

# The Bible- What We Believe.

Hope Church, Dunedin

March 2019

Jesus said if you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).

Question: How do we hold to Jesus' teaching to be a true disciple and free?

Answer: By obeying the written word of God the Holy Bible.

Now, for 95% of the time this is straight forward but history shows that we Christians have not been that good at following Jesus instructions. Basically we a) prefer to do our own thing which is the very slavery Jesus warns us about in John 8:34 or, b) we don't really understand the nature and character of scripture and how to 'hear' it.

## 1) The River Banks

The two extremes we need to avoid if we are to hear God's word in reading scripture are **legalism** and **licence**. To help me in this I think of God's word as a braided river. The type of river that is common in the South Island of New Zealand. A valid and faithful interpretation of scripture will happen within the boundaries of two river banks. Two far in one direction and you will cross into the error of legalism where God's word to you becomes a rule book of do's and don'ts. Jesus was scathing in his rebuke of the Pharisee for obeying the letter of the law (Matthew 23:13-39) but failing to see that the scriptures testify about Jesus and that he is the source of life (John 5:39-40).

If you travel in the opposite direction you will cross into the error of licence. Here God's word no longer has authority to guide and govern all of your life. The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinthian church had crossed this boundary and were proud of the sexual expression of a man sleeping with his fathers wife (1Cor 5:1). The Apostle Paul warned the church against fellowship with people who claim to be Christian but were sexually immoral, greedy, idolatrous, slanderers, drunkards or swindlers (1Cor 5:11).

So how do we stay within the river of life where the Spirit of God applies God's life-giving word to us?

## 2) **The Bible: A Seven Act Play**

Reading the bible as a whole single narrative helps us to see the coherence of God's dealing with his creation. Some scholars in recent times have invited us to think of the bible not so much as narrative but as a play, or a drama. God is not only the author (inspiring human authors) but is the main character in this drama and we are invited onto the stage. The different 'acts' include:

- i) **Creation**
- ii) **Fall**
- iii) **Israel (election)**
- iv) **Redemption**
- v) **Pentecost**
- vi) **Church**
- vii) **Restoration**

### **3) Guidelines for Hearing the Word of God**

#### **i) Faith Commitment**

A faithful reading of scripture requires a faith commitment about the character of scripture. If the Bible is inspired by God (2Tim 3:16) and testifies to Jesus Christ the Word (John 5:39), then it must have divine authority over the lives of Christians and the Church. Hearing God speak through the Bible begins with a faith commitment. My conviction is that the bible is Gods word written and it contains all things necessary for salvation.

#### **ii) Harmony**

Because God inspired human authors to write the bible, it does not contradict itself. The whole canon of scripture reveals God's plan of salvation for all creation from the beginning to the end. Where there is a tension or ambiguity in our interpretation of scripture we apply the principle of letting scripture interpret scripture. There are some texts where this tension is hard to reconcile (eg Romans 13 and Revelation 13) and as Richard Hayes would say we 'let the tensions stand'. We also acknowledge with the Apostle Paul 'Now I know in part; then I shall know fully'<sup>1</sup>. In the fullness of time the truth of the text will be revealed to us in perfect harmony.

#### **iii) History**

God spoke His word into particular historical settings. The Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) were written into the Ancient Near Eastern cultures. The four Gospels were written into 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine culture. The remainder of the New Testament was written into 1<sup>st</sup> Century Graeco /Roman cultures. As such, eternal truth must be interpreted in the light of the context into which it was originally revealed and translated into the truth of our own culture today. John Stott calls this the 'cultural transposition of truth'. It is important to start with 'them & then' before moving to 'us & now'.

#### **iv) Categories of Writing (Genre)**

Sixty-six books written by forty authors have been written in a wide range of categories (or genres) and so they need to be interpreted differently. The poetry of the Psalms has much metaphorical imagery whereas the law of Moses has much more literal instructions. Just as today we apply different tools to understand a poem compared to a newspaper, compared to a text book, so to in understanding the bible we must first consider what category of writing we are dealing with before we jump to what it might be saying to us.<sup>2</sup>

#### **v) The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ fulfils the Hebrew Scriptures (Romans 1:2-6) and paves the way for the revelation of the New Testament. This good news of God's plan of salvation is the interpretive lens through which all passages of scripture must be viewed. This gospel is the basis for the New Covenant between God and his people and is the basis upon which all faithful Christian interpretation proceeds.

#### **vi) Disputable matters**

The Apostle Paul acknowledged there are 'disputable matters' (Romans 14:1) of faith that we are at liberty to disagree on and this was certainly true of the early church. The Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century had a helpful grid when it came to determining our church practice and doctrine; "In essentials; unity, in non-

---

<sup>1</sup> 1Cor 13:12

<sup>2</sup> There are some excellent resources available to help us determine this for example 'How to Read the bible for all its Worth' by Fee & Stuart is a good place to start.

essentials- liberty, in all things charity". Our church defines the essentials as those matters of faith that impact the creeds or effect our salvation.

**vii) Humility**

A defining characteristic of Jesus while on earth, the man who is fully God, was his humility.

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Philippians 2:6-8*

This same attitude of humble obedience will be ours as we come to hear and apply Gods word to us from Scripture. There are many things that the bible is quite clear about and which the church has rightly said for 2000 years "this is true for the orthodox follower of Christ." In the previous section we define doctrines of the creeds such as the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the church this way. When we come to the disputable matters where scripture leaves us room for varying interpretations and where there is current ambiguity in how the church universal interprets some matters, (such as infant baptism or women in leadership), we seek to apply the same obedient humility that our Lord Jesus revealed as we seek to come to a faithful understanding of God's word.

**4) Flawless Love**

The Holy Bible is God's flawless word (Psalm 18:30) to his people. Under the old covenant with Israel this was an external law to be obeyed. Under the new covenant in Christ, God puts his Spirit within his people (Ezekiel 36:27) and graciously enables us to know him personally through Jesus Christ and then to obey his word written in scripture and in our hearts. Jesus commands us to love one another (John 15:12) and to remain in his love. The way we remain (abide) in this flawless love is to obey his commands (John 15:10). There is a joy and a freedom when we fully trust the word of God as the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth of God.

**Handling and hearing the Word of God at Hope Church**

Central to our calling as a church is to raise up 'next generation disciples of Jesus Christ who impact the world'. God has called us to plant Hope for this reason. The bible is God's revelation to us of himself and his dealing with creation. Because of the troubles within the ACANZP around the authority of scripture it could be easy for us to react to the liberalism we have seen with a conservative literalism that is neither faithful nor life giving to a lost world. Jesus remains both our interpretive key to scripture and our model for hearing and obeying Gods word. Like him we seek to be full of grace and truth as the Spirit of God guides us into all truth.

To God be the glory.

Stu Crosson

Senior Minister

Hope Church, Dunedin.

**Knowing Gods Story**

Hope Church offers an in depth course on Bible Interpretation called "Knowing Gods Story". If you would like more information on this please, contact Sandy Elkin at [sandy@elkins.co.nz](mailto:sandy@elkins.co.nz)