

Evaluating Books, Commentaries, & Bible Study Guides

Things That Effect The Conclusions of Writers

The Author's View of Scripture:

- Does the author believe in the completion of Scripture, or additional revelation or mysticism (God talks to me in addition to the Bible)?
- Does the author believe in the verbal (every word) plenary (every part) inspiration of Scripture?
- Is the Bible sufficient, or are man's ideas on psychology needed to make sense of life? Man's views more accurate; man's views essential along with Scripture (integrationist); or sola scriptura?
- Is the Bible scientifically accurate, or is it erroneous in areas of science?
- Is the Bible wholly cultural, or does its truths transcend culture?
- Is the book an explanation of Scripture? A collection of Scripture? Little or no scripture (man's ideas).
- Does the author believe in a literal creation account, or in some form of evolution? What is the author's view of the origin of life?
- Does the author believe in absolutes? Situational ethics?

The Author's Method of Interpretation:

- What is the author's hermeneutic (method of interpretation)?
 - Literal-historical (the Bible is to be taken as normal language; it says what it means and means what it says as considered in normal communication)
 - Allegorical (what the Bible says really represents something else – hidden meanings, symbols, etc.)
 - None – no consistent method of interpretation.
- Does the author teach from the Bible (exegetical), or make it say something that isn't there (eisegetical)?
- Is the author covenantal or dispensational, or something else?
 - Dispensational:
 - Church does not equal Israel: God will fulfill His promises to Israel.
 - God works in different ways during different times in history, but salvation has always been by faith.
 - Usually pre-millennial return of Jesus (Jesus will return before the millennium). Pre-millennial view of the rapture can be pre-trib (before the tribulation), mid-trib (during the tribulation), or post-trib (after the tribulation).
 - The OT is specifically to Israel, but we can derive principles, etc. from it.
 - Covenantal:
 - Church becomes or replaces Israel
 - OT applies directly to the Church
 - Usually allegorical (Bible written with hidden or higher meaning)
 - Usually preterist view of Revelation (mostly history, not prophecy)
 - Usually a-millennial (no literal 1000 years) or post-millennial (1000 years = long period of time)
 - Other or no view:
 - No consistent overall view or approach to Scripture

The Author's Theological Views:

- Is the author theologically fundamental; evangelical; liberal?
- What are the author's theological views on different doctrines?
 - Salvation:
 - what does it take to be saved? (faith alone; baptism; works);
 - does the author believe in eternal security? (once saved always saved);
 - does the author hold to or reject Lordship salvation?
 - Is salvation man-focused (depends upon what men do - Armenian) or God-focused (depends on God – Calvinistic)
 - Church:

- how does the author view the importance of the local church? Essential? Non-essential?
- What is the author's view of the validity, value, purpose, and place of para-church organizations?
- Does the author reinforce or hinder the Biblical view of the local church?
- Jesus – is Jesus God?
- Trinity – is God a trinity, or something else?
- Holy Spirit:
 - What is the author's take on the charismatic movement?
 - Are all gifts for today (healing, tongues, wisdom, etc.), or did some (or all) go away?
 - Which gifts are still valid?
- Separation:
 - What is his view of personal separation?
 - What is his view of ecclesiastical separation?

The Author's Views on Gender Roles, Home, & Family:

- What is the author's view of the roles of men and women in the home? In the church?
- View of ministry – who can do what?
- Does the author have a strong marriage and family?
- How many children does the author have? (*View of children; true experience raising them.*)

Other Factors:

- Which has more importance? The Bible, tradition, the views of current society?
- What is the author's view of authority? In the home? In the church? In government?
- Is the author evidencing primary study, or a repeating of others' views?
- Is the book's info accurate? (historical, scientific, statistical, and informational, etc.)?

Some Good Initial Indicators:

The Author's Training:

- What school(s) did the author(s) attend? When? Each school has its theology and influences.

The Author's Qualifications:

- Is the author a known specialist, or just a writer?

The Author's Affiliations:

- With what denomination (and division) does the author unite or identify?
- With what institutions or organizations is the author affiliated?
- Is the author ecumenical?
- What political connections does the author have?
- What books has the author endorsed?

The Author's Conduct:

- Is the author in actual ministry?
- If in ministry, how faithful/effective?
- Does the author attend church faithfully? Where?
- What type of actual testimony does the author have?
- Has the author written other books? About what?

The Publisher and Endorsers:

- What publisher published the book?
- Who endorses the book? (Warning: many are blind endorsements – they haven't read it!)
- How widely accepted is the book?
- Who is touting the book?

Poor Indicators:

- Popularity – best seller list
- Name recognition (heard the name)
- Title of book
- Graphics & pictures
- National advertising