



## The Bible in the Postmodern Age

We are in what is called the Postmodern Age. It is important for us as Christians to be aware of the philosophical outlook of those among whom we live and whose lives impact upon us within the church. In order to relevantly communicate the Gospel in our day, we must be aware of the way people think.

What are the distinctives of Postmodernism? What is different about our age from that of our fathers? The Modernists had great faith in reason and in science as able to provide all the answers. Postmodernists are disillusioned with regard to science's ability to answer the deepest questions. What is truth? Postmodernists argue that there is no such thing as objective truth. Rather everyone must come to his own conclusion. Your understanding is right for you and my understanding is right for me. Everyone does that which is right in his own eyes (compare Judges 21:25). Everyone is right. I decide what is right for me. There is no absolute truth. That means that I am happy in my beliefs and you are free to be happy in yours. The Postmodernist says I must not criticize others but accept their views as right for them even if these views are the opposite of mine.

### **Every Religion Right?**

So, on the basis of Postmodernism, every religion is right. One is a Roman Catholic, another is a Charismatic, another is a conservative Presbyterian and yet another is against formal religion and worships on his own at home. Even the atheist is justified in his position. Similarly, according to Postmodernism, every lifestyle is right. One follows a traditional Christian lifestyle and lives with his spouse and is faithful to that spouse all his life. Another lives with a partner unmarried and later moves on to another partner. Another practises homosexuality. What right, they ask, have you to criticize others? If someone is caring and loving then surely that is all that matters? Toleration is everything. The Postmodernist says that you must not try to force your views on others.

One of the advantages we have in this postmodern world is, on one level, more tolerance for all religions and lifestyles. You can believe what you like and live the way you want. No one will mock, criticize or persecute you. One follows Christ, another Islam, another Buddha, and someone else invents his own new religion — that is all fine. All religions are different pathways up the mountain to God. You go your way and I will go mine. Sadly this means we end up with no objective religious truth.

### **True Christianity is Exclusive**

True Christianity is totally different to this Postmodernism. It cuts across every religion and every personal opinion. It says that there is truth — absolute truth, and that absolute truth is to be found in the Bible alone. There is only one way of salvation and that is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the great Prophet and Teacher and He said: *'He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day'* (Jn 12:48). Every man and woman is wrong and all are going to hell apart from those who believe and follow the Bible. Jesus stated quite categorically, *'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me'* (Jn 14:6). Every other religion leads to a lost eternity. Every form of the Christian religion apart from that which teaches faith in Christ alone as the only way of salvation also leads to eternal destruction.

So Christianity and Postmodernism are against one another. Christianity demands repentance from every other outlook and philosophy. The natural man, the unconverted man, is always wrong in his thinking. The mind of fallen man is defective: *'Ye must be born again'* (Jn 3:7). *'The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God ... The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain'* (1 Cor 3:19-20). *'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'* (1 Cor 2:14). The Bible is the truth — the absolute truth — as true as the laws of science. It calls everyone to turn from Modernism and Postmodernism and every other unbiblical way of thinking and submit to God and His Word.

## **The Bible's Teaching about Itself**

With regard to every other doctrine we look to Scripture to see what it teaches. For example we look to the Bible for the right understanding of Justification or the Atonement. So we must look to the Bible to see what it teaches about itself.

### **Inspiration**

Paul writes to Timothy: *'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God'* (2 Tim 3:16). The word 'inspiration' is sometimes misunderstood. It is treated as if it meant something like a poet being inspired to write a poem. The word used in the Greek is *'theopneustos'* which means 'God breathed'. The idea is not that something is breathed into the Scripture but that the Scripture itself is breathed out by God. It is His breath and His word. This quality belongs not just to part of it but to 'all Scripture'.

The first reference of this passage is of course to the Old Testament which was the Scripture of the day. But Peter writes: *'The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction'* (2 Pet 3:15-16). Here Peter refers to the epistles of Paul. He finds difficulty understanding all that Paul writes and speaks of heretics who twist Paul's words in just the same way as they do other parts of Scripture, finding in them weird and wonderful false doctrines to lead themselves and others astray and eventually to Hell. It is interesting to note that here Paul's writings are called Scriptures. These New Testament writings are thus placed on the same level as the accepted Old Testament Scriptures of that day.

Earlier in his second Epistle, Peter writes of the way in which Scripture was written: *'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost'* (2 Pet 1:20-21). The prophets and other holy men who wrote the Bible were not presenting their own ideas or their own views about God. It was not their private interpretations. Rather they were moved and carried along by the Holy Spirit. They were directed in what they wrote by the Spirit. It was because of this operation of the Holy Spirit upon them that the Bible can rightly be described as God-breathed. Scripture is not man's reflections on God but God's revelation of essential truths to man.

The amazing thing about inspiration is that each writer writes with his own distinctive background, vocabulary and style, but at the same time the end product is the word of God. Because it is God's word it is inerrant. The writer is not simply writing down like an amanuensis the words that God speaks to him. We do not believe in a dictation theory of inspiration. Rather all is processed through the mind of the author but the Spirit ensures that what is written is infallible.

### **Authority**

Since Scripture is God-breathed it is rightly to be equated with God Himself. It has all the authority of God behind it. Ministers and churches only have authority as they act or speak in accord with

the Bible. God rules the world and the church. The means He uses for conveying His will to His subjects is the Scriptures. The terms, 'Scripture says', 'It says' 'It is written' and 'God says', are used interchangeably in the New Testament when quoting the Old Testament. This makes plain that what Scripture says, God says. Jesus stated, '*The Scripture cannot be broken*' (John 10:35). The Bible is infallible and inerrant. A quotation from the Scripture settles disputes. God has spoken and that concludes the matter.

God does not make mistakes and whatever He writes is without mistake or error. Some liberal teachers who do not like Scripture's doctrine of inspiration claim that there are errors and contradictions in the Bible. However when you ask them to point out the errors they are not so ready. There are a few apparent contradictions in Scripture but they are only apparent. Not one part of Scripture really contradicts another. There is a reasonable explanation for every apparent contradiction and a good evangelical commentary will provide an explanation.

Because all Scripture is the Word of God it comes to us with the authority of God. He has spoken and we must believe and obey. Jesus states: '*Thy word is truth*' (Jn 17:17).

## **Canon**

It is necessary to say a few words on Canon. The Canon is simply the list of books which rightly belong to the Bible. We accept only the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. The Old Testament books were accepted by the Jews and are quoted extensively in the New Testament. The New Testament books were similarly accepted by the New Testament church. The Apocrypha which consists of twelve books written in the inter-testamental period was accepted by the Roman Catholic Council of Trent (Sixteenth Century) but was rejected by the Reformers. They were not accepted by the Jews as being on the same level as Scripture. They are not quoted in the New Testament and so are not to be given the authority which the New Testament authors afford to the Old Testament.

Why are some books chosen as belonging to the Bible and not others? Simply on the basis of inspiration. We do not at the end of the day depend on Jewish or church councils. Rather the question we must ask with regard to any book is, Is it inspired? If it is inspired it should be in the Canon but not otherwise. And how do we know which books are inspired? It is by the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit. The Spirit witnesses with our Spirit that we are the children of God (Rom 8:16). In the same way He assures us that certain books belong to the Bible and so are His Word.

## **Conclusion**

The Bible is fundamental to Christianity. There are some churches which depend more on tradition e.g. the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. But even with them, their starting point has originally been the Bible and then they have moved on from there with their evolving traditions. Yet even these churches like to show how their beliefs and practices are in some way related to the teaching of the Scriptures. Other churches are more rationalistic. They are regarded as liberal and depend on human reason. Disregarding the fallenness of human reason they try to work out what parts of the Scriptures are acceptable to human reason. Some of the Bible they dismiss as myth — time-bound and primitive. Miracles, for example, are regarded as impossible and belonging to a pre-scientific age and so requiring to be re-interpreted for today's world. They move with fashions and what is generally acceptable in contemporary society. They, as it were, use scissors to remove unacceptable parts from the Scriptures. Yet they too must start with the Bible because we have no other sourcebook for knowledge of God and Christ and salvation but the Bible.

We would have no Christianity without the Bible. The only way we can get to know about God is by His revealing Himself to us. Man by searching cannot find God (Job 11:7). The Bible is God's special revelation to us. It reveals what we are to believe and how we are to live. There is, of course, what is called general revelation outside of the Bible. The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1ff). Creation around us reveals to us the Creator: '*For the invisible things of Him*

*from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse*' (Rom 1:20). Further, all human beings have a conscience. When God created us He placed within us a sense of Himself. Atheists argue vehemently against God's existence. Why? Richard Dawkins, the renowned atheist, gets very angry as he argues against those who believe in God's existence. Why? Because he has a conscience and is suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18), and he does not find it easy to do that. His conscience is condemning his atheism.

From nature we learn about the power and godhead of God. We are made aware that He is Creator and that we are answerable to Him at the end of the day. But the only way we can know the Gospel of Jesus Christ is by special revelation. *'How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?'* (Rom 10:14). *'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe'* (1 Cor 1:21). Also even with regard to those things revealed by general revelation we need the Bible to give us clarity and a full, proper understanding. The Scriptures are vital to Christianity.

In the Bible we have a great treasure which humanity needs. We must unashamedly, fearlessly and fervently communicate this message. Loving our fellowmen we cannot leave them in the darkness of Postmodernism. We must call to Postmodern man as Jesus did to the people of the day in which He lived: *'Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'* (Mt 4:17).

William Macleod

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