

What should be our approach To God's Word, the Holy Christian Bible?

It is very difficult for some to dispassionately examine new evidence presented to us.

We all tend to imagine that a thing is true simply because we fervently believe it.

But genuine faith rests on sufficiency of evidence.

Romans 10:8-17 [New Living Translation] *“Salvation that comes from trusting Christ, which is the message we preach, is already within easy reach. In fact, the Scriptures say, ‘The message is close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart.’ For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, ‘Anyone who believes in him will not be disappointed.’ Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They all have the same Lord, who generously gives his riches to all who ask for them. For ‘Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ **Yet faith comes from listening to this message of good news, the Good News about Christ.**”*

Genuine faith never fears to re-examine the facts.

To believe on the basis of insufficient evidence is not faith but folly.

To doubt in the face of sufficient evidence is not prudence but hardness of heart.

William Barclay expresses my feeling in “A Spiritual Autobiography”:

“In teaching my first desire has always been to interest the listener; if I don't interest him, he will soon stop being a listener. But I have never been eager that he should think as I think, but only that he should think. I hope that he will agree with me, but, if he does not, I shall be well content if he will examine his own beliefs in the light of what I say. The only kind of person who really ‘offends’ me, to use Somerset Maugham's word, is the person with the shut mind who refuses even to think about what is said to him, the person who deliberately misunderstands, the person who substitutes parrot cries for thought, and, worst of all, the person who criticises a writer without ever having read a word of his books. I hope that I have always taught in order to stimulate and to awaken, and never to indoctrinate and stifle.

Come, let us reason together.”

Two basic rules should govern our study of God's Word, the Christian Bible.

1 The New Testament must always interpret the Old Testament

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 [NIV] *“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was **not** pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as*

they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did, and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel. **These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.** So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”

2 The New Testament Epistles must interpret the Gospels

John 14:15-18 [NIV] “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

What would be the major tasks of the Holy Spirit?

John 16:5-14 [NIV] “Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, **he will guide you into all truth.** He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”

One of these tasks is to “guide us into all truth”.

These two principles mean we should read The Bible in light of the Gospel Message and judge every matter by it.

Whatever is out of harmony with the Gospel Message is to be rejected, even if it comes buttressed with numerous “proof” texts.

All doctrinal questions should be determined in the light of the Gospel Message brought by Jesus Christ.

The New Testament must interpret the Old Testament because the Old Testament is the preliminary and fragmented revelation.

Hebrews 1:1-3 [Amplified Bible] “In many separate revelations, each of which set forth a portion of the truth, and in different ways God spoke of old to our forefathers in and by the prophets. But in the last of these days He has spoken to us in [the person of a Son, Whom He appointed heir and lawful Owner of all things, also by and through Whom He created the worlds and the reaches of space and the ages of time. That is, He made, produced, built, operated and arranged them in order. He is the sole expression of the glory of God, the light-being, the out-raying of the divine, and He is the perfect imprint and very image of God’s nature...”

Jesus Christ is the sole expression of God.

John 14:6-14 [New Living Translation] “Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him!” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Jesus replied, “Philip, don’t you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see him? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I

say are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of what you have seen me do. "The truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father. Yes, ask anything in my name, and I will do it!"

We can only know God through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, God's Son.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 [New Living Translation] *"What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun! All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!"*

The coming of Christ transformed the apostles understanding of the Old Testament.

It should transform our understanding of the Old Testament as well.

We must not come to the New Testament from the Old, but our understanding of the Old Testament from the New Testament.

Not only must the New Testament interpret the Old Testament, but the Epistles must interpret the Gospel Message.

After the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the New Testament Epistles systematically explained the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection.

Some of Christ's sayings recorded in the gospels remain rather puzzling without the clarifying light of the epistles, they could easily be misunderstood.

The final court of appeal must be the New Testament epistles.

2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-5 [New Living Translation] *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do. And so I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favourable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at bringing others to Christ. Complete the ministry God has given you."*