

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 1d The Synoptic Problem Redaction Criticism

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The last approach in this clip that we would deal with is redaction criticism. It's the third approach and it answers the question: What do the gospels tell us about Christ? So redaction criticism bases its overall inquiry on theological agendas of the evangelists. Now, I should probably stop here before I go on and say, I want to make a clear statement on these criticisms, these methodologies. Form criticism is largely dead. It's not really used by scholars anymore because the conclusions that they came up with have been largely disproven and it's been largely abandoned. That's not to say that the small minority doesn't still find a use for it, but they are decidedly in the minority. Source and redaction criticism are used by all. Not everyone has a high view of Scripture. It is the position of this particular instructor that the word of God is inerrant. I need to be very clear about that. So I'm telling you about these methodologies that scholars used to study the gospels just to highlight what's going on out there. So it's used by scholars that don't have any sort of evangelical commitment. They don't have a high view of Scripture. That is not my position. I do hold a very high view of Scripture and I'm simply talking about the methodologies.

Having said that, there are scholars like me who hold a high view of Scripture, who use these methodologies. That is, they don't use form. They use source criticism because they're just trying to understand how Matthew and Mark and Luke interacted with one another. What's the interdependence? And they can draw conclusions using the methodology that affirm inerrancy. And they've done that for years. Redaction criticism is in the same vein. Redaction criticism deals with the theological agenda of the gospel writers, the evangelists. And with a high view of Scripture, you can still deal with theological agendas and you can still teach the theological emphasis of the gospels at any given point or preach in the same vein. So I just wanted to be clear about that.

So redaction criticism bases its overall inquiry on theological agendas, with respect to how these folks wrote the gospels. These authors have shaped the material according to their authorial intent, and so they have shifted and shaped certain aspects of the life of Jesus in the process of exercising authorial intent. But we must be clear. Again, the exercise of their authorial intent is under the impress of the Holy Spirit. We must be clear. So the discipline focuses, redaction criticism, that is, it focuses on Matthew and Luke because of the working theory that we have of the two-gospel hypothesis. The two-gospel hypothesis, again, argues for the priority of Mark. We have no knowledge of Mark's sources for the gospel that he wrote.

That statement, let's unpack that for a minute. We have no knowledge of his sources. Well, I just read you in the last clip the Papias tradition. If we take the Papias tradition to be historical, and I do, why? Well, because very often, early sources are the only resource that we have to reconstruct history, the story of humanity as it occurred in the past. So the practice of history writing or historiography uses the best sources that it can find and it weighs those sources and calibrates the information from those sources to create a coherent picture of what may or may not have happened, which is to say, I think Eusebius did good history for his day. And I don't need to read 21st century criteria for history writing back into the 4th century to critique Eusebius. He sought to gather together all of the historical data about the church and he did a fine job for his day. And so if he records the Papias tradition and we read that Mark followed Peter and recorded Peter's anecdotal statements about Jesus and composed it into a gospel, and if he talks about Matthew and the other evangelists, well, that's the information that we have. We can at least treat it as a working theory. That is my method, writ large. That is what you've seen me do all along in all of these clips.

So the two-gospel hypothesis argues for the priority of Mark. We have no knowledge of his sources for the gospel he wrote. That's a mainstream statement. The statement of the evangelical who takes history seriously or is not willing to overthrow the veracity of the historical sources that we do have vis-à-vis the early church will take the Papias tradition seriously and argue that Mark composed his gospel based on the reminiscences of Peter, what Peter remembered.

So there are five basic fundamentals to the discipline of redaction criticism. Number one: Redaction criticism separates the categories of tradition and redaction because the authors of the gospels have shaped, they have redacted, the tradition that was before them as they composed the gospels. The authors included and excluded material. They arranged it according to preferred order during the process of composition. They added and omitted material. They changed wording. They created transactional seams as a result of the use of varied sources. That's the second point. The third point. Redaction criticism looks for patterns as clues to the theological direction or emphasis of the evangelist. Four: Redaction criticism attempts to ascertain the life setting for the gospel in question, i.e. why was it written? What was the makeup of the audience? What was the situation the evangelist and his audience were embroiled in? And five: Redaction criticism seeks to determine the literary and theological dimensions of the gospel. So redaction criticism in practice tends towards the literary dimension of the gospels. How are they shaped, right? And from that literary perspective, the composition, the features of that composition. There is an attempt to answer historical questions about the evangelist and about his audience.

Now, in the hands of a non-evangelical, these questions are handled with an atmosphere of skepticism. In the hands of an evangelical scholar who holds a high view of Scripture, those questions tend to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture. We need to be mindful, though. Much of the practice of these criticisms, traditions criticism as a whole (form, source, redaction), for all intents and purposes today, it's source and redaction. Conclusions can and are regularly challenged. But that doesn't mean that we can't look at the process. We can learn something, but it's better to be aware of the limitations of the method. So we don't need to blindly agree. We can look at what they're suggesting, particularly as it relates to the source critics and the redaction critics. We can weigh those things out and see if it is true to the text, if it is to the word of God.

The redaction critic has to navigate between the theological motives of the gospel authors and historical accuracy. It's a constant balancing act. You can apply redaction criticism in a positive fashion, but it is often used in the opposite direction, negatively. Redaction criticism is the critical method that is most immediately useful to theologians and exegetes, people who study the text to determine what it means. When we apply redaction criticism to the gospels, we can inquire into theological emphasis and historical background, and we can appreciate the fact that we have four gospels because that means that we have four different perspectives on the life of Jesus.