

Happy Mother's day!!

Worship services are being cancelled until further notice because of Covid-19. However, we will have worship services through the Internet Zoom platform every Sunday at 10:30 AM. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom always remains the same but the Meeting ID and password number changes every week. If you need more information, please contact Mr. Vautour. See the bottom of the bulletin the contact information.

If you have friends or acquaintances who want to join in the worship service, please do not hesitate to share with them the Zoom links to join with us in the worship our great God.

The National GCI services will be at 1:00 p.m. each Sunday. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom and the meeting ID always remains the same for the National Worship Service.

For more information about special activities happening in GCI, please see the international website at www.gci.org. On the left-hand upper side of the screen, you will see 3 short lines. You simply need to click on it. A drop down menu will appear. Click on "**PARTICIPATE**".

Please note that audio sermons are available and a PDF copy of sermons are available at www.worshipim.ca and video sermons are now available on YouTube – GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL-MONCTON (see link below)

If you have a prayer requests, other events you would like to announce and/or praise to our great God you would like to share, **please try to contact Mr. Vautour by email, text or telephone no later than Saturday, in the morning.**

Certainly, we all need to realize, during this time of crisis, that even if situations appear bleak and evil appears strong, God is still the ruler yet. Jesus sustains all things we are clearly told in Colossians. We could not be in more loving hands! Although we may go through temporary troubles, we have to always keep in mind the hope we have in Jesus.

How the first disciples of Jesus responded to the apostles' teaching:

1- "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
2- and fellowship,

3- to the breaking of bread
4- and the prayers." (Ac 2:42 ESV)

Bob, (Robert Jokela) who many have known died on April 30, 2020. See following link:
<http://colchesterfuneral.frontrunnerpro.com/book-of-memories/4205715/Jokela-Robert/obituary.php>

For prayer requests, please see www.worshipim.ca under "**Members Only**". If you have forgotten password for this section only, please contact Mr. Vautour.

April/May Calendar

| Worship Services 10:30 a.m. Sunday | Bible Study Thursday 7:30 p.m. | Prayer Meeting Thursday 7:30 p.m. |
|---|---|--|
| Communion – May 3 | April 30 | |
| May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 | May 14, 28 | May 7, 21 |

Offerings: you can send your offering directly to the following address: **Grace Communion International- Canada, Suite 203A, 2121 Airport Dr., Saskatoon, SK 7S1 6W5**. If you prefer, you can also call **1-306-653-2705**. Thank you for your continued generous giving to God by giving to this part of God's church, his body.

From Mr. Bill Hall – GCI Canadian Director *"Our office here in Saskatoon will remain open during regular business hours. I'm self isolating for a couple of weeks, but Kathleen will be available. We will continue to process the donations we receive in Saskatoon. Members are urged to mail them directly to our office for the time-being. They can also donate via phone using a credit card, or via Canada Helps using the donate button on our website www.gcicanada.ca We are waving the provision that all donations given via Canada Helps go toward national expenses for the time being. We will credit all donations received via Canada Helps to a member's local congregation, if we can identify where they attend."*

Timeless Truths in Cultural Clothing, by Michael Morrison

Most Christians accept the Bible as authoritative, as a book that gives reliable spiritual guidance. If we took a survey of Christians, asking them, "Do you believe the Bible?" most of them would say, "Yes" — or at least they would try to say yes to some portion of the Bible, such as the New Testament, or the teachings about loving one another. They want to say in some sense that they believe the Bible, that they accept it as an authority in their faith.

Protestants in particular respect the Bible as the basis for the Christian faith — the basis for their beliefs about God, Jesus, salvation and the church. Even though they may not have read the Bible, they tend to assume that it is true. Their faith in Christ leads them to accept the book that tells them about Christ. A preacher can say, "The Bible says..." with the expectation that the audience will give favorable weight to a biblical citation. The general tendency is for Christians to trust the Bible.

Some Christians view the Bible skeptically, but this is a more intellectually challenging (and therefore less common) position. It is not immediately apparent to new believers how a person can combine trust and mistrust — faith in Christianity with skepticism about the book that has been the traditional basis of that faith. They might view it as like sawing off the limb on which one's ladder is resting.

Limits to belief

Christians do not automatically believe everything that the Bible says. For example, if the preacher says, "The Bible says to destroy houses with persistent mildew," most Christians would not take it seriously. Although the Bible does say that ([Leviticus 14:43-45](#)), most Christians would not accept it. Their reasons might vary in sophistication: 1) That would be stupid. 2) No other Christians believe that, so it can't be right. 3) Jesus never said anything like that. 4) That has nothing to do with going to heaven. 5) Old Testament laws don't apply to Christians.

Most Christians reject the teaching about mildew. They are using a filter on the Bible — a filter that in most cases they haven't thought much about. They say they accept the Bible as an authority for their beliefs and practices, yet they do not accept part of the Bible. In this case, the common sense of most Christians functions as more authoritative than the original meaning of Scripture.

I am not saying that houses should be destroyed. Nor am I saying that we should routinely ignore the Bible and follow our common sense. We do not have to choose between such extremes. But Christians should think about the kind of authority the Bible has. If we openly disobey some of its teachings, then in what sense can we say that it is authoritative? Whether we like to think about such tensions or not, we do not read far in the Bible before we are faced with the issue. Why do we stand on some parts of the Bible, but not others? To use the ladder analogy again, we want to be sure that our ladder is resting on the correct branch, a branch that will not be broken by the winds of additional thought.

Let's use a New Testament example. Paul says four times, "**Greet one another with a holy kiss**" ([Romans 16:16](#); [1 Corinthians 16:20](#); [2 Corinthians 13:12](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:26, NRSV](#)), and Peter also says it ([1 Peter 5:14](#)). Nevertheless, the vast majority of Christians who claim to accept the Bible as authoritative do not accept this command as required for Christians today. They greet one another, but not with a holy kiss. Why? Nothing in Scripture says that we can ignore what Peter and Paul wrote. There is no "Third Testament" to tell us that this part of the New Testament is obsolete. So the question remains: How can we say that the Bible is authoritative, and yet consider parts of it as not authoritative? In what way is the authority of the Bible limited?

Accidents of history

Christians often call the Bible the Word of God. They view it as revelation from God to humans. The writers "**spoke from God**" as they were "**moved by the Holy Spirit**" ([2 Peter 1:21](#)). The Scriptures were "**inspired by God**" ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)). The New Testament is believed to be inspired in the same way as the Old.

But the Bible is not the supreme revelation of God — Jesus Christ is. The letter to the Hebrews begins by noting that difference: "**God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son**" ([Hebrews 1:1-2](#)). And Jesus, the Son, reveals God perfectly: "**He is...the exact imprint of God's very being**" (verse 3). "**The whole fullness of deity dwells bodily**" in Christ ([Colossians 2:9](#)). Jesus reveals God so well that whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father ([John 14:9](#)).

But this supreme revelation of God came in a very specific form. His hair was a certain color, his skin was a certain color, he wore a certain style of clothes and spoke specific human languages. He was a male Jew living in Galilee and Judea at a particular time in history. So, is this what the Father looks like? Are we to identify a particular style of clothing and language as more God-like than other styles? No, those things do not reveal God to us — they are accidents of history. In speech, dress, and personal appearance, Jesus probably looked much like Judas Iscariot — and in such incidentals, Jesus reveals no more to us about God than Judas does.

Jesus, the supreme revelation of God, came to us in a specific cultural form, and when we discuss the way in which Jesus reveals the Father, we must distinguish between form and substance, between culture and principle. Sometimes it is easy to distinguish Jesus from his culture. But in other cases, Jesus participated in his culture — he went to Jerusalem for Jewish festivals, he told someone to follow a Jewish ritual, he told Peter to pay a tax, he told stories about kings and vineyards, he ate fish and drank wine, and called God Abba ([John 7:14](#); [10:22](#); [Matthew 8:4](#); [17:27](#); [Luke 24:43](#); [Mark 14:36](#)). Did he do these things by conviction, or by custom? Are Christians today to follow his example in these things, or do we overlook them as cultural accidents?

Jesus must be seen within his culture. We do not go to the extreme of imitating everything Jesus did, nor do we go to the other extreme of ignoring everything. We call Jesus our Lord, and we feel that we should obey his teachings, but we also make various exceptions. We do not **“sell everything you have and give to the poor”** ([Luke 18:22](#)). Some of Jesus’ teachings were limited to a particular time and place, or even to a specific person. Although Jesus has supreme authority, we filter his teachings. We want to ensure that we are responding to the right teachings, not a command intended for someone else. We want to make sure that our ladder is resting against the correct branch of the tree.

Scripture likewise limited

Jesus, the supreme revelation of God, must be interpreted with some allowance for the specifics of his culture. How much more so must the Bible, a less direct revelation! Each writing was given at a particular time and place, in a particular language with words of a particular nuance. Sometimes the text addresses one specific situation only. We do not need to obey all the commands God gave to Noah, or to Abraham, or to Moses, or even to Jesus’ disciples or to the believers in Corinth.

The command, **“Bring my cloak and parchments”** ([2 Timothy 4:13](#)), was given to a specific person. So was the command, **“Use a little wine because of your stomach”** ([1 Timothy 5:23](#)). The same letter says, **“Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once”** (verse 9). Such commands are rarely obeyed now, even by those who say they accept the Bible as authoritative.

Scripture is not a collection of timeless truths. Although some of its truths are timeless, other parts of the Bible are designed for a specific situation in a specific culture, and it would be wrong for us to take them out of that context and impose them on modern situations. First-century men were advised to pray with their hands raised ([1 Timothy 2:8](#)). Slaves were advised to submit even to harsh masters ([1 Peter 2:18](#)). Virgins were advised to remain virgins ([1 Corinthians 7:26](#)). Women were told how to dress when they prayed ([1 Corinthians 11:5](#)), and men were given advice regarding hair length (verse 14). Similarly, people were told to greet one another with a kiss.

These behaviors were appropriate in first-century Mediterranean culture, but are not necessary in Western culture today. Just as the New Testament was written with Greek words, but we do not have to repeat those Greek words in our worship, so also the New Testament was written with a particular culture in mind, but we do not have to repeat all the cultural details. Just as we recognize that the command to destroy mildewed houses was given to a specific people at a specific time, and does not apply to us today, we can also recognize that the command to kiss one another was also given to a specific people at a specific time, and we are not those people. Despite the fact that the command is given five times in the New Testament, it is not a command for us today.

The apostle Paul used one style of message in the synagogue and a different style at the Areopagus. If he could speak in our culture, he would change his style again ([1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#)). He might cite Old Testament scriptures in a different way, or different scriptures, or at least give a longer explanation of how the verse is relevant to his argument. Parables might refer to urban life more often than to agricultural customs. Advice about slavery would not be included; modern situations would be addressed. The Bible was written in a different culture and for a different culture. Its truths were given with words and styles shaped by the culture it was given in.

Scripture does not warn us when a culturally-specific command is being given. When we read, we do not know in advance which verses are going to be culturally conditioned, so we cannot rule out the possibility in advance. We have to consider the possibility for all verses. This may complicate our approach to Scripture, but it is unavoidable, for this is the way Scripture was inspired. It came with certain extraneous details, just as Jesus had certain personal details about himself that were not essential to his revealing God to us.

Everything in Scripture had an original setting, but we do not conclude that the Bible had value only in its original setting. It continues to have value. Even the New Testament, which declares much of the Old Testament obsolete ([Hebrews 8:13](#)), nevertheless says that the Old Testament continues to be useful for Christian doctrine and training in righteousness ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)). The New Testament often quotes the Old Testament not just as an authority about history, but for a principle that continues to be important for Christians. The New Testament is not advocating a wholesale application of old covenant laws, but it is saying that the Old Testament has a less specific but no less important usefulness, a usefulness rooted more in principles and concepts than in specific laws or specific words.

Why have I spent so much time on the Old Testament? Because, when the New Testament speaks of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, it has the Old Testament in view. Our understanding of inspiration for the entire Bible is built on scriptures that are about the Old Testament. The New Testament is presumably inspired in the same way as the Old Testament. Just as with the Old, the authority of the New Testament is not in the specific cultural situations it happens to mention, but in the principles and concepts that lay behind the writings.

It is beyond the scope of this article to explain how to distinguish cultural details from timeless truths. In some cases the difference will be obvious. In other cases it will take more work to determine whether a teaching applies in other cultures, and in some cases it will be debatable. The point here is simply that a discrimination is necessary. There are obsolete instructions in the New Testament. The authority of the New Testament must be sought not in a literalistic application of every word (e.g., kiss), but in the level of principles (e.g., greet with affection).

Let me use the analogy of the ladder again. Many new Christians see that the tree is solid and well-rooted. They assume that all its branches are equally solid — even the smallest twigs — and they place their ladder against the tree without realizing that those twigs were never designed to carry such weight. Small branches may support the ladder for a while, but when a wind or an extra weight comes along, the ladder becomes unstable and possibly dangerous.

Now let me suggest a safer approach: New Christians need to begin at the trunk of the tree, and move out on branches only after testing them for stability. Some parts of the Bible (mildew, kisses, clothing styles) are good for decoration, as it were, but not for support. They are useful, but not always in the way we assume. They were inspired for one purpose, and we go wrong if we try to make them serve a different purpose. We need to focus on the purpose.

Authority of Scripture

So far, I have shown that Scripture has limitations, in particular the fact that it was written in and for other cultures. Some people use that fact to dismiss large portions of the Bible, perhaps Scripture itself. It is easy to show that biblical authority must be qualified in some way, but we do not jump from there into the opposite view, to say it has no authority at all. We are not forced to choose between all or nothing.

Let me mention some evidence that supports biblical authority. First, Scripture claims to be inspired by God. Writers such as Paul claimed to write with authority derived from his commission from God. God is the ultimate authority; Scripture is a derivative authority, but an authority nonetheless because it comes from God and testifies about Christ. This is a faith claim, not a proof. There is no way to prove the Bible's authority beyond all question; not even Jesus convinced everyone.

Tradition supports biblical authority. Christians throughout the centuries have found these writings to be useful and reliable, for both faith and practice. These books tell us what sort of God we believe in, what he did for us, and how we should respond. The biblical Jesus is the only one we have; other reconstructions are based more on presuppositions than on new evidence. Tradition also tells us which books are in the Bible; we trust that God ensured that the right books were included. Since God went to the extreme of revealing himself in flesh, we believe that he would also ensure that the revelation be faithfully preserved. This cannot be proved, but is based on our understanding of what God is doing with us.

History also shows that Scripture has been useful as a corrective to abuses within the church (e.g., in the Middle Ages) and within society (e.g., slavery, Nazism). The fact that a moral authority is needed does not prove that the Bible *is* that authority, but history shows that the Bible was useful in reforming some problems, and its usefulness came because people accepted it as an authority.

Personal experience also helps us understand that the Bible has authority. This is the book that has the courage and honesty to tell us about our own depravity, and the grace to offer us a cleansed conscience. It gives us moral strength not through rules and commands, but in an unexpected way — through grace and the ignominious death of our Lord. The Bible testifies to the love, joy and peace we may have through faith — feelings that are, just as the Bible describes, beyond our ability to put into words. This book gives us meaning and purpose in life by telling us of divine creation and redemption. These aspects of biblical authority cannot be proven to skeptics, but they help authenticate the writings that tell us these things we consider true.

The Bible does not sugar-coat its heroes, and this also helps us accept it as honest. It tells us about the failings of Abraham, Moses, David, the nation of Israel, and the bumbling disciples. The Bible is a message of grace, and grace resists manipulation. Although some use Scripture as a club, the Bible itself gives the message that undercuts such misuse of its authority. The Bible is a word that bears witness to a more authoritative Word, the Word made flesh, and the good news of God's grace.

The Bible's complexity is impressive. It is not simplistic; it does not take the easy way out. The New Testament claims both continuity and radical discontinuity with the old covenant. It would be simpler to eliminate one or the other, but it is more thought-provoking to have both. Likewise, Jesus is presented as both human and divine, a combination that does not fit well into Hebrew, Greek or modern thought. This complexity was not created through naïveté of the philosophical problems, but in spite of them. The Bible is a challenging book, not likely to be the result of peasants attempting a fraud or trying to make sense of hallucinations.

The disciples firmly believed Jesus to have been resurrected, and the most likely explanation for their belief is that Jesus was actually raised from the dead. (Fraud, hallucination, and mistake are all implausible.) Jesus' resurrection then gives additional weight to the book that announces such a phenomenal event. It gives additional weight to the testimony of the disciples as to who Jesus was and to the unexpected logic of conquering death through a death.

Repeatedly, the Bible challenges our thinking about God, ourselves, life, right and wrong. It commands respect not so much through outright command, but by conveying truths to us we do not obtain elsewhere. The testimony of Scripture, of tradition, of personal experience and reason all support the authority of the Bible — yet it is an authority given in a particular historical context. The fact that it is able to speak across cultures, to address situations that never existed when it was written, is also a testimony to its abiding authority. Its timeless truths are given to us in cultural clothes.

Bibliography

The literature on biblical authority is enormous, often technical, and often contradictory. I recommend here a few introductory books. Perhaps one of these titles will pique your interest, should you want to explore this subject a little more:

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Marshall, I. Howard. *Biblical Inspiration*. Eerdmans, 1982.

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McQuilken, Robertson. *Understanding and Applying the Bible*. Moody, 1992.

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Mickelsen, A.B. and A.M. Mickelsen. *Understanding Scripture*. Hendrickson, 1992.

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Michael Morrison received a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2006. He is Dean of Faculty and Professor of New Testament at Grace Communion Seminary.

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—a) www.gci.org, b) www.worshipim.ca, c) www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; d) Grace Communion International-Moncton <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqKazyWhmKmdZy69vJcFfPg>
For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website.
Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email— evautour47@outlook.com