

A RESPONSE TO DR. CRAIG KEENER'S PRESENTATION "THE SPIRIT AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION"

ARDEN C. AUTRY

Spiritus 4.1 (2019) 45–47
<http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/spiritus/>
© The Author(s) 2019
Reprints and Permissions:
Spiritus@oru.edu

Before responding to Dr. Keener, let me first thank him for writing *Spirit Hermeneutics*.¹ If you have not read it, I recommend it highly. Second, I thank him for honoring us by visiting ORU again and giving this splendid presentation.

To respond to his book and presentation, I want to describe how I perceive the discussion about hermeneutics (i.e., biblical interpretation) among Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars.² (Full disclosure: I am a life-long Pentecostal, an ORU alumnus and faculty member, and I belong to a local United Methodist Church.)

All of us as Spirit-filled scholars would say (I trust) that we stand under the authority of Scripture as God's inspired Word. All of us, I think, would say we pursue our scholarly tasks to serve Christ and his church. As persons committed to the authority of Scripture and the mission of the church to make disciples, we obviously share core beliefs with non-charismatic Evangelicals and our Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters (despite differences in describing authority).

But in this area of hermeneutics, there is some disagreement among Spirit-filled scholars about which community we should seek to serve: should our focus on hermeneutical theory serve to explain and validate the experiences and practices of the Spirit-empowered community (otherwise known as Pentecostal/Charismatic churches)? That is, should we provide something like an apologetics, a defense, for reading and teaching the Bible as Charismatics? Should we seek to provide a hermeneutical framework for Pentecostal pastors? Or, on the other end

of the spectrum, should Pentecostal scholars pursue a hermeneutics that seeks to serve the whole church (including non-Pentecostal and even non-Protestant believers)?

My position is that our biblical hermeneutics should strive to keep the whole church focused on what Scripture indicates is God's focus: by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God has indicated that his purpose is growing an ever-larger family of people being conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus, our Lord.

There is some value in Spirit-filled scholars discussing among ourselves how we interpret the Bible. But if we limit our discussion to people with experiences like ours, we impoverish ourselves and our sisters and brothers in the larger church. Using Scripture's analogy of the church as a "body," Pentecostals should not identify ourselves with just one part of that body. Our hermeneutics should not be confined to the service of the Pentecostal part or party.

If the whole church contains all the blood-bought sons and daughters of God, and if God has given the Spirit of adoption to all of them, why should we want to speak to or hear from only some of them? Christ crucified, risen, exalted to the Father's right hand, and coming again for a whole church without spot or wrinkle—that should be our unifying focus for doing hermeneutics, homiletics, and theology. That should be the unifying focus for my life and yours as disciples of a Lord who has that kind of focus.

Yes, we have our distinctive practices and emphases within our various communions and traditions. But which of those distinctive practices should overshadow the work of Christ or of the Holy Spirit who makes us one in Christ? And if we are one in Christ, why should my Christian hermeneutics be intended for only some in Christ?

I hope it is obvious that I am in strong agreement with Dr. Keener. The "charismatic community" is not the canon, the standard. The Bible is the canon, and the text of Scripture must be understood historically, grammatically, and in its cultural setting. Its "intended design" is our unifying theological baseline, our standard for teaching, preaching, prophesying, and healing in Jesus' name.

Arden C. Autry (aautry@oru.edu), retired Professor of New Testament, Oral Roberts University, is currently serving as Adjunct Professor of Bible, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, USA.



Notes

1 Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

2 For a more detailed review of Keener's book, see Arden C. Autry, "Review of Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost by Craig S. Keener," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 3:1 (2018), 127–29.



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY MODULAR/DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM

This program offers a combination of fully online, modular, and blended courses that allow students to attend class on campus for all or half of a five-day intensive week while completing the rest of the course work online. This unique schedule was created for students seeking spiritual, academic and professional training while maintaining their current jobs and homes.

The following degrees are offered:

- Master of Divinity
- Master of Divinity/Pastoral Care and Counseling Concentration
- Master of Arts in Practical Theology
- Master of Arts in Practical Theology with a Teaching Ministries Concentration

ACCREDITATION:

ats Association of Theological Schools in
the United States and Canada (ATS)

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC)



LEARN MORE
TODAY

800.678.9976

oru.edu/gradtheo

gradadmissions@oru.edu