

The Bible and Christian Doctrine

- For Christians, the Bible's highest value is in revealing Jesus, who gives us the highest, deepest, and most mature view of the character of the living God.
- “And the Word became the scriptures and was published among us”?????

- The character of God, seen in Jesus, is not violent. The living God is not the kind of deity who decrees ethnic cleansing, genocide, racism, sexism, homophobia, war, religious supremacy, or eternal conscious torment.
- Instead the character of the living God is like the character of Jesus. Don't simply look at the bible, Look *through the bible*, to look at Jesus, and you will see the character of God shining radiant and full.

How should the Bible be understood?

- A legal constitution? Is it meant to be used this way?
- Mark 2:27 “ The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.”
- Notice how Jesus subordinates the requirements of even “the law” to the well being of human beings. This is not a constitutional approach!

- One might argue that it is *biblical* to commit genocide by quoting Deuteronomy 7, but one could never claim it is *Christ-like*.

- When Jesus is the focal point of the story, he is the climax, the hero, the summit, the surprise, the shock, the revelation that gives all that precedes and all that follows profound and ultimate meaning.

- If we follow this approach, we will speak less about the Bible as the supreme Word of God and more about Jesus as the supreme Word of God. We will let the person of Jesus including and integrating his birth, life, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, abiding presence, and ongoing mission through the Holy Spirit become the light in which all interpretations are evaluated and find meaning.

- In so doing, we will cherish the Bible in a more truly biblical way (recalling John 5:39-40 and Hebrews 1:1-3) -- as a unique, irreplaceable, and God-given witness in words made print to the unique, irreplaceable, and holy Word made flesh.

The Bible and Spiritual Transformation

- Not to put us *under* the text as conservatives do
- Not to lift us *over* the text as liberals do
- But to place us *in* the text, *in* the story, *in* the current and flow, *in* the predicament, *in* the Spirit, *in* the presence, love, and reverence of the living God and *in* God's mission.

A Trustworthy God?

The Bible's Answer

- The Bible directly addresses these concerns:
 - God has communicated his purpose by the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.
 - Through Jesus and the events around Jesus' life, God has at last made his purposes clear
 - God has shown us God's agenda

A Community That Listens to the Bible

Listens to the Bible

Stories and Songs About Who We Are

- When Christians come together for worship
 - we gather not just to share bread and wine,
 - But also to be told who we are,
 - in words,
 - in story and song,
 - and above all, in the story and song that is the Bible

Listens to the Bible

The Word of God

- We call the Bible the “Word of God”
 - NOT because it is the primary and central witness in history to God —
 - Jesus is the primary and central witness to God —
 - But because it is the primary and central witness to Jesus
- The Bible is inspired because of its capacity to be *a vehicle of the Holy Spirit* to make Jesus vividly present in our minds and hearts.

Listens to the Bible

A Book Read in Community

- From the beginning of the Church's life, the Bible was a book read in community.
 - It was a collection of books read by and in community, in the context of prayer and regular meditative interpretation.
- In modern times some Christians have tended to think about the Bible as if it were first and foremost is a book to be read in private.
 - Making the Bible accessible to everyone has been good.
 - But what badly needs to be recovered now is the sense that the Bible is first and foremost a book to be read *in company*.

Listens to the Bible

A Book Read in Community

- The Bible has the unique role in proclaiming to a group gathered for worship the acts of God in making a people for himself.
- It is text meant to be struggled with in the context of prayer and shared reflection.
- Private and individual reading should be informed by this unique role:
 - When we read the Bible on our own, we must remember that we read it in the company of readers across the ages — and we have to be open to learn from them as well as from our contemporaries.

“I Have Seen the Church, and It
Works”

“I Have Seen the Church”

- There is saying of one of the monks of the desert in the early Church:
“I am not a monk, but I have seen monks.”
- He is aware his own life is somewhat compromised, his enthusiasm dimmed, his practice far from the ideal, but he has seen true monks.
- So too with the community of the Church. Its practice is often far from the ideal, but there are moments and stories we can point to and say, “Yes, we have seen the Church, and It works.”