

From the July 4, 2008, Issue

Reading the Bible in Christ

Someone just asked me for help in how to read the Bible so I thought I would share my real life response with you, too!

1. Remember that some things PRECEDE other things.

Basic math precedes Algebra. Algebra precedes Calculus. The Basic Math of scripture is the Person of Jesus Christ, therefore we should learn to always ask “Who Is Jesus Christ?” BEFORE we try to read too much into what the scriptures mean by what they say!

Before the Canon of scripture (the Bible as we know it today) was formally canonized, faithful successors to the Apostles agreed on the basics of interpreting the scriptures. Those basics are represented in the Christian creeds known as the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedon Creed.

The last two creeds, in particular, were agreed upon in councils by the Church of its time to fight wrongheaded thoughts about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit! There were heresies going around that said Jesus Christ was not God, or that he was ONLY God or ONLY a man! People weren’t holding to the Truth that Jesus is Fully God AND Fully Man. This is what Jesus had revealed and what the Apostles were witnesses to!

Lies were also spreading around that the Holy Spirit was not a Person equal to the Father and the Son within the Relationship of the Triune God! (If you are interested in learning more about this subject, an easy to read historical source is *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1*, by Justo Gonzalez.)

Think of these creeds as a pair of glasses. When we cannot see without glasses, we would not even begin to attempt to go through life without them because of the hazard to our very life, health and peace! By analogy, we all have poor spiritual vision (we are all sinners) and yet we find ourselves trying to read and understand the bible (with this admitted blurry vision) without our glasses!

This has produced a hazard of horrible doctrines and theology that are hurting most of us in the present day and snatching away life, health and peace!! (John 8:43 - we misinterpret God’s speech because we don’t hear things through the lens of who Jesus is as THE Word)!

The creeds are our pair of glasses for the scriptures, fashioned so that we don’t misinterpret everything we read. So many heresies and false doctrines arose in the past from misinterpreting the scriptures that the early Church was forced into developing these creeds so that we would avoid heresies and false doctrines about God, creation, and ourselves. It is HIGHLY IMPORTANT to remember that the ideas expressed in these creeds were developed and in place BEFORE the scriptures were put together as a complete package known as “The Holy Bible”! The Holy Spirit made sure that we had our glasses BEFORE most of us had availability to the books as a whole!!!

By centering on Jesus Christ, and His relationship with Creation and the Triune God, we can see, through the guidance of the creeds, that scripture is trying to speak to us about a relationship of distinct persons and things bound up in the Person and Being of Jesus Christ! Knowing Who Jesus

is tells us that, in His Person and Being, all people and things are included in the Triune life of God by nature of his creating us, sustaining us and his becoming human, permanently, and ascending with us to His Father in the Spirit! We live, move and have our being in the very Person and Being of Jesus Christ!!! (Heb 3:1-13, John 1:1-5, Col 1:15-21)

We must not begin any attempt to understand life or words by defining things outside the Person of Jesus Christ! That is to be anathema (or accursed) for a believer! Attempting to interpret scripture without knowing Who the Person of Jesus Christ is in his relationship with the Father, Spirit and creation, is hazardous to our life, health and peace!

2. Remember that everything in existence is included in the Triune Life of God, in Jesus Christ, because Jesus is Fully Man and Fully God, and the One in Whom all created things live, move and have their being (Acts 17:28)!

Jesus is also the Only One Who mediates all things between God and Man (1 Tim 2:5), which is why he is called the God/Man or “God [is] with us” (Matt 1:23)! The life and maintenance of all created things is implicated in Jesus’ Life! (2 Cor 5:14-16)!

3. As you read any scripture, hold to the overarching thought promoted by the creeds: God is One Being in Three Persons and Three Persons in One Being and in relationship with all things in Jesus!

This means that God is a Relationship of Three Distinct Persons Who are so Unified that God can only truly be called One! Mankind, being made in God’s image, is also distinct along with creation WITHIN the Union we have with God and each other in Jesus Christ.

All of scripture is taking this Reality of Life and Relationship in Jesus Christ into account as the main thing (Luke 24:25-27, Col 1:19, 2:9)! This means that, fundamentally, no scripture can EVER be speaking of someone not being in union and included with God in Jesus Christ, no matter how dire or negative it may sound to us!!!! Negative sounding scriptures can ONLY be pointing to the fact that in our personal distinction within creation we each can either embrace the truth of our union with God and all things in Jesus, OR, we can embrace lies about our union with all things in Jesus. Embracing the Truth about our union is good! Embracing lies about our union is bad! (John 3:36)!

4. Now, here is the real zinger for all of us that read the bible: why is our tendency to take the scriptures that look bad and allow them to question and cast doubt on the ones that look good? Seriously?!

To date, no one has ever demanded that I speak more about the goodness of God when I have overemphasized the bad things mentioned in scripture! However, people ALWAYS demand that I speak about the bad side of things when I over-emphasize the good and positive things about God mentioned in scripture! That’s no joke, and believe me, it is NOT funny!!

There is something wrong with that, isn’t there?! Now, some would probably argue we shouldn’t overemphasize any of it, but I disagree! We should overemphasize the good! After all, most believers would say that God is good all the time (meaning NOT bad at all!), and I agree and say it with them (God - as in the Father, Son and Spirit! - is good all the time)!

Actually, because we are sinners, we too easily allow the negative and bad scriptures to cast doubt on the Goodness of God! I would say that most questions I personally get, even from those receiving and believing hope about our inclusion, primarily come from this perspective. Hey, it is my tendency too! But, if God is Good, and ONLY Good (and he is!) – shouldn't we do the exact opposite and allow God's goodness to cast doubt on the things which appear bad and negative in scripture?!

St. Athanasius did when he wrote: “[The Word] has been manifested in a human body for this reason only, out of the love and goodness of His Father, for the salvation of us men.” Interestingly enough, he was known as Athanasius ”Contra Mundum” or ”Athanasius Against the World!” Ha-Ha!! Gotta love it! I'm trying to stand with him in the grace of God!

Athanasius understood, as we are beginning to, that because the starting point of all things is God, and God is GOOD (and nothing less than Good!), then bad is ONLY a twisting and perverting of that which is Good! And, of course, that is just what bad is! As the great Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, said, “There is no such thing as badness, only spoiled goodness!”

~ Tim Brassell