

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE BIBLE

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STUDY SEVEN: BE ALERT TO WHAT PEOPLE AROUND YOU BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE

We have looked at what God says about his word and at the confidence we can have in it. We have looked at a number of principles that will both honour the Bible and help us to get the most out of the Bible. It is important, however, to also understand that our society and, to a lesser extent, our churches, have quite a wide range of different opinions about the Bible. A common factor in these attitudes is that the finality, authority and relevance of the Bible is undermined, and we are left with a Bible in which no confidence is felt. We will look now at some of these mindsets:

A. TRADITIONALISM SMOTHERS THE BIBLE

Within the church human traditions are added to the Bible. The result of this is that these traditions, formalized into church practice and belief systems, override the Word of God. What is written in the Bible is interpreted and limited by the traditions. The traditions are given equal authority with the Bible, and sometimes more. This superseding of the Bible with human traditions sometimes happens subtly and unintentionally; in other instances it happens deliberately.

Task 1: Discuss examples of traditionalism in churches today. Describe one example in the box below.

B. LIBERAL/MODERNIST/NEO-ORTHODOX TEACHING REJECTS THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

The absence of confidence in the authority and authenticity of the Bible in many churches today is the result of Liberal, Modernist or Neo-orthodox teaching in the past century. Each of these denies that the Bible is God's Word. [Neo-orthodox does believe that the Bible *becomes* God's Word when it speaks to a person, but that same text might not be God's Word tomorrow.] The Bible is seen merely as a collection of human writings, through which God, if indeed there is a personal God, might or might not speak. Liberalism and Modernism deny the existence of the supernatural – denying the Biblical miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the whole concept of a divinely inspired, written Word of God.

Task 2: Discuss examples or results of this unbelief in churches today. Describe one example in the box below.

C. SECULAR HUMANISM AND ATHEISTIC EVOLUTION REJECT THE CONCEPT OF GOD

Secular humanism and atheistic evolution reject and mock the very idea that there is a God, let alone one who has broken into our human sphere and spoken to us. All things supernatural are denied. Man is on his own. The basic assumptions of evolution deny the validity of the Biblical record, and shake the faith of anyone not convinced of the infallibility, authority, inspiration and finality of the Scriptures. Evolutionary atheists rightly recognize the sheer incongruity of holding to Christian faith and at the same time accepting the theory of evolution; sadly, some Christians, attempting to reconcile supposed scientific fact with the Scriptures, adjust the significance of the Scripture from fact to myth, and by doing so undermine the whole ground of their confidence in the Scriptures.

Task 3: Discuss examples or results of secular humanism/evolution in churches today. Describe one example in the box below.

D. HEDONISM PREFERS ITS OWN PLEASURE ABOVE THE BIBLE

Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure – the belief that pleasure is the ultimate good. In this mindset values are gauged by the amount of pleasure given. If something gives a ‘buzz’ it is seen to be good and desirable, irrespective of how it stands when lined up with the Word of God.

We see the results of this mindset where churches or Christians:

- Focus on their own comfort and feeling of well-being instead of seeking the glory of God
- Look for entertaining, buzz-giving services instead of sound proclamation of the Word
- Lower standards in order to please people, instead of honouring God’s standard
- Make the gospel a ‘feel happy’ message, instead of the command to repent and believe.
- Flit from one church to another looking for the biggest spiritual high.

The list is more extensive than this.

Task 4: Discuss examples of hedonism in churches today. Describe one example in the box below.

E. ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM AND ANTINOMIANISM REJECT THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

Antinomianism [*anti* – against; *nomos* – law] is an ancient problem. Paul spoke against it in Romans 6 when he responded to people who said ‘Shall we go on sinning to that grace may increase?’ Anti – authoritarianism is the oldest godless attitude of all: it first appeared in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve rebelled against the one prohibitive command [Genesis 2:17]. Ever since then the human heart has rejected authority. Ever since then the human heart has rebelled against the right and authority of God to tell us how to live.

This rebellious mindset happily finds excuse for its rebellion in rejecting the authority of the Word of God by questioning its authenticity. This rebellious mindset happily embraces the evolutionary, god-denying, Scripture-denying mindset. It is happy to believe *anything* that excuses it from having to submit to the authority of God in the Scriptures.

As Christians we need to be especially alert to this expression of the rejection of God and his Word.

Task 5: Discuss examples of anti-authoritarianism and antinomianism in churches today. Describe one example in the box below.

F. POSTMODERNISM RELATIVISES AND INDIVIDUALIZES THE WORD OF GOD

Postmodernism rejects the concept of absolute truth. For this mindset there is simply no such thing as truth that is always true for all people in all places at all times. For this mindset the idea that there is actually one God who is God over all, and who has spoken the one truth that is the truth for all, is ludicrous.

Here all ‘truth’ concepts are equally valid and equally right for they are all only human ideas born of transient human cultures. Here it is the height of intolerance for any one individual or group not only to assert but even to *believe* that their concept of truth alone is right.

Thus all becomes relative; all truth-concepts are mere individual preferences at that particular point of time. The concept of the Bible as the Word of God, the absolute truth for all people, which all people must be told, and which all people must accept, is rejected; indeed, in some instances it is considered a criminal offence. The Bible is nothing more than any other religious book – just a collection of human collections of truth from a particular time frame and culture. Its claims to uniqueness and world-wide relevance and authority merely display the mindset of the culture that produced it.

This is the mentality that dominates our western societies today; to its accusations the Bible-believing Christian is particularly vulnerable.

Task 6: Discuss examples of postmodernism in society today. Describe one example in the box below.

H. SUBJECTIVISM INTERNALISES AND EMOTIONALISES TRUTH

We can recognize that we have fallen into the error of subjectivism when we find ourselves saying things like:

- It *feels* so right to ...
- I don't *feel* that God could possibly love me because ...
- I can't believe God is a God of love *when I look at* all the suffering ...
- I *think (or believe)* that as long as a person is sincere, they'll be right ...
- What *that verse means to me* is ...
- I *feel* so good today! I had such a great time witnessing ... and so on.

Subjectivism understands and interprets truth on the basis of personal thoughts, feelings and needs rather on the solid eternally true statements of the Bible. It reserves for itself the right and the ability to import its own ideas into the words of the Bible. It ignores the straight, originally intended meaning of the Biblical text and uses the Biblical text for validation of its present opinions, choices and actions.

This is a very subtle and dangerous attitude to the Bible because it appears to be 'so spiritual'. The end result is a false and very shaky spirituality that takes its confidence from personal feelings, or leadings, or experiences, which can collapse in a crashing heap and leave a person with their assurance of salvation riddled to pieces and their confidence in God and the Bible shattered.

We could include here the frequently reported experience of getting a 'word from the Lord'. This is an area in which great caution should be exercised at all times. Almost every false Christian cult is the result of an individual believing that they had a personal revelation from God; Islam also originated in this way. Doubtless God does communicate with us, but his normal way of doing so is through the written word. Certainly he will never communicate anything contrary to the written word, nor is there any additional spiritual truth beyond and beside Jesus Christ, his final word.

Task 7: Discuss examples of subjectivism in churches today. Describe one example in the box below.

I. POPULAR PREACHING REDUCES AND/OR MISINTERPRETS THE BIBLE

There are many perceptions and expectations within evangelical churches that have for years been assumed to be Biblical, with very little thought given to whether or not they are. Over the centuries 'evangelical traditions' have gradually developed unnoticed, and popular preaching continues to reinforce these reductions of or additions to Biblical truth.

We could list as examples:

- The 'gospel call' to ask Jesus into your heart [the Bible commands us to acknowledge him as Lord, or, to repent and believe].
- The belief that if you don't have a 'quiet time' you'll 'have a bad day' [the Bible teaches that we relate to God on the principle of grace, not the principle of performance].
- The 'do you want to be happy' basis of evangelism [the Bible bases its evangelism on who Jesus is]
- The out of balance focus on Satan's power in certain 'spiritual warfare' concepts

Task 8: Discuss other examples of the way popular preaching in churches today deviates from the truth contained in the Bible. Describe one example in the box below.

J. WORD OF FAITH TEACHING TWISTS THE SCRIPTURES

The 'Faith Movement' or 'Word faith' or 'Word of faith' teachers twist the Scriptures and their meaning beyond recognition. They portray a God who is at the beck and call of men, powerless to act unless released by prayer spoken in 'faith' from hearts without sin. It is the power of the positive human word ['positive confession'], spoken in faith that creates the realities for which we pray. Failure to receive the desired object or result is because of a 'negative confession' – that is negative words, or lack of the right kind of faith, or the presence of sin in one's life. Here every believer has, or should have, in their words the same creative power as the word of God by which the world was created.

This blasphemous teaching is very pervasive. It exalts the human, pandering to our ego-centric hearts. It demeans and demotes God. In the hands of its proponents verses from the Bible are wrenched from their Biblical context, robbed of their Biblical meaning, and used to dupe listeners into believing these teachers are teaching the pure word of God and receiving messages straight from the very mouth of God.

Task 9: Discuss examples of Word of Faith teaching prevalent today. Describe one example in the box below.

Task 10: In the box below make a note of the things from the above points that you personally have been challenged to remove from your own attitude to the Bible. Ask the Lord to forgive you for these attitudes, and express your commitment to the Bible as his inspired, authoritative, infallible eternal Word.