



The Authority of the Word of God in Print and in Person

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. And the Word became flesh... ~ John 1:1-5, 14a (NASB)

Introduction

The Word Made Flesh

Whenever we talk about Scripture, we Christ-followers must remind ourselves that ultimately we are not just people of the *book*, but even more so, we are people of the *Person*. The book points us to the person of Jesus. The word in print points us to the Word in person. As followers of the Word made flesh, we must resist succumbing to an approach to God's Word that was as popular in Jesus' day as it is today. An approach that would unwittingly rewrite the above passage to say, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became print and page and dwelt among us, at least, among those of us who are literate and educated, and it rolled off our printing presses and was memorized and studied and debated and divided over." We must make no mistake here. The word in print is clear about what Word holds final authority: the Word who became flesh.

Throughout Scripture we learn that when God wants to reveal his will to his people, he does so primarily through persons rather than pamphlets; through messengers, angels, prophets, apostles, pastors and teachers. This is because God is personal and relational. Love is God's essence (1 John 4:16). So when the time came for God to reveal himself most fully to his people, he did so *in person*. Jesus is God's Word, God's message, embodied for us to hear and see. He teaches through words and through actions. He articulates and demonstrates the very heart of God. Jesus is God's show and tell.

Jesus speaks God's message and he enacts God's message. He then passes that message on to the church, breathing his Spirit into the church and inviting us in community to carry that message forward – *in the flesh*. To call the church "the body of Christ" is not just poetry, but important theology. The Word of God is still meant to be observed in the flesh – a Christ-following community – not just read in a holy book. Yes, God ordained that the core teaching of Jesus and the core emphasis for the church should get written down as a tool for God's people to keep us on track so that we can't keep reinventing the message according to our own whims and wants. The Bible reminds us that there are parameters to the truth that we steward – it is not

open to reinvention. However, as the Body of Christ, it is still we who are called to steward the truth in our lives, our relationships, and our teaching. It's not enough to say that God's Word came in living personal form for one generation, but then got written down and is now in static book form. Rather, we say that God is continually calling us to allow his word, his message to be enfleshed in our lives so that we also become God's show and tell, just as Jesus was. We do this with the power and presence of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, who empowers us to walk in the way of Jesus. In that sense, we really are the body of Christ – the word made flesh.

A Case Study in Bibliolatry

When we imbue the Bible with the place and power that only Jesus should hold, Christ-followers can become idolatrous Bible-followers rather than Christ-followers – and that is a recipe for disaster. As an example, I offer the heartbreaking story of Rev. Paul Hill. A very dedicated and passionate evangelical pastor, Paul Hill was committed to the authority of Scripture. He was passionate for God, and followed the Bible as his authority for faith and practice. Please note again: he was passionate for God and he professed to love Jesus – but he *followed* the Bible. And that was his undoing (see John 14:15-24).

In the early morning of July 29, 1994, Rev. Hill rose before dawn, spent time in prayer and Bible reading, and then drove to the abortion clinic where he was a regular protestor. But this time it was not a regular protest. When Dr. John Britton, the abortion doctor of the clinic arrived, Rev. Hill walked up to him and his bodyguard while they were still seated in the car, raised his shotgun, and killed them both. How could a committed Christian do such an anti-Christ thing?

As Rev. Hill wrote later, he believed his commitment to follow the Bible left him no other option but to kill a murderer in the defense of innocent lives. Remember, although Hill professed to love Jesus, he *followed* the Bible. Does not Proverbs 31:9 tell God's people to defend the rights of the afflicted and the needy? And does not Proverbs 24:11 say to rescue those who are being led away to death? And is not violence condoned and even commanded as a means to accomplish God's will in large portions of the Bible? Rev. Hill was especially moved by his reading of the Ten Commandments. As he reasoned, the sixth commandment calls God's people not only to avoid committing murder but also to actively prevent murder. Armed with this biblical rationale, along with his shotgun, what other course of action could make sense? If you're not going to kill to rescue an unborn baby, what's worth killing over? Professing Christians go to war for other things, we kill for other reasons. Shouldn't we also be willing to kill in order to rescue innocent children from certain death?

In contrast to Paul Hill's actions, I think of 1 John 3:16 which describes what Christian love in action should look like – "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another." (TNIV) It's very simple really. Christ-followers should always be prepared to die for a cause, but never to kill for a cause. Jesus helps his followers make sense of the apparently conflicting ways God works at different times in history. Jesus helps his followers make sense of their own Bible. His life crystallizes the whole story. So it seems to me that the Bible, detached from the enfleshed word of Jesus, can be a very dangerous book used to justify many destructive and deadly practices. It was never intended to be used as some have

today – as an independent authority, detached from the self-sacrificing community called the body of Christ.

The Bible comes with its own instructions on how to use it, if we have eyes to see them. The Bible records Jesus teaching that all of Scripture functions as a pointer to him. If Christians do not move through and beyond the pages of Scripture to follow the person of Jesus, then we are left following a book that can be manipulated to espouse many deadly and destructive teachings. The example of the religious leaders in Jesus' day provides ample evidence that this is true (e.g., see Matthew 23).

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27, ESV). At the time, his voice was audible. Now it is in print. Yet, in both instances he must have meant more. The religious leaders who rejected him heard his audible voice and many people who reject him still can read his teachings in Scripture. But there is a voice, a message, a Word that Jesus offers us that is embedded within Scripture and yet revealed only by his Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). The Apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16, TNIV). He did not say the power of God lay in Scripture itself, for Scripture can be used for many evil devices. God's power of salvation comes to us through the message, the Word, the Good News that is embedded within Scripture, embodied in Jesus, revealed by his Spirit, and stewarded by the Church.

With this in mind, let me suggest two ironies and three applications.

Two Ironies

The first irony to get our heads around is this: the Bible, the authoritative word of God, tells story of one who holds authority over everything, including the Bible itself! We discover this radical truth by reading and trusting the Bible. When we go to the Bible, we learn about Jesus who has authority over the Bible. We must remember that Jesus is the ultimate end goal of the book that tells his story – its telos. The book is not the destination for a believer in and of itself. This book is the place where I learn about Jesus who claims to be the final destination for our Christian lives.

To the Pharisees, who often seemed to read the Bible more like Paul Hill, Jesus says this:

You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life. (John 5:39-40, NLT)

Jesus accuses the Pharisees of using the Bible as their endpoint destination rather than as a stepping stone to Jesus. They studied the word of God in print, and they followed the word of God in print. If they had a summary slogan it might be, “The Bible says it; that settles it; I believe it; let’s do it.” But Jesus says to all of us, “Follow me.” When reading the Bible, we too need to need to make that next step to Jesus. Now, notice Jesus never told the Pharisees that they should stop studying Scripture or that it was getting in the way of their spirituality and they would be better off leaving it behind and followed him apart from the Bible. On the contrary, he

encouraged them to try to understand it correctly, as the very thing that pointed to him, and he invited its readers to submit to him as their ultimate authority.

In John 1 we read that the Word of God became flesh. And later in that same chapter we read something that should stick in our minds every time we open our Bibles:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18, NASB)

Let the full impact of this verse settle in. No one has seen God directly. Apart from his self disclosure, our understanding of the true nature of “God” is nebulous and confusing at best. We see evidences of his existence and we read stories in the Bible about his interactions with nations and individuals that sometimes encourage us, sometimes puzzle us, and sometimes downright frighten us. Apart from Christ, it is hard for us to get a clear view into God’s heart. And so, God reveals himself to us definitively through Christ, in a way that makes his love for us crystal clear and irrefutable and through which we understand everything else we read in Scripture. God sends his Son, who is himself God – the Word who was with God and who was God, he who is in the bosom of the Father – literally the one who came to us out of the chest cavity of God. It is as though God opened up his chest and took out his heart to show us. The passage says that Jesus “explained” God. The Greek word there is the same word from which we get the word exegete. Jesus “exegetes” God to us. He is God’s ultimate explanation of who himself. Jesus must be at the centre of our seeing, hearing, and responding to God.

Through Jesus, it is as if God says, “I know there are stories of violence in the Bible, stories of pain and of harsh judgment all mixed with stories of mercy and grace and healing and hope. I understand that sometimes you aren’t sure what kind of God I am or how best to follow my will. You flip through the pages of your Bibles trying to find the evidence of my heart, to figure out what the great “I AM” is like. Well, it’s time to nail that one down, because once you know my heart then you will be able to better understand everything else you read about me in the Bible. And so, because I want you to know my heart, I give you Jesus. This is my Word, my ultimate message, my ultimate act of self-revelation.”

We recently finished a series at The Meeting House on The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5- 7, which is primarily a passage about New Covenant ethics. But even here the Christology is undeniably high. That is, Jesus is clearly linked with divinity unexplained but undeniable way. He is

at the centre of everything and has authority over everyone. For instance, at the end of the sermon the crowds are said to have been astonished at Jesus' teaching because he taught as one who had authority and not as their scribes. The rabbis in Jesus' day would teach as we pastors would teach today, claiming that the authority behind their teaching was based on someone else – Scriptural precedent, accepted tradition, and/or another respected rabbi's interpretation of Scripture and tradition. It's the right way for a mere mortal to teach. As a pastor and teacher, I would never stand before a gathering of the church and say that, based on my own authority I will reveal what reality is all about and tell us the right way to live in response to it. If that ever happens, I need to lose my job, because I'm starting a cult. No, I look to Scripture in general, and to Christ in particular, for the authority behind my teaching. I have no intrinsic authority and certainly the rabbis in Jesus' day wouldn't claim to have intrinsic authority either.

That's why pastors today quote Scripture to make their points and often quote other respected scholars and teachers to support their interpretation of Scripture. But in the Sermon on the Mount as elsewhere, Jesus supports his assertions simply by saying "truly I say unto you". (In John's gospel he says two trulys – "amen, amen I say to you.") And that's it. That's all. He appeals to no authority higher than himself. He doesn't appeal to Scripture for his authority. In fact, he places his teachings in authority over Scripture. In Matthew 5 we read what are sometimes called the six antitheses – six units of teaching that follow the basic pattern "you have heard it said, but I tell you" where he contrasts his teaching with Scripture and tradition. And he does not even appeal to God as his authority, as the prophets did before him. A prophet would say, "Thus saith the Lord." Jesus doesn't say that. Jesus says, "Thus saith me."

Also in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus claims to have the authority of the judge over all. He says that on the last day people will be judged based on what they do with his teaching and whether or not he knew them. He goes beyond saying "By the way, on Judgment Day, God will judge you based on how you respond to me." He says, "On Judgment Day, when you get there, I will be the one judging you. I will be the one in the seat of authority. I will judge you based on what you do with these words of mine. The only thing that matters for you is whether or not I can say that I knew you." In this passage Jesus also mentions "the will of my Father". The line is very blurry between who God is and who Jesus is. Jesus speaks of his own authority in such a way that would leave his audience saying, "Who do you think you are – God?"

And so it shouldn't surprise us that Matthew's gospel ends with Jesus saying as his preface to giving the Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18, NRSV) God has not delegated his divine authority to a book, but he does share his authority with his own heart, his word made flesh – Jesus. In a one sense, we could say that the book has a derived authority because the book gives us Christ's message. But the book in and of itself is never meant to live as a detached authority to be passed around and quoted as authoritative. Jesus hands the book to the church, but he never let's go of it. He keeps holding on and he walks with us everywhere and asks that as we read we read it with him in mind, regardless of whether we're looking at the Old Testament or New Testament.

At the end of Luke's gospel Jesus walks through the Old Testament with his disciples and tells them about how every page, every chapter, every verse is really all about him (Luke 24:27). The whole Bible—Old Testament and New Testament—is all about Jesus. And he takes authority over it all. We see this in Mark 7:19 where Jesus is reported to have declared all foods clean. What stunning authority! With that Jesus displays his authority over large portions of the Torah. The same is true in Matthew 19, where Jesus undoes the divorce and remarriage teaching of Deuteronomy 24. Amazing authority. The Bible, then, records the authority of Jesus, but does not claim that authority for itself. And that is first great irony. We read a book that points us to Jesus, who then claims to have complete authority over the book.

The second irony is this – Christian Scripture is the product of a community of believers who affirm that they, and not a book, are called to be the earthly repository of divine truth. The New Testament

was written as, among other things, an ongoing reminder that the Bible alone is not enough. I think of passages like 1 John 2:27, where John says,

As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him. (NRSV)

Do you see the irony? John is teaching these Christians that they do not need anyone to teach them. He identifies the Holy Spirit's anointing on the church to guide them into all truth, and yet sees his written encouragement as a part of that process and so goes on to teach many wonderful things in the letter we now know as 1 John.

The early church leaders do not display a self-awareness of contributing to a book called the Bible so they could finally dump their delegated authority into the book and then sit back and allow the book alone to steward the truth of Jesus for future generations. It seems as we read through the New Testament that the writers of Scripture had a sense that their writings were one tool to keep the church on track but, should not take over for the church itself as a whole stewarding the truth of Christ in community together.

Paul often asserts that he wants to come to his readers in person, seeing face-to-face teaching as superior to writing. Relational teaching, passing on truth person-to-person and face-to-face, is never pushed aside for the printed page. The tool of writing is used as a support to, but not a replacement of, personal instruction and relational truth-telling. For instance, Paul writes to Timothy,

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15, TNIV)

Notice that Paul says the pillar and foundation (or support or buttress) of the truth is the church as a whole, and not the Bible as an isolated document. The Bible is the product of the church and, when used correctly, helps produce a healthier church in return. The New Testament teaches that truth is stewarded within the body of the church, which includes Scripture but is not delegated solely to Scripture. For instance, to the Corinthian church Paul writes,

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such confidence we have through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:1-6, TNIV)

Paul understands that his greatest work is not writing this book of 2 Corinthians as yet another contribution to the future book called the Bible. His greatest work is writing truth into the hearts of God's people. In Jeremiah 31 God promised that the coming new covenant wouldn't just be a new version of the old covenant but a new kind of covenant. The old covenant is a written covenant, written on tablets of stone. But the new covenant is an organic covenant, written on the human heart. The old covenant was written by the finger of God. That's amazing and wonderful and never to be repeated. The new covenant is not a different version of the Old Covenant, also written by the finger of God. There's no parallel. The new covenant is not revealed by God coming down to Sinai again and writing something different with his finger into onto tablets of stone. The new covenant is revealed in personal form through Jesus, written on our hearts by the transforming work of God's Spirit, and stewarded in personal form through the church, the body of Christ. So our relationship to the new covenant is different than the relationship Israel had with the old covenant. It's not about the letter which God literally wrote with his finger in the old covenant. It's

about the spirit of the teaching – the principles embedded within the precepts and relationally applied within and through the Spirit-guided community of Christ-followers.

Three Implications

All of this is well and good, but useless without solid application. And so I offer the following.

Implication #1: *We should use our Bibles the way Jesus used his.*

When we look in the gospels at the interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees (and we focus on the Pharisees here more than the Sadducees and other groups because they, like us, put a high value on all of Scripture), we see the helpful correctives he offered them regarding how they should use their own Bibles. I am convinced that our current Evangelical church needs to hear these same correctives today. I think of passages like Matthew 12:1-8 where Jesus' disciples scandalize the Pharisees by eating grain on the Sabbath, and Jesus responds by teaching the Pharisees how to read their own Bibles. Jesus says to them,

Haven't you read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He went into the house of God, and he and his companions broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. 5 And haven't you read in the law of Moses that the priests on duty in the Temple may work on the Sabbath? 6 I tell you, there is one here who is even greater than the Temple! 7 But you would not have condemned my innocent disciples if you knew the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' 8 For the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!" (Matthew 12:3-8, NLT)

In keeping with the way David related to God's Law, Jesus challenges the Pharisees to pay attention to the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law, to hear the heart of the lawgiver rather than delighting in the details of the law itself. It's true – David also delighted in God's law. He read and meditated on it. But that was never enough. God's law allowed him to get to know God's heart. Then, when faced with an ethical challenge, David didn't have to find chapter and verse to get God's rule on the matter. Instead he simply followed God's heart which he got to know through the Scriptures and the Spirit. David had the confidence to make wise decisions that went behind the details of scripture because he was immersed in Scripture. And in at least one instance, David shows that sometimes it is appropriate to break the rules in the name of the love of God and God's people. It is interesting to note that Jesus could have called himself the son of Abraham, or the son of Moses, but he chose instead to refer to himself as the son of David, the one after God's own heart.

Next Jesus points out to the Pharisees that God even embeds within the Levitical Law itself a measure of contradiction that should serve to frustrate letter-keeping legalism. For instance, the same God who commands that no one should work on the Sabbath then commands the priests to work on the Sabbath. So, using Scripture to make his point, Jesus opposes all attempts to use the Bible as a legalistic rule book for life. Instead, we read the Bible to get to know the heart of the Father, and then we follow his heart with discerning wisdom and grace.

What we are seeing here is a clear Jesus hermeneutic—a Jesus way of reading and applying our Bibles. The principle rules over the precept, the spirit over the letter. And this is what we as Brethren in Christ have wrestled with over the years. Should women wear head coverings? Should men have long hair? Should modest dress look a certain way? Should women be allowed to lead and teach? Should we wash one another's feet literally or metaphorically? Should we greet one another with a holy kiss or a healthy hug? We are always asking the important question that Jesus encourages us to ask – what is the principle embedded within the precept and how do we live these principles out in our time and our space?

Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount supports this approach to Scripture. Jesus teaches us that the law against murder is not just about physically taking a life, but about the inner issues of anger and disrespect that have the power to take emotional and spiritual life. Likewise Jesus says

that the law against adultery is broken internally first, through willful lust. Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but he did come to fulfill it. And so we turn to him to see how the principles of the law should be lived out in a righteous life.

I have to say that I believe the Brethren in Christ as a whole should be commended for catching this Jesus hermeneutic and continually resubmitting our legalisms to it. As we return regularly to the teachings and example of Jesus as our filter for the interpretation and application of the rest of Scripture, and as we submit our own traditions to the heart of God revealed in Scripture, our struggle to follow Jesus in better and better ways can become an example and encouragement to the wider Evangelical church.

Implication #2: *We should use our Bibles the way the writers intended.*

How did the writers of Scripture expect their gospels, letters, and histories to be used? Certainly they did not intend us to use our Bibles as a collection of magical formulas, containing specific words and phrases that can unlock spiritual power. The power of God is not contained in this word or that phrase, but in the “Word” as a whole, the entire message of God ultimately revealed in Christ. To reduce the Word of God to specific words in a specific order (and for some, within a specific translation) is to embrace a worldview of magic. Magic is based on finding the right formula, the right mystical words or incantations to unlock power. But the coming of Christ puts all such word-idolatry to rest for his followers.

Unfortunately, many Evangelical Christians treat the Bible as a collection of magical formulas that need to be memorized and quoted and repeated in order to unleash God’s power in a specific way. We quote passages like Isaiah 55:11 – God’s word will not return unto me void – to justify our magical worldview. Yet, the New Testament challenges that approach to Scripture in many ways. The apostle Paul believed in the power of the gospel (the message, however rightly expressed, not a specific word formula) for the salvation of everyone who believed (Romans 1:16). Yet, when given his chance to communicate the gospel to a large pagan crowd in Acts 17, Paul never quotes Scripture. Instead, he wraps the same gospel message in the cultural idioms of his audience. He uses their sources of authority to point back to Jesus. He takes every thought captive to Christ. Paul preaches the word of God to his audience, but that “word” is the message of Christ applied to their context, not simply the quoting of Scripture.

This rejection of the word-magic worldview can be seen in other ways in the New Testament. For instance, whenever the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament, they usually quote it loosely. They paraphrase the text and, when they do quote it more closely, they use the Greek text of the Old Testament, already one step away from the actual words of God revealed to the ancient Hebrews. They choose not to quote the actual words of the Hebrew text, yet they show no signs that they fear they might be watering down the power of the message itself. Jesus follows this same pattern in Mark 12:30, where he quotes the Greek Old Testament (inserting the word “mind” which is not in the Hebrew texts).

We see this same freedom from word-legalism very clearly in the gospels – and this is very significant. The four canonical gospels were written in Greek. However, Jesus spoke Aramaic. Apparently, those charged by God and inspired by his Spirit to preserve the very teaching of Jesus didn’t feel the need to capture his exact words. Instead, the first written record of Jesus’ teaching is already a translation out of the Aramaic into the Greek, likely because more people read Greek. The New Testament writers felt the radical freedom to make a pragmatic decision – abandon the literal words of Jesus in order to capture the essence of his message in the popular language of their day. Get the message out to as many people as possible, rather than preserve the actual words for the academic few. Christians should feel the same freedom today.

For more on this point, please see chapter 16 in my book, *The End of Religion*.

Implication #3: We should use our Bibles.

If we are going to summarize the gospel in our own words or the language of our audience rather than merely quote Scripture, this is not an excuse to become lax in our biblical literacy. The Apostle Paul was only able to summarize the word of God to pagans in their own images and idiom precisely because he was saturated with Scriptural knowledge and filled with the Spirit of Christ. We must love God, study Scripture, and follow Jesus.

To a young leader in the early church, the apostle Paul wrote,

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, TNIV).

And there you have it – the apostle Paul’s summary theology of the authority of Scripture. What does Paul emphasize about Scripture? He says, “It’s... useful.” Inerrant? Where is that mentioned? Infallible? In what version? Authoritative? That’s not Paul’s emphasis. Instead he keeps it simple. The Bible comes to us from God through his people and, therefore, we should use it. To go beyond that is to go beyond Scripture itself.

Let me take a moment here to say thank you to the Brethren in Christ for side-stepping Evangelical Christianity’s great distraction – the inerrancy debate. What an amazing amount of energy has been invested into a hypothetical doctrine about documents we don’t have, that themselves are already a translation of the very words of Jesus. I’m not saying inerrancy is right or wrong, biblical or unbiblical. I simply appreciate that the Brethren In Christ have stayed fast in their conviction that the whole debate is non-biblical. It is not a debate that the Bible itself invites us into. Paul doesn’t talk about inerrancy and argue for the letter of the word. In fact he says that kind of argument kills (see 2 Corinthians 3:6 and 2 Timothy 2:14). And remember, when Paul says the letter kills, he is talking about the letter of Scripture. A wrong focus can turn the Bible into a killer. Paul says Scripture is inspired by God, and knowing that should be enough for us to use it.

And as we use our Bibles over and over again, Scripture will point us again and again to Jesus, the unchanging and authoritative Word of God.

Q & Eh? Questions for Review, Reflection, and Discussion

1. What aspects of this paper stand out to you as most encouraging, challenging, or puzzling?
2. Reflect on the case study of Rev. Paul Hill. What was this dedicated and passionate pastor missing in his Scriptural hermeneutic?
3. In what ways is the Brethren In Christ view of Scripture similar/different to the Evangelical view? In what ways is it similar/different to the Catholic view?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6, in different translations if possible. What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? According to Paul, how is the New Covenant different to the Old Covenant. What are the implications of this for us today?
5. What is the revolutionary significance of the four canonical gospels being written in Greek? Is “the Word of God” the Bible in Greek? The Bible in English? The original words of Jesus in Aramaic? Or something more?
6. When Paul spoke to Jews, he quoted the Hebrew Bible. When he shared the gospel with Greeks, he quoted their own poets and philosophers. What are the implications for the church today?
7. What does it say about the value God attributes to specific words associated with his message that his historical timing for inspiring the Christian Scriptures was pre-printing press?
8. How would you respond to someone who asked you the question – So, do you really believe that every word in the Bible is literally true?
9. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17, in different translations if possible. Brainstorm specific examples of what it might look like to use Scripture in cases of teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.
10. What is your response to the following quote from The Scripture Project, produced by the Centre of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, New Jersey (1998-2002)? Scripture is like a musical score that must be played or sung in order to be understood; therefore, the church interprets Scripture by forming communities of prayer, service, and faithful witness.