

We believe, therefore, that the only safe method of interpretation is neither strictly literal, nor strictly spiritual; but that whenever possible the New Testament should be allowed to explain the Old. Augustine, of Hippo, had found the secret of true interpretation and expressed it in these words: 'The New was in the Old concealed. The Old is in the New revealed.' "

-- George L. Murray, *Millennial Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1948), pp. 39-41.

10. Gerald B. Stanton

"The science and art of interpreting the Scriptures of God is called hermeneutics. . . .

. . . The purpose . . . is to examine the one central, most basic issue of that science, namely: is the Bible to be interpreted literally? Or to state the problem from the opposing viewpoint: 'To what extent is the spiritualizing of Scripture permissible, and what is the relationship between the literal method and the interpretation of prophecy?' With the Bible abounding in figures of speech and with prophecy full of symbolism, can the rule of literal interpretation be held consistently? . . . It will be demonstrated that the *sine qua non*, the one thing indispensable to the premillennial viewpoint -- indeed, to orthodoxy itself -- is that the Scriptures of God be understood in a normal, grammatical, literal fashion . . .

To interpret the Scriptures literally means to interpret them grammatically, that is, according to the normal use of the words and the accepted rules of grammar. . .

'But when a word, originally appropriated to one thing, comes to be applied to another, which bears some real or fancied resemblance to it, . . . the meaning is called topical, or if we prefer the Latin form of expression, figurative. . . .' When the figurative meaning of a passage of Scripture is taken in preference to the ordinary 'literal' meaning, the passage is often said to be spiritualized, the implication being that a deeper, more spiritual understanding of the passage has been reached by the recognition of the hidden figurative interpretation. While these terms, literal and spiritual, are not the best that could be used to designate the two methods of interpretation under investigation, they have been utilized so widely that a change of terminology seems unwarranted at this point.

It is necessary to understand, however, that the advocate of literal interpretation does not exclude from his method the proper use of Biblical figures. . . . Excessive spiritualization of the Sacred Text is likewise often called allegorizing . . .

The extent to which a man spiritualizes the Scriptures will largely determine his doctrinal position.

By . . . failure to accept the literal sense of the plain testimony of Scripture, some interpreters have stolen away the foundations of every cardinal Christian doctrine and left the Church to drift into liberalism and infidelity. The difference, then, between the liberal and the conservative evangelical lies squarely in the system of hermeneutics employed. . .