

From the Pastor's Desk

Biblical Fraud

The problem with calling the bible "the word of God" is that God did not write one word of it. It was written by men who were inspired by God. But, were they all? During a recent men's Bible study of first Corinthians, we found what today can only be described as Biblical fraud.

Does anything about the following scripture passage seem odd?

29Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. 31For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. 32And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, 33for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

34As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. 35If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?

37 Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. 38Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. 39So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; 40but all things should be done decently and in order. (I Corinthians 14: 29-40)

Now read it again and omit verses 34—36.

Paul's explanation about how to use spiritual gifts becomes clearer when not interrupted by verses 34-36, which have nothing to do with the use of spiritual gifts. Why does this interruption occur? Because Paul never wrote them. It is the opinion of most biblical scholars that verses 34-36 were a later addition written by someone who desired that women be silent in church. The reason they know Paul did not write them is because these verses contradict I Corinthians 11:4,13. One author puts it this way:

If these verses are removed no violence is done to Paul's argument. In fact it gains in clarity. Not only are these verses not integral to this section, they contradict 11:4,13 where Paul takes it for granted that women can speak in church and even assume a leadership role. Finally the mention of the Law (vs.34) (presumable the reference is to Gen. 3:16) as a decisive argument on a practical issue is totally at odds with Paul's habitual practice. The textual tradition sometimes places v. 34-35 at the very end of this chapter. Hence, they probably originated as a marginal note at a time when social conventions were permitted to limit the freedom of the Spirit. (Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, I Corinthians—New Testament Message, p. 133)

This "marginal note" to Paul's original letter was later copied into the body of the text by a later scribe. His original letter was lost.

Today many churches use verses 34-36 to prohibit women from exercising leadership roles in their congregations. Are these verses the “word of God” or the work of a fraud? They appear to be the latter and have been quoted to support the suppression of women in church and society for generations. Fortunately, scholars indicate that this sort of manipulation of Paul’s text was a very rare occurrence. Yet, one could say that because verses 34-36 are in the bible, they should be considered the inspired word of God and taken literally. Thankfully, like the early Christians, our allegiance is to the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, who is present in our midst and speaking to us today. He is not imprisoned in the culture and prejudice of previous generations.

Scripture scholarship that excavates the bible to try and find the author’s original intent is called the “Historical-Critical Method” of study and most all mainline seminary students benefit from this scholarship. Basically it teaches that in order to get back to the original intent of the author, we first have to sift through various strata of biblical development and understand the cultures and context from which they came. What we read in the New Testament was first oral tradition for at least 20 years before anything was written. Few people during this time could write, and of course, there were no tape recordings of the words or teachings of Christ. It was all transmitted orally and celebrated liturgically for many years before it was written down.

The Gospels contain the early Christian churches experience of Christ and what he meant to them. Because of the various stages in the formation of scripture, it is difficult to find the exact words of the historical Jesus of Nazareth (i.e., the pre-Easter Christ). What we hear and read in the Gospels are the words of the resurrected Christ (i.e., the post-Easter Christ) speaking through the faith communities of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These words also address particular needs in their congregations, which is why the Gospels do not always agree with one another.

To further complicate things, we have none of the original writings of the NT. All are copies. And, Jesus was a Jew who spoke in Hebrew and Aramaic but the NT was written in Greek, which was a totally different language and culture.

So, we need to read the Bible with humility and understand that it points to Christ and beckons us to not be “blind” and to open our eyes and “see” that he is alive. Our faith leaps from the pages of the New Testament and proclaims loudly that *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* Because of Pentecost, we, like the early Christians, celebrate Christ in our midst today.

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