



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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What Do You Believe About the Bible?

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Isaiah 40:6-11
2 Timothy 3:10-17

When do you remember first learning about the Bible? When did it come into your life?

For me, it was with Mrs. Mack, the pre-school Sunday School teacher for me and Cindy and Amanda, a small church in a small town.

We sat on those little red spindle back chairs, and Mrs. Mack taught us to sing, among many songs, *“The B-I-B-L-E – yes, that’s the book for me, I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E.”*

I didn’t know it at the time, but that was my introduction to church history and reformed theology.

For that little song carries the essence of the Reformation: Martin Luther’s stand on scripture alone against the Roman Catholic Church, and the explosion of the Reformation’s ‘sola scriptura’, the authority of scripture.

Today we give Bibles to our 3rd Graders, an exciting day and special gift.

The first Bible I remember was the big Picture Bible my brother and I looked at during the worship service. I was 6, he was 4.

Its purpose was to keep us preoccupied during the sermon and prayers.

I'm not sure that's what Paul meant by 'training in righteousness!' For if we were not quiet and still, we got 'reproof and correction' later!

As we give these Bibles, it's a good time for all of us to consider what we believe about the Bible?

I've read that about 92% of Americans own at least one Bible; the average household has three.

A bumper sticker says, "A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to a person who isn't," but according to a Gallup Poll all our Bibles must be in pristine condition because the number of people who read the Bible, at least occasionally, has dropped to 59 percent from 73 percent in the 1980s. We revere the Bible, but we don't read it.

In a recent survey, fewer than half of Americans could name the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Only a third knew that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Many people thought it was Joel Osteen. 80 percent of "born again" Christians thought it was the Bible that said, "God helps them that help themselves." It was Ben Franklin.

And I just think this is funny: 12% of Christians thought Noah's wife was Joan of Arc.

How can this book, this living word of the living God "*instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ*" if you don't read it?

Maybe we don't read it because, like Peter, in his letter he says about Paul's writings, "*some things in them are hard to understand!*"

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I think most of us could agree with that If the Bible were just another book, a book for the beach, a summer sizzler, coffee table decoration, it wouldn't matter.

But I think all those people who buy Bibles, they believe or they hope that this book is something more, that it is what was told Timothy nearly 2000 years ago: to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Do you believe that God speaks to us through this Book today? Here we are in the twenty-first century and I believe, do you believe, in some way, God uses this Book to bring us to Jesus Christ, and to bring Jesus Christ to us.

That's what the Bible is, and that's what this book does. What is just as important to say is what we are not affirming which is this.

We are not affirming that this is a scientific textbook. It is not a scientific textbook.

And we're not affirming that it is a history book. It contains history, but the purpose of the Bible is not to give us lessons in history of two to three thousand years ago.

Its primary purpose is through these stories that are told, to bring us to God made known in Jesus Christ and to bring God made known in Jesus Christ to us.

And this Bible has done that repeatedly, again and again, for millions of people.

But even more, and probably even worse, we have honored the Bible in name, claiming great things for it, while all too often we have not read it and placed it in our hearts as Jesus himself did.

He just read it and knew it. It was there for him, in his head and in his heart, and it was for him the guiding light of his life. That's how it functioned. He read it and he knew it, and he lived it!

The linchpin of the authority of Scripture for me is that if it was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me!

What I believe is that the stories in here are not true just because they're in the Bible. They are in the Bible because they are true to the reality of our relationship with and experience of the living God.

If you will, the Bible is God's "Facebook" page, the divine "Instagram" account, God's social network: God's timeline of God's story with and for God's people!

What I believe is that the Bible is, in fact, filled with people very much like the ones we know: people who are confused and confusing, the courageous and the coward, mean and merciful; people who are less than exemplary, but who, nevertheless, take an active part in God's plan to change the world, make the world better.

Billy Graham once said, "One of the greatest tragedies today is that although the Bible is an available book, open book, it is a closed book to millions; either because they leave it unread or because they read it without applying its teaching to themselves. No greater tragedy can befall humankind than that of paying lip service to the Bible left unread or the way of life it advocates not followed."

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And that's the final word in our passage: *"equipped to do every kind of good deed."*

Like Rob Bell said in his book, "What is the Bible?": *"That's why the Bible is not a book about going to heaven. It's a library of poems and letters and stories about bringing heaven to earth now, about this world becoming more and more the place it should be. The action is here..."*

Do you believe the Bible, do you read the Bible, so that you are equipped for every good deed, to be not only Bible-believing, but Bible-living for the healing and restoring and reconciling and renewing of this world.

William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army, said, "I want to see a new translation of the Bible into the hearts and conduct of living men and women...It is of no use making correct translations of words, if we cannot get the words of this book translated into our lives."

We can read the Bible and get a lot of information, but if that's all that happens, then we become fountains of trivia and we've trivialized the Bible and we begin to live by biblical clichés or bumper sticker slogans.

The issue is for us to read the Bible seriously, with all our heart, soul, and mind for its intended purpose: to form us, shape us, so that you and I live as God's people.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit to give us the strength and courage and faith to apply the truth of Jesus Christ and make the changes God wants in us.

Just as Mrs. Mack taught me what it means to ‘stand alone on the Word of God...’ so that I can say I believe, as she also taught us to sing, “*Jesus loves me. This I know for the Bible tells me so!*”

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!



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