

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

9244 Five Forks Road

Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612

Tel: (717) 762-2991

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SUBJECT: The Bible

Series: Focusing our Faith

THEME: Believing the Bible

SERMON: "Believing the Bible"

Introduction

Good morning. Welcome to Five Forks. We are in the second week of a new series we have called: Focusing our Faith. Where we are spending some time talking about some of the most important things to us as a church. Some have called them core values – the things that help to shape and mold us, and help us prioritize what we do, who we are as the church that meets at Five Forks.

I don't know of any Christian church that says, "We are NOT a Bible believing church." Being called a **Bible believing church** seems to be one of the litmus tests people use to determine if a church is to be considered good or not. So it is an important core value for churches. Having said that, I also know the statement, "Bible Believing Church" means different things for different people. And so I want to talk with us this morning about how we at Five Forks and the Brethren in Christ think about and interact with the Bible.

I hope we will leave here this morning with a renewed interest and curiosity in the bible. I hope it will cause us to spend significant quality, exciting time around the Bible as part of our life routines.

As my mother lay dying of cancer I was looking for ways to be with her. I asked her if I could read to her, because I knew she loved reading. She said, yes. I suggested some books that I know she loved. And to each suggestion she replied, "No." Then she said, "just read to me from the Bible."

As we approach the end of life we often think about what is precious to us. What I was

reminded of that day, was that the Bible was precious to my mother. I think I knew that already because I often found her reading her Bible. Early in the morning, late at night, sitting in church when she couldn't understand the sermon that was being preached in a language she hardly understood. She was often reading her bible, and would talk to us about what she read.

On more than a few occasions, I was quoted to from the Bible, when I needed to be rebuked, corrected, trained or taught. As kids we knew what the bible said about fighting with your brother, taking something that didn't belong to you. But we also knew what it said about how much we were loved by the God who made us, and the Son who died on a cross for us. How God was with us when we were afraid in the middle of one of those African thunder storms. My mother made the words of the bible, central to our very lives – helping us read it, memorize it, figure out what it meant. We even sang songs about it and the stories in it.

I noted later in life that my mother's life was shaped and prioritized by what she read in the Bible. I also came to realize that her Bible was precious to her because it was one of the places where she felt closest to her precious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It was as she immersed herself in the Scriptures, discussed and wrestled and debated with others what she read about, that she came to know and love and follow Jesus. For my mother, Jesus was, in the ink and on the pages of what may have looked to others like just another book, Jesus was revealed to her as a living person, a close friend, her Savior. So as she lay dying she said to me, "Ray, read to me from the Bible."

When we say we believe the Bible, what do WE mean? That is what we want to consider this morning. This is how we express it as Brethren in Christ.

“We value the Bible as God’s authoritative word, study it together, and build our lives around its truth.”

3 things we will consider – The Bible as God's authoritative word, studying it together, and building our lives around its truth.

We say we **value** the Bible. How much we value it will become apparent as we flesh out what we mean by the rest of the statement. So lets begin.

God's Authoritative Word

We consider the Bible to consist of 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. Some others include other books in their Bible, like the books of the Apocrypha. We do not. Although that does not mean we cannot read and even learn from those other books. We just do not consider them to have the same level of authority.

What do we mean by authority? Sarah Little observes:

In all of us, **“There is a genuine longing for some form or frame of reference and authority, some common history and language and source of meaning...”**

In other words, everyone longs for some trusted authority to explain life and the world we live in. It is like we all wonder, “Okay who’s calling the shots. Who decides? Who can make sense of all of this for us?” Those types of questions are particularly true when people come up against a crisis – a child is abducted, your house burns down, your brother gets cancer. Your house is foreclosed on. We want to know – is there anyone who can help us get through this? Who is in ultimate control and authority?

I remember when Pres. **Ronald Reagan** was shot in 1981. He was in surgery and no one was sure whether he would live or die. Apparently there was some chaos at the White House over who was in charge. Who was calling the shots? **Alexander Haig**, the Secretary of State said famously, **“I am in charge here.”** Now that is not how our Constitution is worded. And I remember the debate over what he said. While some were aghast he would say that. Others noted there was also some comfort, and a calming effect for the nation, in the fact that someone had stepped forward to be in charge, in control, in authority.

See as humans we seem to have a need to know that someone is in charge. Someone bigger than us. Someone with final authority. Someone who knows the truth. We hope there is someone who can explain to us, what is really going on.

At Five Forks we are saying **the Bible, as God’s Word to us in written form, is that authority.** It is that voice that speaks to our situation. Making sense of life for us.

So we value the Bible as God's authoritative word. We should ask, "What gives the Bible this authority?" Why the bible over some other document?

We believe that God has **revealed himself** to people and the bible is part of that revelation. God wants to be known by us and have a relationship with us. One of the most important ways, we believe God did that, is, God inspired some people to eventually write down God's message to the world. These people wrote in their own language, their own style, with their historical and cultural setting, and understanding. And God by the Holy Spirit guided what they wrote.

This is how we understand **II Timothy 3:16**

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 corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

Let me say a little more about the word "inspired?"

One of the exercises we had to do in school as we were learning to read and write and understand, was we had **dictation tests**. The teacher would read something to us and we would have to write down what we thought the teacher had said so that it would capture the correct meaning of her words. What was of utmost importance was how we added the punctuation. Because the wrong punctuation could give the wrong meaning.

Examples: **"I'm sorry I love you."** Or **"I'm sorry, I love you."**

"Let's eat grandpa." Or **"Let's eat, grandpa."**

So when I was younger I often pictured God sitting somewhere in front of the class of Moses, all the prophets and the disciples and the apostle Paul, dictating what he wanted written down in the Bible. Did God dictate the Bible to each writer? Maybe God dictated some, but all of it? I don't think so. But you know, there is no punctuation or even vowels in ancient Hebrew – the language of most of the Old Testament. And even if God did dictate to the writers, we don't have any of those original manuscripts or tablets the words were written on.

And this is why we have **different translations** and some of the different interpretations of the bible and what we think God wanted to communicate to us. So to say, “Just read the bible and do what it says,” is a bit simplistic.

However, we believe because of the way Holy Spirit guided or directed the writing, the preservation and even the translation of God’s message, we believe that what we have today is a **reliable, and trustworthy account** of God’s message to people.

So when I pick up my Bible and read, I believe I have a reliable and accurate account of what God wants me to know about God, about Jesus, about Holy Spirit, about me and about the world around me. I believe I can understand God’s purposes. I believe I can gain insight into God’s plan. This is why we value it and give it the authority we do.

I have learned **not** to trust a lot of the things I read, but I do trust the Bible. We trust it because we consider it God’s revelation to us, and given and preserved in a way that makes it reliable and authoritative for us.

Another important aspect of believing the Bible is “**Understanding God’s message to us.**” If you have ever studied a foreign language in school, you hear and read a sentence and you have to translate the sentence or interpret it so that you can understand it. For example if I say to you, “Bantu Boonse, Amunyamuke kuimba, Iwiimbo 25.”

Most of you have no clue what I said – because it was a different language. In Zambia the people in church would’ve understood and stood up to sing song number 25.

Well, God’s message to us was given in languages most of us do not know, Greek Hebrew, Aramaic. Fortunately many have studied those languages and have interpreted them or translated them into English which most of us do understand.

So when we talk about the Bible let us understand that we have a translation of God’s message that we can understand. But even here there is also the issue of understanding what God intends us to hear and understand.

For example the psalmist writes in **Psalm 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.**

How are you going to just read that and do what it says? You can't take that verse literally – in the sense that you take a bible, cut your chest open and put it in your heart – like you might hide a bible under your coat. But we can learn what the author's intended purpose was, and then act on what we learn as we study that verse in the bible.

Another example. Jesus said, "**Love God and love your neighbor.**" The people listening to Jesus thought they knew what he meant until he started telling a story about one of their enemies, a **Samaritan**, and how that Samaritan acted towards a Jew. That Samaritan demonstrated Jesus' understanding of 'neighbor.' That day the people gained a new understanding of a simple message from God, "love your neighbor."

In another place in the Bible we read that "**God is love.**"

I John 4:8 "Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

What does God mean by that statement? John, the inspired writer of this portion of the Bible has told us more.

I John 3:16 "We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters."

The point I'm trying to make is that when we, Brethren in Christ, say we value the Bible as God's authoritative word, it is important to us that we **not only read it** and maybe even **memorize it** but that we **study it** and **interpret it** so that we get to know what it means.

We also recognize that we all read God's word through a certain **lens**. By that I mean we read it in a way that is affected by who we are our **history** our **culture** our **background** and that affects what we think we see or know when we read God's word.

If I say to you, "**Jesus is the bread of life.**" You will get a picture in your mind of bread and how bread impacts your life.

Some of you, like me, love bread and eat it almost whenever you can. There others of you that don't eat bread. And so how you think about Jesus when you hear that Jesus is the bread of life is affected by **"The lens"** that you use as you read and understand that statement in the Bible.

So as we talk about trying to understand the Bible because we value it, we believe it is important to understand it **through the "lens of Jesus,"** who we believe Him to be, and how Jesus lived his life.

We believe **Jesus is central to understanding the Bible.** This is why we pay so much attention to the Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – where we find the most direct description of Jesus teaching and his life.

We even see and understand the Old Testament, as part of the story God is telling which points us to Jesus, who the best and most complete revelation of God to us. As we read the O.T. we ask, how is this pointing us to Jesus?

We read and understand Paul's words and instructions through the lens of how Jesus lived his life.

In the book of Acts when Paul says "We must help the weak," we are reminded of how Jesus always seemed to stick up for and lift up the weak. And so on.

If you are around us for long, you will learn that we spend a lot of time and effort trying to understand what God wants us to know, and do, by giving us the Bible to read.

Perhaps you noticed, I said **"We."**

Another thing we Brethren in Christ believe about the Bible is that **it is best understood and interpreted when we study it together.** Towards the end of Acts chapter 2, we read about the believers meeting daily in the temple and in each other's homes studying what the apostles taught. This type of setting, being together, to gain understanding of the Bible is important to us.

Rather than relying just on a few experts – scholars or even our pastors - to give us all the answers and tell us what to do from the Bible, we believe Holy Spirit, at work in each believer and follower of Jesus, helps us all gain new insights about God and God’s relationship with us. And so gathering together to study God’s word is very important to us. We gather here on Sunday mornings in services in classes, in Bible studies, to collectively study God’s word and understand it together.

There is a more recently developed and now common method of teaching called **“collaboration.”** This is where a group of students study a topic together and work on a project together. What is interesting about this method of study is that a lot more insights, new ideas of problem-solving and so on are achieved when the whole group works together.

We believe this is true as we study the Bible as well. Now you may be thinking, yeah that sounds good, but when am I going to find time to go to another Bible study group? That’s a good question and a real concern.

I know of a group of women, I think they number in the 20s now, who meet for Bible study almost every day. But they meet on the Internet. They all read the same passage and some comments on the passage of Scripture, and then they interact with it and with each other through email messages. They use a bible app called **“YouVersion.”** It allows them to study the bible together, to challenge each other’s thinking, and encourage each other as they learn to follow Jesus together.

If you want to invite some of your friends to set up something like that, **Rochelle Nolt**, rochelle@fbic.org, who set up the group for the ladies, can help you get your group set up and studying together.

One more thing I want to say about what we believe about the Bible is: **We believe we are to build our lives on its truth.** To put it another way, we believe that a proper interpretation of the Bible will ultimately lead to a changed heart and a changed life.

In Hebrews we read:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

I remember as a young boy, the first time I read the book, “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.” The book was so captivating, the descriptions so vivid that the book seemed to come alive as I read. I pictured myself walking through the wardrobe and finding myself at the lamppost in the snow. I could almost feel the cold. And hear the beavers talking to the humans.

The book was written so well the characters seemed to come alive for me.

We believe the words of the Bible, are not just a well-written story that activates a vivid imagination in each of us. So that we are making up some imaginative understanding about a God and this God’s world, and this God’s demands, and this God’s purposes.

When we say the Word of God is alive and active and powerful we think about what John wrote about Jesus in his gospel.

John calls Jesus **“The Word, becoming flesh, and living among us.”**

In some mysterious way, God is in the words of the Bible in such a way that interacting with the Bible and really studying it, and putting the words into practice, (as Jesus says at the end of his sermon on the Mount,) will bring about an actual transformation in the life of anyone who is willing to risk letting God’s words impact them. It is not the ink and the paper, or the app on your phone that is alive. It is the words of God that are alive in Jesus and his life that transform us.

When I told you about my mother earlier, I mentioned that what she read in the bible shaped her life. She expressed her love for Jesus by loving her neighbors. Her passion to tell other people the Good News of the gospel, that eventually led to she and my dad going to Zambia and Zimbabwe as missionaries, grew out of what she felt called to obey, as she read her bible and heard Jesus speaking to her in those words.

The way she parented us kids, the values and priorities she attempted to instill in us, all

came from how she viewed God's Word – the bible.

This living and powerful Word compels us to forgive and love our enemies. It compels us speak words to each other that build up rather than tear down. This living Word compels the Roths to go to Zambia to serve. It compels us to feed the hungry through our Food Pantry. It compels us to sacrifice some of our personal time, put great amounts of energy and time into a week of VBS, as we strive to train our children in the ways of Jesus. And there is so much more.

We can resist what God wants to do in us through God's word. The Bible will then be little more than a library of information, stories, poems and songs and some good advice. But for those who allow God's Word to take root in their lives they find themselves being transformed, different, new creatures if you will.

Such is the power of the words of the Bible. This is what we mean when we say we are a Bible believing church. My prayer is that it will be an accurate description of each of us individually, and all of us collectively.

PRAY