

Study 8. We love listening to God (doctrine of Scripture)

Big idea: Bible reading is far from a dry intellectual experience – only by listening to God can we truly know him.

Opening question: Do you remember the first time you ever picked up a Bible? What was it like?

Read today's passage, 2 Timothy 3:1 to 4:5.

Share the reading by taking a paragraph each at a time (but give people the opportunity to pass if they don't feel comfortable reading).

Any words or phrases that people didn't understand?

We've all had bad relationships and good relationships. What's one thing people can do to improve any relationship?

Write the answers on a sheet of paper or whiteboard.

Hopefully the answers will include something to do with communication - listening to the other person. That's the topic for today's study - we know God by listening to what he says to us in the Bible.

Observation and Interpretation

Read again 2 Timothy 3:1-9

- Paul mentions lots of bad things which the "last days" (i.e. the time after Jesus and before judgment day) will bring. He particularly mentions "teachers who oppose the truth" (v8). What truth does Paul mean?
- In this day and age, why does it matter whether what we think about God is true or not?

Read again 2 Timothy 3:10-15

- According to Paul, how do you avoid being deceived?
- What does Holy Scripture mean here?

Paul is probably thinking of "Scripture" primarily as "the Old Testament", but he would probably also include in this category the writings about Jesus which come via his chosen apostles and carry all the authority that implies. See also 2 Peter 3:16.

Read again 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- “God breathed” is a weird phrase. What is Paul getting at here?
- Is the Bible written by humans or by God? (Hint: 2 Peter 1:21 connects to the role of the Holy Spirit)
- What is the goal of reading the Bible? What do you think is the difference between teaching, rebuking and correcting?

Christians believe that all Scripture is from God. God’s Holy Spirit has a unique role in bringing Scripture about. Sometimes this will involve God giving the writers of Scripture the exact words, sometimes it will be a vision, or sometimes it will be simply an insight from God on how to interpret current human affairs and politics.

People often think that the process of compiling the Bible (what theologians call the “canon”, the list of books we consider Scripture) *gives* authority to the books of the Bible - as if the church decides what the word of God is. This is around the wrong way. These books have authority *because they are from God*. They were authoritative before they were included in the Bible, and they would have been authoritative even if every human alive ignored them. (It might be better to say that the Bible is a collection of authoritative books, rather than an authoritative collection of books.)

We trust the New Testament books because they bring the message about Jesus to us via trustworthy people chosen by Jesus for the task (the apostles). As Christians, we trust the Old Testament books not least because Jesus treated them up as authoritative (Matt 5:17, Luke 24:44).

Further reading: Deut 29:29, 2 Peter 1:19-21, John 16:13, Matthew 5:8, Ps 119:18, 1Cor 12:12.

Implications

Try to keep in mind where people are at in their Christian walk. The last thing we want is to lay guilt on them.

What's the benefit in reading the Bible on your own?

Why is it sometimes hard to read the Bible?

What tips have you found worked well for encouraging you to listen to God regularly?

- Morning routine with coffee and a Bible
- Praying in light of a passage
- Bible reading plans (i.e. read the Bible in a year... just make sure you don't try to catch up if you miss a day or you'll get really depressed quickly!)
<http://www.biblegateway.com/reading-plans/old-new-testament/today?version=NIV>
- Bible reading guides e.g. <http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/growth/the-daily-reading-bible-volume-1>

The invention of the printing press has made it so much easier to access the Scriptures. But even before then, people would meditate on the word of God, even if that meant memorising it! (See Psalm 1:2, 77:12)

Prayer ideas

Try praying using the words of some passages of Scripture, such as Revelation 15:3-4, or Colossians 3:16-17.