

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Identity Check (Week 1) - How to Read the Bible Like a Presbyterian:



- 1) We started a new series that will carry us through the start of Advent on our common ground and shared identity as a Presbyterian church.
- 2) We started today by talking about the Bible itself, and how many Reformed Christian groups make sense of it, specifically as a one big story composed of two distinct parts.
- 3) More specifically, as one of our PCUSA creeds (The Confession of 1967, 9.28) puts it, "The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New."
- 4) Ten times in his various letters St. Paul refers to the O.T. era as a time of "mystery" (e.g., Col. 1.26-29; Eph. 3.1-13), in which things were shadowy and hard to make out (Col. 2.16-17).
- 5) Thus, good news! - if you're sometimes confused by the O.T. or not sure what to make of a particular passage or story, congratulations, you're reading it correctly.
- 6) 2nd Timothy 3.15-16 is a truly remarkable passage about scripture itself insofar as it claims that the "God-breathed" Old Testament is no longer for the Jewish people principally, but is now for everyone everywhere.
- 7) God's word is full of God's breath/Spirit, or is "inspired," in that it shapes us spiritually - it trains, corrects, and reproves us., in the language of 2nd Timothy 3.16.
- 8) One of the ways it does this, accordingly to another insight from St. Paul, is that it is our tutor or teacher about human sinfulness (Gal. 3.19-24): when we read through the pages of the O.T., we are not seeing superheroes but normal human life and faith, with all the ups and down, in which we can see ourselves.
- 9) But the most fundamental way to understand how the pieces of scripture fit together is imagine it as an "X": the O.T. leads us to the climax of the story, Christ and God's coming Kingdom through Him, while the N.T. is the record of the first Christians grappling with and articulating that climax, and then taking that message to the far reaches of the Roman empire.
- 10) As The Confession of 1967, 9.29, reminds us, "The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ": that means that we should use the climax of the story, Jesus, as the interpretive lens by which we understand or view everything else in scripture.

Quotes to Remember

"A warning: it may prove dangerous to get involved with the Bible. You approach it with a series of questions, and as you enter it you find the questions turned back on you." (Philip Yancey, in *The Bible Jesus Read*)

"It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers will bring us to Him. But we must not use the Bible (our fathers too often did) as a sort of encyclopedia out of which texts (isolated from their context and not read without attention to the whole nature and purport of the books in which they occur) can be taken for use as weapons." (C. S. Lewis)

Explore More

- Honest piece about admissions we need to make about scripture, from a leading Christian periodical for 20-30 year olds: [Five Things I Wish Christians Would Admit About the Bible](#)

- Two pieces on the Bible from the PCUSA's Mission Agency:

[Presbyterian Mission Agency Biblical Interpretation](#)

[Presbyterian Mission Agency The Bible – The Living Word](#)

- A longer piece by the great contemporary biblical scholar N. T. Wright in which he discusses the Bible as an unfolding five act play: [N.T. Wright on Scripture and the Authority of God](#)