

Who Cares about the Bible?:

Taking Scripture Seriously

by Tyler Schwaller

In my first article, I expressed suspicion that the Bible is most often deployed in church debates as a rhetorical tool meant to give authority to one's own arguments. Otherwise, it simply does not make sense, for example, when scripture is quoted to define what is "good sexuality," while immigration is "too political" for ancient texts to have any contemporary relevance.

The problem, of course, is that the Bible debates itself. Are women valuable leaders in the church or supposed to be silent? Is slavery a fact of life, or are Christians compelled to end exploitative practices? We can actually make Bible-based arguments on all sides of issues.

How, then, can the Bible be "the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine" as we United Methodists say in our *Discipline*? If we are going to take scripture seriously, the question becomes *how* we take it seriously.

John Wesley is quite helpful. The Bible might have been *the* primary source for determining Christian Truth; however, if we pay attention to how Wesley read our sacred texts, we find that scripture is not a kind of rulebook for our lives.

Living biblically, according to Wesley, is having faith in God's promises, which are revealed in the Bible, and thereupon experiencing the transformative power of grace.

First and foremost, the Bible serves to show us that when we step into God's covenant through Jesus, God will work through us, not necessarily conforming to a singular script but in various ways that bring good news to the world. Then, how we live is "biblical" insofar as the ideals within scripture become defining characteristics of our own selves.

In this way, the Bible is a measuring stick more than a judgment rod. That is, as Wesley believed, we can measure authentic faith when we see good fruits—which are biblical values like *mercy, truth, justice, righteousness, joy, and love*—spring forth in and around believers.

In the next issue, we will delve more deeply into the complexity of diverse responses to and experiences of the Bible. For now, though, imagine if our standards for ordination and measures of effective ministry did not *predetermine* right and wrong ways of being but waited to see what God might be doing—even unexpectedly—in others.

May we look for and value the good and biblical works that God inspires through our faith.

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