

Week 3- Foundation-Grounded in Scripture

Summary

As we strive to be an intentional congregation we want to affirm our commitment to remain grounded in Scripture. The Scriptures of both the Old Testament and the New Testament are inspired writings and provide the authoritative revelation of God, his gift of salvation, his church and his will for all people. Everything we do as Christians and as a church must have its' foundation in the Scriptures. The challenge for all believers is to diligently study the Scriptures to grow in knowledge and understanding of God's will.

Week 3 – Grounded in Scripture

There is a basic two step model for reading and applying the Scriptures. Step one is to understand what the writings meant in their original setting. Step two is to reflect on how that original message applies to our contemporary lives. There may only be two steps in the model, but each of them can be very challenging. We believe that both steps can be accomplished relying upon the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the spirit filled community. We want to take a prayerful and rational approach to the Scriptures. Prayerful because we want to be guided by God in our understanding by allowing the Holy Spirit to help us understand the text. Rational means we want to use logic and the available tools and methods to delve into the Scriptures. (see Acts 6:1f)

According to the Scriptures

First, they relied upon the Old Testament scriptures. In the Old Testament scriptures they found the support and confirmation that Jesus life, death, and resurrection was “according to Scripture” (1 Cor 15:1f). In the Old Testament they also found reliable teachings in the law on the topic of moral behavior. Not that they followed the law as a demonstration of their righteousness, but they believed the law was a “good and holy” definition of sin (Rom 7) that served as a supervisor until Christ. But the Law did not empower a person to live up to the definition it contained; only the Spirit empowers followers of Christ to live righteous and holy lives (Rom 8). The Old Testament was used by the early church in several ways:

- ❖ Paul, Apollos and others used the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the Christ and the listeners confirmed the message by using the Scriptures as well (Acts 17:10f, 18:24f, 1 Cor 15:1f)
- ❖ Paul instructs Timothy to preach, teach, and correct from the Old Testament for “training in righteousness” to prepare people for “every good work” (2 Tim 3:16f)
- ❖ Jesus rebuked the Jews for blindly following the Scriptures without recognizing the person they referred to. (John 5)
- ❖ By establishing that salvation and hope of eternal life was through Jesus alone, the early church was able to refute false teachings that also used the Scriptures. These false teachings seem to have emphasized other forms of attaining to eternal life including: reliance upon genealogies (1 Tim 1:4), myths derived from the Old Testament (1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4; Titus 1:14), ascetic and harsh practices (1 Cor 7; 1 Tim 1:8f; 4:3; 5:1f), leaders who possess special mystery knowledge (1 Cor 3; 1 Tim 4:13).
- ❖ False teachings are often taken from the Scriptures or at least involve the Scriptures (“Jewish myths”) and that is why Paul instructs Timothy to “correctly handle the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Thus it is not enough to be Scriptural, but we must understand how to use Scripture correctly....that salvation and sanctification are through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Endless Chain of Truth

The second means that Paul used to “certify” the truth was to rely upon an endless chain of trustworthy people who lived and taught the gospel.

- ❖ In Galatians, Paul emphasizes that the gospel he preached to the Gentiles was a direct revelation for Christ. Paul uses his “change of life” as the proof that what he was teaching was the truth
- ❖ When Paul leaves Timothy in Ephesus he reminds Timothy that Timothy was entrusted with the message of the gospel by the “laying on of hands” (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). This direct link of authority traces from Timothy back to Christ, through Paul.
- ❖ Paul then instructs Timothy and Titus to “appoint elders” who have two basic qualifications; they demonstrated moral conduct in their lives and they adhered to Paul’s teaching (Titus 1:9). One primary role of elders was to refute false teachers (Acts 20:16f).
- ❖ Paul also instructs Timothy to entrust “reliable men” with the message as teachers in the church (2 Tim 2:2)
- ❖ A similar chain of reliable teaching is depicted in Eph 4:11f where Paul lists the chain of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers....who have the role of “preparing God’s people for works of service” and bringing them to be “mature” and able to resist “every wind of teaching.”
- ❖ This “instructional” role was also given to the congregation as a whole (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16)

Rightly Handling the Word

The real question for us as a church is how will we be guided by the Bible? Paul argues forcefully in the letter to the Galatians that the Christian faith is fundamentally different from the covenant with Moses (Gal 4:8f). The covenant with Moses involved a written, codified definition of righteousness; the Law. Righteousness, living a good and acceptable life, is often attempted on the basis of lists and laws. The Law of Moses was a God given definition of righteousness, it showed the kind of people God wanted the Israelites to be and the kind of things they should do. According to Matthew 5, the fulfillment of the law is the inner transformation of the followers. Paul argues in Romans that the law was good and perfect, but it did not accomplish the goal of transforming the followers because the followers lacked the power to overcome the desires of the flesh (Rom 6-8). Here is where Paul's argument in Galatians gets interesting. According to Paul, even the pagans used to pursue the ideal of righteousness on the basis of having laws. As Paul argues against the continuation of the Law of Moses, he also says that righteousness is no long a matter of following law, either pagan laws or even THE Law. This is most visible in Gal 4:8f where Paul says, "formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?" Here Paul is speaking to the Gentiles (those who formerly did not know God) and he says that they used to live by "miserable principles" and now they are returning to "miserable principles" in the form of Jewish holidays and feasts. In this one statement Paul equates the Law of Moses as the same type of approach to proper living as the principles used by pagan religions. Righteousness, proper living and practice, is not accomplished by having "laws" to restrain the desires of the flesh. Instead, under Christ, righteousness relies upon the Spirit instead of law or laws because the Spirit is what opposes the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16f). In Romans, Paul says that it is the Spirit that empowers Christians to overcome sin in their lives, so long as they "set their minds" on the Spirit (Rom 8).

This is a foundational understanding for our interpretation of Scripture. When we set out to understand Scripture to determine what is "proper" we must be careful to avoid deriving a new law or law-like definition of what is "righteous" or proper.

Studying the Scriptures

There are several important considerations involved in coming to an understanding of what the Scriptures meant in their original settings.

- ❖ **Nature of Inspiration** - When we say that the Bible is inspired we mean that God, through the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of what was written. The involvement of the Holy Spirit does not obliterate the presence of human writers. Each author writes in their own style, using their own vocabulary, and employed various techniques to accomplish their purpose for writing.
- ❖ **Context** - All of the writings of the Bible were written on specific occasions by specific authors who had a specific purpose for their writing. One of the most important aspects of understanding the Scriptures is to understand the cultural context of the writing. The context helps to determine the meaning of words, the cultural references, the illustrations, the tenor and tone and how to apply the teachings.
- ❖ **Genre** - The Bible is a collection of writings of many different types. Different kinds of writings use language in different ways and the usage of language is not intended to be literal. When we read a poem we understand that the author is using language in a different way than the history writer. Parables are different than songs. (e.g. When the Ps 98:8 says for the rivers to clap their hands we don't take that literally)
- ❖ **Structure** - When trying to understand the meaning of a Scripture we need to make sure we understand the individual statement AND how that statement fits into the context and the larger flow of the discussion the author has been following. There is a vast difference between 1 Cor 3:16 and 1 Cor 6:19 although they both appear to say the same or similar things.
- ❖ **Grammar** - Unless you are reading the Bible in Greek or Hebrew, the sentences you read will be the result of a translators understanding of the text. Sometimes there are language structures in Greek that simply do not exist in English and so to convey a similar idea the English translation will have a different sentence structure. Sometimes the grammar of the original is ambiguous allowing for more than one possible sentence structure and meaning. Some examples include: Rom 1:17, 3:21f – Righteousness of God vs. Righteousness from God. 2 Tim 3:16 – can be rendered "All God inspired writings" or "all writings are God inspired" the grammar is open
- ❖ **Vocabulary** - Words carry meaning, but the meaning of words is not precise so that a word always means the same thing in every usage. Words have a range of meaning and the precise usage by the author in the context must always be used to determine what the author actually means by the term. Different authors use the same word in different ways. That is why you must be careful when using a concordance to study the Bible because a concordance assumes that words mean the same things in different settings.