



## **WOW: Word Of the Week**

### **“Blinders” and Bible Reading**

**August 25, 2021**

One more time – blinders.

“Blinders” refers to a pair of small screens attached to a horse's bridle to prevent it seeing sideways and behind.

Almost 50 years ago, Billy Smith, missionary to Japan, wrote a series of Bible studies based on Genesis. His purpose was to help U.S. Christians realize that our view of God's purpose and work in the world was influenced by the cultural “blinders” of Western society. Working through the book of Genesis, he contrasted Western and Eastern views of God's nature, the nature of reality, human nature, guilt, shame, and wrath. He contrasted human longing for God with God's steadfast love and longing for his human creation, human concepts of judgment with God's justice and judgment, human desire for restitution with God's righteousness and retribution, human alienation with God's holiness and separateness.

Smith's work was for this young preacher eye-opening. Through the years, I have been challenged to explore more deeply biblical themes such as honor, shame, community, belonging and exclusion, individualism, and mutual obligation.

More recently, but now almost 10 years ago, InterVarsity published Richards and O'Brien's work, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*. Their main thesis is that the experience and culture of Christians in western societies have clouded our ability to understand Scripture. The subtitle continues my recent Wednesday WOW theme of “blinders.”

Cultural blinders may keep us from understanding or appreciating a biblical text or teaching. Even our interpretative models are “westernized.” Valid interpretation (hermeneutics) will require that we Western Christians pay close attention to the contextual nuances of Scripture texts.

I remember Dr. Raymond Kelcy saying, “To teach Tommy the Bible, the teacher must know Tommy, and the teacher must know the Bible.” If our “blinders” keep us from seeing Tommy, or if our “blinders” keep us from knowing and understanding the Bible, we cannot accomplish our purpose.

I am committed to Bible reading and study. My most recent book was an effort to provide helpful understandings, with thoughts and questions to guide the development of our spiritual lives. To read the Bible well, we must read the Bible. We must read ourselves and our culture. We must integrate the two with reflections, thinking and questioning, so that we make appropriate applications.

The next time you spend time in the Word, don't forget to take off your cultural “blinders.”