

**General Topics :: Questions on "liberal" Christianity****Questions on "liberal" Christianity - posted by stephenpeter, on: 2005/10/26 5:04**

Yesterday my aunty (who is a Methodist minister) sent me a whole collection of books on the way she sees Christianity, Jesus and the Bible. These include "Reading the Bible again for the first time" by Marcus Borg and "Liberating the Gospels - reading the Bible with Jewish eyes" by John Shelby Spong.

I am quite young in my faith, having been a Christian for around 2 and a half years, and I am having trouble knowing what to make of these books. I was a little worried about reading them to start with, but I decided that I had to at least see where this large group of people were coming from (I have wondered what to make of liberal Christianity in the past). So far, having read the first few chapters of "Reading the Bible again for the first time", it has brought up some questions of my understanding of the Bible.

It talks about "Taking the Bible seriously but not literally", and presents a perspective that the Bible was not written to be taken as truth in a literal sense, but that instead the truth lies deeper in a "historical-metaphorical" view of the Bible.

I don't really know what to make of this, as I know that there are many references in the Bible to false prophets and teachers, and also Jesus said to Nicodemus "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" (John 3:12) which has then been commented on with "Similarly, if the Scriptures can be wrong on testable matters such as geography, history and science, why should it be trusted on matters like the nature of God and life after death, which are not open to empirical testing?".

Which leads me to ask you all how I should be reading these books - not at all, with very much caution or with an open mind? One thing I will be doing is to continue praying as I read - as I realise that this is about more than just an intellectual understanding - this is a life or death spiritual understanding that can only be given by God.

Any wisdom on this would be very much appreciated.

Yours in Christ,

Stephen

PS - sorry if a similar thread has already been started - I am quite new to the site and couldn't find anything in my brief search that answered my questions.

Re: Questions on "liberal" Christianity - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2005/10/26 10:14

Stephenpeter,

From your post I sense you are doubting the wisdom of reading these books because you are asking for either affirmation to read or not to read. Do you not think the Holy Spirit is placing some red flags there for you, telling you to discard them without reading them?

In my walk with the LORD I have learned that when there are red flags it is in my best interest to stop and do what I am hearing in my spirit to do. If I persist in it, I come to grief.

Brother, there is a lot of junk out there printed in books that's not even worth the paper it is printed on. All it is good for is to be used as kindling for a fire and you might consider using these books for that purpose!

Since you are new in the faith, I would encourage you to read/study the Holy Bible as though your life depends on it because it really does. Any other reading you do must be held up to the filter of the scriptures and do NOT allow other writings color your understanding. In fact it may be in your best interest to severely limit your outside reading of theological works because many of these writers are very persuasive and can drag you right into hell. In fact I read very few theological books for this very reason and I am 58 YO! Reading a wide variety of theological books is like eating leftovers with spoiled meat in contrast to a freshly cooked meal made with fresh ingredients - the freshly cooked meal being the Word of God. The difference is that great.

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This is my opinion and the principles I live by and it works. God bless you as walk with the LORD, brother.

ginnyrose

Re: Questions on "liberal" Christianity - posted by Angelssong, on: 2005/10/26 22:19

Stephenpeter:

I have to agree right from the start with the wise and timely advice given to you by Ginnyrose.

I would also like to point out that it's probably a great idea to do what the title of the one book says..."Read the Bible again" and again and again. I've leaned years ago to lay aside foolish books that contain only the wisdom and or ideas of modern day man. People today have given themselves over to the notion that there is no absolute truth. There IS absolute truth and it IS found in God's Word (The Holy Bible). Read it and read it again. The Bible must be taken literally. I encourage you to stick to the Bible.

One wise person once said... "God said it, I believe it and that settles it."

Read it and God Himself will give you insight. In it you will find all answers for life and godliness.

God bless you...Angelssong

Re: Questions on "liberal" Christianity, on: 2005/10/26 23:29

Stephen,

Garbage cans were made to put garbage in. Take the books and put them in there, take the garbage to the curb.

There is nothing wrong with being liberal in God, it becomes wrong when you use that liberty to replace your saviour with something else, usually it's self.

"When in doubt throw it out"

Karl

Re: - posted by dohzman (), on: 2005/10/27 0:00

Excellent post ! :-) Very wise counsel.

Re: Questions on "liberal" Christianity - posted by crsschk (), on: 2005/10/27 0:36

Hi Stephen,

I am so glad you do bring this up to us all here and having been caught up in a lot of spurious things early on I would have a bit of a different slant. Without a doubt the wisdom given is first and foremost yet I would add the same blessed help I received when I was in a state of confusion over who to believe and what to read, sensing that somebody must have a better idea of what all entails this life.

A dear lady pointed me back to the classics and the difference was profound, compared to what is passing for a lot of Christian thought in our day.

Part of why I believe this is helpful is that many of these books have stood the test of time. Truth never changes, it is just ourselves and the generation we are living in that do, in that sense they can never be 'dated' as they speak to our condition more so than what is contemporary at the time.

With that also comes some discernment and found a lot of that both in what I believe the Holy Spirit would have me to grapple with in any given moment of time and just as well there are books that are beyond us depending on our level of understanding, where 'our heads are at.'

Though we can be clever in our reasoning to read only things that 'fit', that are instantly agreeable, there is just as well books that will challenge us and that we shouldn't resist because of that.

Quote:

-----Which leads me to ask you all how I should be reading these books - not at all, with very much caution or with an open mind? One thing I will be doing is to continue praying as I read - as I realize that this is about more than just an intellectual understanding - this is a life or death spiritual understanding that can only be given by God.

The ones you mentioned... would agree with Karl there, and you already have discerned the issues by mentioning the "liberal" aspect, certainly both of these are dangerous heretical teachings.
In this case "Not at all". My own tendencies though faulty are to be more on the skeptical side most of the time (something likely ingrained in me by my father). Would like to think it has developed more into a defensive posture only in approaching things with an open mind, yet always with the backdrop of "is this in scripture, is that really true?" It is not too forceful to state that we must be good Bereans, no matter who it is we are reading.

Personally there are many that I could recommend and many that have been recommended by the saints here that have developed and broadened my own understanding and still continue to. These 'classics' have actually had the opposite effect often times of what I might have suspected, that it might become a feeding on as Max Lucado put it, "pre-digested food" (that has always stayed with me, that line) but it really has caused me to dig more into the scriptures in a variety of ways. Some things you want to check on first hand, others lead to more thought that I think even the authors may never had intended and will send one digging.

It must be biblical, not as building on a book, but in just so far as the Bible is regarded not as a record of doctrines or history to be authoritatively accepted, but as a book of honest testimony to experience. Its supreme value lies just here. For the testimony of another is our chief road to enlargement of life. Most of all, it is through such simple, honest witness that the New Testament puts us face to face with the redeeming personality of Christ. Whatever our theories about the Bible, it is not as compelling authority, but as simple, honest witness that the New Testament brings us emancipating power.

Henry Churchill King

Think this sentiment can carry across our reading as well. So Stephen I hope you do take a look around here, there is just a wealth of resources, articles, sermons, that cut across denominational lines and some battle worn saints that have a great deal of input here in this forum.

Without bogging down with too many recommendations, perhaps a glance through this thread might be of some help:

(https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?viewmodeflat&order0&topic_id3372&forum41&post_id&refreshGo) The top 3 books that have influenced your life (other than the bible)

Note the ones that are often repeated. I think it would be fair to state this one in particular comes up often enough and was for myself a great turning after where I had previously been feeding.

A.W. Tozer "The Knowledge of the Holy"

Believe there is an online version around somewhere.

But as a corollary, this was also a very important book personally:

(<http://calvarychapel.com/library/Tozer-AW/PursuitOfGod/0.htm>) The Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozer

Re: - posted by stephenpeter, on: 2005/10/27 13:51

Thank you all for your responses.

I have realised that although I don't have any intellectual reasoning to back it up, I know that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, and so anything that goes against this is not going to be helpful.

Thank you also to Mike for that final post - I am actually in the middle of reading the Pursuit of God right now, and it is an amazing book. I have also read and listened to books and sermons by guys like Leonard Ravenhill, Art Katz and David Wilkerson who have also led me to think through things for myself rather than just letting them "do the work for me".

One other thing - and this may again have been answered in another post - do you have any advice on reading the Bible

in general. I find myself being able to read it, but it seems to just be reading and I wonder if I'm missing something. I have found that I've begun to notice more things as I read now, and the Holy Spirit has begun to point things out as I read, but I still feel that maybe I'm doing something wrong. Any advice on this?

Again, thank you all so much for your responses - they have been a real help

Stephen

Re:, on: 2005/10/28 13:02

Get a Bible commentary by Matthew Henry. Read your Bible with the MH commentary sitting right there by your side. His commentary has really opened up scripture for me.

Having said that, I would be very careful not to let commentaries rule your Bible reading. Always keep in mind that any commentary is written by a man, and not inspired, and are therefore capable of wrong interpretation of the Word. Don't just go out and buy any old commentary... be very selective. Like if you find some commentary by Oral Roberts... I would run (not walk) away from it.

Matthew Henry is the one I recommend, even though sometimes he leans more toward Calvinism than I do. But it was written some 300 or more years ago and has stood the test of time.

Also... get a Strongs Concordance.

Oh, and get a KJV too!

Krispy

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/10/28 13:25

Quote:
----- I have found that I've begun to notice more things as I read now, and the Holy Spirit has begun to point things out as I read, but I still feel that maybe I'm doing something wrong. Any advice on this?

Something that I found very helpful in this area was a book on Bible study called *Living by The Book* by Howard Hendricks.

It is a very good introduction to Bible study that covers observing the text (the most important step and the one given the least space in most introductory books), interpreting the text, and applying the text (another often neglected step).

There is also an excellent workbook that you can get to go along with the book, this helps you develop each of the skills with additional exercises, highly recommended.

This book has been a great help to me in digging deeper into God's Word.

You can find it in the UK at the following link...

(<http://www.christianbits.co.uk/product.php?id0802408168>) Living by the Book

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/10/28 13:38

Quote:

-----Oh, and get a KJV too!

Hi Krispy

You are incorrigible! ;-)

Re: Spong is wrong - posted by Compton (), on: 2005/10/28 20:52

As I was reading through this thread it occurred to me the advice given below is great not just for young believers...but also for old believers and everyone in between!

Quote:

-----"Reading the Bible again for the first time" by Marcus Borg and "Liberating the Gospels - reading the Bible with Jewish eyes" by John Shelby Spong.

"Theologians" like Bishop Spong confound me. Why call yourself a Christian if you refute the testimony of Jesus? Some one could never call themselves an evolutionist if they believe the case for creationism, so how can these people call themselves Christians if they don't believe Christ is who he says he is? Liberal Christians epitomize this quote from G.K. Chesterton: "These are the days when the Christian is expected to praise every creed except his own."

MC