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Biblical Teaching – week 7

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I guess that most if not all of us reading these emails already love the Word of God and use the Bible to help us in our faith and in our lives.  However, we have to recognise that not everyone feels so positive about the Bible, and even some Christians find bits of it quite difficult, for two reasons.The first difficulty is that parts of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, seem to be hard to reconcile with the God of love described in the New Testament.  They can be bloodthirsty and seem to accept cruelty, slavery, the inferiority of women and children, and so on.  Sometimes it seems to say that God accepts this.  There are two responses to this.  Firstly, the Bible often deals with people as they actually are, not just as they should be.  The modern world has just as many faults as we find in the Old Testament, with our blanket bombing in wartime and indiscriminate terrorism in peacetime. We accept famine and disease and poverty while we spend fortunes on weapons and luxuries.  It is hypocritical of us to accuse the Old Testament of unchristian standards of behaviour.  Secondly, we expect people in the Old Testament to have the same understanding of God as Christians familiar with the teaching and example of Jesus.  The letter to the Hebrews begins with these words: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son (chapter 1 verses 1-2a).* It is as Isaiah prophesied: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.  They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them (9: 2).*In the Old Testament, people had an incomplete understanding of God.  It was often better than that of the pagan tribes around them, but it is not fair to judge them by Christian standards.  We who have seen the Light of the world and heard Him speaking to us have much less of an excuse for the evil of the modern world than people of ancient times struggling to hear and understand what God is saying and wanting.The second difficulty is how we know which bits of the Bible are meant to be taken literally and obeyed as completely as possible, and which bits belong to the societies and cultures of the past.  Although Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 that a woman should have her head covered in worship, few if any of us at Bents Green believe this applies to us.  However, there are other things we do feel strongly about.  How can we be sure which bits fall into which category?  Christians often make assertions and public statements which are based on specific bits of the Bible.  However, we need to be cautious.  For example, people often think it was only the Rich Young Ruler who was told by Jesus to sell all he had and give the money to the poor *(Mark 10: 21; Luke 18: 22),* but in fact Jesus gave this same command to all his disciples *(Luke 12: 33).*  To avoid hypocrisy in what we claim about the Bible, maybe we need to take these words of Jesus literally before we expect people to take other bits of the Bible literally.  After all, Jesus was very clear about how we should judge other people: *Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you (Matthew 7: 1).* So the response to this second difficulty has to be that we must rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us as we read the Bible, and that we should respect those who feel they have been guided differently. *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.* |