

The Source of Our Beliefs
John 5:31-42, Hebrews 1:1-3

Sermon

Hobart, January 22nd, 2017

Launceston, January 29th, 2017

Scripture Reading

John 5:31-42

³¹ “If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. ³² But someone else is also testifying about me, and I assure you that everything he says about me is true. ³³ In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist, and his testimony about me was true. ³⁴ Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. ³⁵ John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message. ³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, ³⁸ and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you.

³⁹ “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

41 “Your approval means nothing to me, 42 because I know you don’t have God’s love within you. ¹

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 5:31-40). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHAT YOU BELIEVE?

A. IN THE PAST

1. People fairly much believed and did what they were told

- a) They trusted, or were pressured to believe and do what those in power instructed

2. This included religious beliefs and practices

- a) Everyone in the community conformed to the local customs and way of living

3. We experienced this in our own history, when most of us read very little outside of church literature

- a) We trusted the authority and teachings of church leaders and so most in our community believed and practised almost identical beliefs

B. TODAY

1. We live in the post-modern, information age, the age in which people believe what they like

- a) There are still underlying cultural influences, but nowhere near the conformity of the past

2. This also applies to Christians, and to each of us here, and in other congregations of our denomination and others

- a) There are so many books, videos and websites with people proposing all sorts of views on every topic under the sun, including Christian topics

3. So what determines what we believe today?

4. What is it that persuades us to accept or reject certain views and beliefs?

- a) To decide what is good, bad, right, wrong, critical or unimportant

C. SO TODAY WE ARE GOING TO DISCUSS SOME BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR BELIEFS,

- 1. We are going to look at some of the challenges we all face with a plethora of competing Christian views in our modern information age**
- 2. and the way we view and use the Bible**

D. PRAYER

BODY:

II. QUESTIONS:

- A. PILATE FAMOUSLY ASKED, "WHAT IS TRUTH?"**
- B. LET US START BE EXAMINING WHAT WE BELIEVE, AND THE AUTHORITY OR SOURCE OF THOSE BELIEFS**
 - 1. How do you decide what you believe, and determine what is true and what is false, what is important teaching and what isn't?**
 - 2. DISCUSS**

III. THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE

- A. CLEARLY THE BIBLE PLAYS A VITAL PART IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS TRUTH**
 - 1. In giving us verification and assurance of what to believe is right and good, and what isn't**
 - 2. As we may look at another time, many people go into battle using various scriptures to prove their points, and to attack and oppose other viewpoints**
 - 3. The problem is that others with opposing views are also using the Bible just as dogmatically and confidently to prove they are right**
 - 4. Some insist we must believe the Bible is inerrant,**
 - a) others demand we all teach this is the only way of salvation, or a particular view on prophecy, or the Ten Commandments, speaking in tongues, or hell, or repentance, or creation etc. etc.**
 - b) Young earth creationists say that those who don't believe that Genesis 1 is literally and scientifically make God out to be a liar, with the result that all scripture becomes unreliable**

5. Dogmatic and divisive arguments, accompanied too often by a condemning of those who don't agree, has been going on for centuries causing great divisions and harming the witness of the church

a) It has become rife with the advent of the internet, particularly in North America

B. IT IS VERY EASY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN IT ALL, AND LOSE SIGHT OF THE CORE ISSUES OF CHRISTIANITY THAT THE SCRIPTURES ARE FUNDAMENTALLY ALL ABOUT

1. Many times people wave the Bible around, claiming to be defending it—

a) but all too often, rather than starting with God and the overall message of the Scripture, much of what they say is based on their own preconceived views

b) Any scriptures that are used are too often narrowly selected to suit their point without seeing them in context

2. Often those who speak the loudest are independent teachers, who lead their own group, and are not accountable to a larger group or denomination

a) They aren't functioning in the body of Christ as an accountable team member

C. THERE IS ALSO A TENDENCY TO CLAIM THAT THEY ARE DEFENDING "GOSPEL" TEACHINGS AND VALUES

1. But very often what is being defended is a view of Christianity and the Bible that arose in America in the 1800's and more so in the early 1900's, in an understandable reaction to changes in culture and society that challenged Christianity

a) There was a great concern that modern science and the increasingly liberal views of society were a threat to Christianity

b) There was an accompanying desire for certainty in a climate of uncertainty, liberalism and changing values and a multitude of opinions

c) So many Christians reacted to this by becoming resistant to outside influences and striving to prove and preserve what they believed to be the "true faith"

2. But in this well-meaning process not only are new theological insights resisted, but sight tends to be lost of the teachings of Christianity down through the centuries

- a) Focus tends to be on having the “right teachings” which includes strict views on how to view and interpret the Bible

D. SEPARATIONISM

1. This desire to be right and resist error led to a “you and me against the world mentality”

- a) People were concerned that their view of the true gospel was being threatened by other Christians and the world around them
- b) In their anxiety to be safe and secure in their beliefs many have become insular and antagonistic those with differing views

2. We see this very much today in North America

- a) There are many of the “religious right” in America that spend a lot of their time writing books or articles on the Internet or making videos
- b) Many of them spend a lot of time attacking and denigrating others they disagree with and urging people to keep away from them

3. This is sometimes termed “separationist”

- a) Believing that true believers should have nothing to do with those who don’t hold to their version of the truth

4. Ironically and tragically, in passionately seeking to defend Christian values and teachings against the pressures of the world, it is all too easy to use the world’s methods

- a) The result tends to be like lawyers in court, lining up all the points they can from various laws and legal judgments of the past to prove their case and disprove the opposing case
- b) So much of what is communicated takes the same tone and use similar methods to those writing about politics, or conspiracy theories, or other emotive secular issues

E. DISCUSS

1. Have you come across this?

- 2. What do you think of this attitude and approach?**
- 3. Is there a place for condemning and opposing other Christians?**
- 4. Who did Jesus oppose, and why?**
- 5. What is the underlying problem with such acrimonious and judgmental approaches?**

F. “RIGHT THEOLOGY”

- 1. How important is “right theology”?**
 - 2. Are we saved or lost based on “right” or “wrong” theology, as the dogmatic arguments of many would seem to imply?**
 - 3. What is missing that leads to all this dogmatism, exclusivism, legalism and division?**
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IV. QUESTIONNAIRE:

A. ONE OF THE KEY ISSUES UNDERLYING SUCH DEBATES IS THE WAY THE BIBLE IS VIEWED AND USED

B. QUESTIONNAIRE: WHAT IS THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

1. Is the Bible the sole source of truth and moral values for life?

2. Is the Bible the source of our salvation?

3. How do we know what its role and purpose is?

V. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE BIBLE

1. British theologian John Goldingay writes;

The *fact* that the Bible is inspired provides our thinking with a starting point. The *nature* of the Bible's inspiration we must learn from scripture itself.²

2. Let's look briefly at what the Scriptures teach as about their role

3. First, let's talk about Jesus' use of the Scriptures

John 5:31-42

³¹ "If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. ³² But someone else is also testifying about me, and I assure you that everything he says about me is true. ³³ In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist, and his testimony about me was true. ³⁴ Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. ³⁵ John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message. ³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself.

4. What is Jesus saying about the validity of his teachings?

- a) The Father bears witness to who Jesus is
- b) The Godly fruits of Jesus' ministry also bear witness

(1) They conform precisely with the overall nature of God and fulfil his plan for all creation

5. We see the fruits of the Holy Spirit that Paul discusses in Galatians throughout his life, ministry and teachings

- a) "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control" ³
- b) Rather than, "hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division" ⁴

² John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, Eerdmans, 1994, p. 274

³ *New Living Translation* (Ga 5:22-23).

⁴ *New Living Translation* (Ga 5:20).

- c) He came to heal, unite, reconcile, extend grace and forgiveness

³⁷ And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, ³⁸ and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you.

6. Who is he condemning?

7. What is their problem?

- a) They don't know who God is - Jesus is the only one who does fully and truly
- b) They don't know his voice, his way, his nature, his will, his purposes, his ways
- c) They loudly proclaim their own version of the true faith, and are quick to condemn and separate themselves from those who didn't conform
- d) Interestingly, the most likely meaning of the name "Pharisees" is "separatist".
- e) As we saw in the parables, these separatists condemned Jesus for associating with tax-collectors and other "sinners"

³⁹ "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

8. What is Jesus telling us about the role of the Scriptures?

9. What is he saying about searching the Scriptures for the source of eternal life?

- a) Not the Scriptures that are the source
 - (1) Their role is to point us to the source

⁴¹ "Your approval means nothing to me, ⁴² because I know you don't have God's love within you.

10. What is he saying in conclusion about the religious leaders of his day?

B. LET'S CONCLUDE BY LOOKING AT TWO MORE SCRIPTURAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THEIR ROLE AND PURPOSE

1. Hebrews 1:1-3

1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. 2 And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. 3 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God

2. II Timothy 3:15-17

¹⁵You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus.

3. As Gary Deddo wrote in his series of articles, "Scripture, God's Gift".

we interpret the whole of the written Word in terms of its center, the Living Word of God. In that way the whole of Scripture is properly interpreted, the gift of God is properly received.

Jesus is the interpretive key to all of Scripture, for in him we see and hear the heartbeat of God. We watch and hear the motions of his heart and mind, even his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The light we find shining forth from the face of Jesus sheds light on all of Scripture, for in him the God of the whole Bible has personally revealed himself.

So we ought to read and interpret Scripture in a way that through it all, in one way or another, we come to see how it points towards and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Think of this as a process much like reading a murder mystery novel for the second time. The first time through, at the end, you finally come to discover "who done it." The second time through is a much different experience. You can see in a new light how all the clues early on in the mystery pointed to "who done it." You appreciate the clues (and recognize the false leads) even more the second time through. But the clues are not the solution. Their value is how they indicate or are signs pointing to the resolution of the mystery.

This means that central to our study and understanding of the whole Bible should be the person and acts of Jesus.⁵

4. As Christian Smith adds;

“The Bible is not about offering things like a biblical view of dating, but rather about how God the Father offered his Son, Jesus Christ, to death to redeem a rebellious world from the slavery and damnation of sin.

The Bible is not about conveying divine principles for starting and managing a Christian business—but is instead about Christ on the cross triumphing over all principalities and powers and so radically transforming everything we consider to be our business...

Scripture then ceases to be about teaching about biblical manhood and womanhood or biblical motherhood and fatherhood—and becomes instead the story of how a covenant-making and promise-keeping God took on full human personhood in Jesus Christ in order to reconcile this alienated and wrecked world to the eternally gracious Father.

...That is not to say that evangelical Christians will never have theologically informed moral and practical views of dating and romance, business dealings, emotions, gender identities and relations, and parenting. They may and will.

But the significance and content of all such views will be defined completely in terms of thinking about them in the view of larger facts of Jesus Christ and the gospel—not primarily by gathering and arranging pieces of scriptural text that seem to be relevant to such topics in order to pinpoint the ‘biblical view’ on them.

Perhaps by making the Bible provide us specific, definite answers to such matters we are forcing the Bible to be something quite other than what it intends to be: a witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel of salvation from sin.”⁶(p. 112)

5. Whatever view or model we have of the Scriptures must hold this purpose clearly at its centre

⁵ Gary Deddo, Scripture: God’s Gift, Part 3, <http://update.gci.org/2013/05/scripture-gods-gift-part-3/>

⁶ Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*, Brzos Press, 2011, p. 110-112.

- a) It must encapsulate Scriptures role as leading us to a knowledge of God, and “the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus.”
 - b) The Scriptures are inspired to guide and equip us to grow in Jesus through the Spirit to be the people God created us to be, in his image
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CONCLUSION:

C. SO WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF OUR BELIEFS?

1. God himself

- a) And he has revealed himself, his being, his ways, his love and his purpose for us and all of creation through sending his son into the world

2. Jesus, God incarnate, born of Mary, became one of us, and came to forgive us, to rescue and restore us, to bring us to be at one with God

3. Jesus called us to be one with the Father in him, through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives

4. He didn't call us to focus on the Bible like a book of rules and laws,

- a) Or to use it like lawyers to justify our views and condemn others
- b) Focusing inwards and backwards, and seeking to defend and criticize and divide and separate

D. JESUS IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

1. The way to salvation, to life at one with the Triune God

2. The Scriptures point to him, the real and authoritative, living Word of God, the source of all truth and salvation

E. RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON WHETHER WE ARE RIGHT AND OTHERS ARE WRONG ON EMOTIVE ISSUES

1. Or fearing or battling the opinions of others we don't agree with, let us move forwards positively, in faith, hope and love

2. Let us focus upwards on Jesus, and trust him to be the Lord and defender of his people, and his church and his kingdom

a) Let us be focused on a real and living relationship with our Father through Jesus the living Word of God

b) Trusting God to keep his own household in order, rather than acting as if it will all fall apart if we don't fix or defend it

3. Studying the written word to learn more about Jesus, the living word, and the new life he has given us in himself

a) And focusing on being part of God's caring kingdom, reaching out in love and grace to the broken and needy of the world

F. PRAYER