**Holy Habits: Biblical Teaching – Week 3**

So far we have focused on what Jesus had to say about the Hebrew Scriptures, and on what the Old Testament said about Jesus.  Although much more could be added to this, we now turn to the New Testament.  There were 5 men who between them wrote most of the New Testament.  Matthew wrote the first gospel with a Jewish readership in mind.  Mark wrote the second but earliest gospel, perhaps with help from Peter.  Luke wrote the third gospel and the book of Acts.  John wrote the fourth, more reflective gospel, plus 3 letters and the book of Revelation.  Paul wrote 13 letters.  In addition there are 4 other short letters written by Peter, James and Jude, plus the longer unsigned letter to the Hebrews.  How much can we rely on what these people wrote?

In some cases they confirm that they are writing eye witness accounts of things that they personally experienced.  In his first letter Peter writes, *I am a witness of Christ’s sufferings, and I will share in the glory that will be revealed (5: 1)*.  At the start of his gospel, John writes, *The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us.  We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s only Son (1: 14)*.  In Acts chapter 16, Luke describes how Paul and Timothy travelled through Asia Minor, using the pronoun *“They” travelled* … (verses 4, 6, 7, 8).  Suddenly, in verse 10 he writes, *“We” got ready to leave for Macedonia.*  He is describing events he was part of.  Paul frequently speaks of his own experiences: *I persecuted without mercy the church of God and did my best to destroy it (Galatians 1:13)*, etc.  I find it very encouraging that in much of the New Testament, people are describing events they actually lived through.

Even when they are not eye witnesses, the New Testament writers are at pains to stress that they seek to tell the truth.  Luke addresses both his gospel and the Acts to someone called “Theophilus”.  That name means “Lover of God”, so it may have been written to one man, or it may have been meant for all people who love God.  Either way, Luke emphasises that his writing is based on: *What we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning (Luke 1: 2)*.  He goes on to say, *Because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you.  I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught (verses 3-4).*  John’s purpose is similar: *These have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life (John 20: 31)*.  I believe we can definitely rely on the New Testament, and that we owe a great debt of gratitude to these people who have so faithfully and carefully told us what they saw and heard.

*Produced by Glenn Evans on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  All quotations from the Good News Translation unless otherwise stated.  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*