

Interpreting the Bible

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Who has read the whole thing cover to cover—like a Book?

1. Bible 101—

- A. Content: Law, History, Poetry, Prophecy
- B. Set aside the Bible as a single book...and read it knowingly
- C. It and we have limitations: not pure history, some prehistory, conflicting narratives, we can look back centuries, current science not there (creation in particular). WEC “limitations in language, limitations in our understanding” – pg. 45-46
- D. Two-fold purpose:
 - a. to describe God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
 - b. to describe the will of God and the love of God (F,S,HS)
...so we don't need to make the Bible something that it is not
- E. Early books come from Oral Tradition (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy...and some others)
- F. Context and Internal Consistency are never easy topics
- G. not just history, but good news – WEC, 51

2. Scripture, Tradition, and Reason

Richard Hooker on the Authority of the Bible: ‘scripture alone is not enough and other authority is needed’ WEC, pg. 47

Tradition and reason helped to form Scripture; Reason and Scripture help to shape Tradition; Scripture and Tradition are informed by reason.

Fredrick Borsch: “It must also again be recognized that the Bible has always to be interpreted through reason and Christian experience before it can be known as revelation. It is not a question of whether this should be done. We all do. The questions have to with how consciously and faithfully it will be done.”

4. The Text of the Bible:

Construction: Divine and Human

Interpretation: Divine and Human (like the prayer) reason

Word of God is not static...and “the Bible is not a simple rule book outlining the right way to live; it is the underlying story that provides us with our identity as God’s people.” Also, WEC, pg. 48

- not static: language...Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek—Latin—to English
- for years, not written: Genesis (centuries) or Gospels (decades)
- briefly, JEDP—a theory
- Reformation: bring the Word to the people in their language
- not static: we don’t have any original letter or book, but many, and they do not all agree. Scholarship and faith combine for translation. (Example: the end of the gospel of Mark)
- Finally, not static because God is not limited to the printed word...and we are not limited to the printed word in knowing God
- WEC, pg. 47 “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (1 Timothy 3:16)
- Chicago-Lambeth Quad 1886/88: “The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the revealed Word of God.”

Struggles over Biblical Interpretation. Some examples

- Divorce: Paul made his own rules.
 - Jesus had said, or NO. Paul said 1 Cor. 7:10,12,15
- Eucharist, Women in ministry, Homosexuality, Slavery, Anti-Semitism.

Other points to consider:

- in ordinations, people vow that the Bible ‘contains all things necessary for salvation.’ That is very different that “God’s little instruction book” or “a manual for Christian living.”
- Important, sacred—but imperfect
- The Interpretive Triangle: Writer, Text, Reader...and God/THS involved with each.
- three temptations to avoid (from *The Good Book*, by Peter Gomes)
 - Bibliolatry: authority of God vs. Authority of scripture. God is greater than Scripture, not in a box.
 - Literalism, language is means, not end. This becomes problematic with Gen 1&2
 - Culturalism: gospel often used to maintain the cultural status quo (slavery)

5. The Bible in Episcopal Worship (WEC)

- read four times on a Sunday morning – pg. 44
- quoted throughout the service turns ‘the Bible into prayer’ – pg. 44,45
- corporate reading, similar to early church who heard it – 46

6. Reading the Bible – WEC – pgs. 56-59 Some good tips