

SERMON OUTLINE

Dr. David A. Renwick -- September 20, 2015

Bible: A Book Worth Reading

OBJECTIONS RAISED COMMONLY:

Old Testament: “a nightmare” (Hitchens); “a barbaric bronze age text” (Vidal)

New Testament: “exceeds the evil of the Old Testament” (Hitchens)

Forming the Bible: A conspiracy by men who excluded what they didn’t like (Dan Brown)

The Text Itself: “riddled with inconsistencies and outright forgeries”; “hundreds of thousands of textual changes” . . . [BUT . . . “most are immaterial, of no real importance”]. (Ehrman)

HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE?

A. Beware of the question (*asked both by Christians and non-Christians*)
“***Do you believe the Bible literally?***”

I. No one reads all of the Bible literally! If we did then...

- i. Women would wear hats to pray! (1 Corinthians 11)! We all interpret (i.e., don’t take literally) some commands.
- ii. We would misread the Bible’s poems (e.g., Psalm 23)! When we read a poem “literally” and not “poetically” we misread it.
- iii. We would only read the Bible in its original languages of Hebrew and Greek. A good translation always includes human interpretation: a literal translation is often a mistranslation!
Here’s the “literal Bible”: . בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים, בְּרָא תְשִׁית, και θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος

II. “Not always literal” does not mean “Not authoritative”

Think of the Bible functioning *like our*

U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence – they . . .

- i. bind us together as a people . .
- ii. tell us who our “family” is
- iii. provide a boundary for our debates . .
- iv. tell us what we have believed/should believe as a people,
and what major principles guide our behavior.

Even though citizens may disagree on interpretation,

These documents are our authoritative community documents

. . . we forget to read them, or plain forget them, at our peril.

B. Divine Inspiration

I. A Presbyterian Belief (expressed in our Constitution)

a. Officer/Minister Vow: “*I accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be by the Spirit the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and God’s word to me.*”

b. Confession of 1967:

The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of **its witness to God’s work of reconciliation in Christ**. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. **As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.**

II. “Divinely Inspired” Means Perfect for God’s Purpose

a. Inspired by God means -- Perfect to Change our Lives

PAUL = 2 Timothy 3:16 (Paul). . . “***inspired*** = ***useful*** for teaching, reproof, correction, to equip God’s people for every good work”

- i. Useful -- to equip our lives for God’s purposes (not, e.g., to teach us math!)
- ii. Useful – even the parts we don’t understand (e.g., think of a surgeon’s scalpel)

b. Inspired by God means – Perfect to Lead us to Christ

JOHN = (John 20:31) “*these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and through believing, have life in his name*”

- i. To “*witness to Jesus Christ*”
 - a. Four Gospels: each different, like 4 portraits
 - b. Would more consistency help? Or would it look like collusion?
- ii. Bishop John Subhan of India . . . brought to faith in Christ by reading

c. Inspired by God means –

- i. ***We MUST commit to reading it!***
- ii. ***We must commit to read it thoughtfully and prayerfully!***

As Jesus did (Luke 4).

-- *There is never an excuse for ignorance of what God has inspired!*

Writings impacting this sermon

1. Achtemeier, Paul J. Canon, Inspiration and Authority, 1980/99
2. Barton, John How The Bible Came to Be, 1997
3. Bruce, F.F. The New Testament. Documents: Are They Reliable? 1943/81
4. Keller, Timothy The Reason for God, Timothy Keller, 2008
5. Ehrman, Bart D. Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why, 2005
6. Hitchens, Christopher God is not Great, 2007
7. Dawkins, Richard The God Delusion, 2006
8. The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories