and in putting the text into paragraph blocks rather than verses. Of course, not even Tyndale's paragraph blocks were inspired. ;-)

Re: - posted by Nasher (), on: 2004/6/23 6:59

I agree, for example here is a classic example:

1 Corinthians 14:33-34

33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.
34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.(KJV)

33For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.
34As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.(NIV)

Without the punctuation or verse numbers it would read as follows:

for God is not the author of confusion but of peace as in all churches of the saints let your women keep silence in the ch

urches for it is not permitted unto them to speak but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law

The question is, assuming someone read this letter of Paul's out in the church at Corinth, where would the reader have taken his "breath" to stop and begin the next sentence?

My theology may lean toward the NIV stance of split but why in the sentence...

as in all churches of the saints let your women keep silence in the churches for it is not permitted unto them to speak but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law

...would churches be mentioned twice? :-(

Re: - posted by Agent001 (), on: 2004/6/23 9:41

There are examples where I think the layout of the biblical text immensely helps getting at the original meaning.

One example comes from an older edition of the Chinese Union Version Bible (the most popular Chinese version, the Chinese-equivalent of KJV).

In the older edition of CUV, Hebrew poetry are not broken down into lines according to its structure, but are presented in a continuous paragraph just like a narrative. The end result is that the poetic elements of Psalms were quite often lost and this makes the reading of Psalms very unpleasant.

Philologos, it is interesting to hear about your practice of using two KJV Cambridge Bibles. My church tradition has for years adopted a similar practice using two Bibles--one marked (for devotion & notes) and one unmarked (for grappling with the plain text)--as taught by one of our earliest brethren, Watchman Nee.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/6/23 11:26

Quote:
-----it is interesting to hear about your practice of using two KJV Cambridge Bibles. My church tradition has for years adopted a similar practice using two Bibles--one marked (for devotion & notes) and one unmarked (for grappling with the plain text)--as taught by one of our earliest brethren, Watchman Nee.

This is an encouraging precedent! Thanks