

CREDO - I BELIEVE!

Scripture: The Word of God

Introduction (2 MINUTES)

The Reformed faith takes theology seriously. We believe God has given us minds to know God and hearts to love God. But the big question is: 'How do we know God'?

In one sense our quest for the knowledge of God is the most important issue we can deal with in life. We need to know God, just as we need to know ourselves. We need to know both who God is and who God is in relation to who we are. That's why John Calvin began his Institutes of the Christian Religion with the famous sentence: 'nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves'.

This session we will look at why the Bible is important in helping us to know God. We will consider its authority and its inspiration.

Starter: (25 MINS)

What is your favourite Bible passage – and why?

If someone were to say to you the Bible is a book of fairy stories and myths – how would you reply?

Bible Passages (15 MINS)

The Reformed faith has always emphasised that God is made known to us in and through the Holy Scriptures. We turn to the Bible to gain knowledge of God.

Are there any other ways of gaining knowledge about God? Are these ways accurate and authoritative?

The scriptures of the Old and New Testament have been central to the Christian faith because Christians have believed that through them God is revealed. We can guess who or what God is like, but unless God 'reveals Himself' then we will only have our best guesses and hunches.

The Bible records how God revealed Himself to humanity. There are number of encounters and covenants in the Old Testament that God made with individuals.

For example (don't read the passage just mention them): Abram and Sarai - Genesis 12.1-3

Noah - Genesis 6

Moses and the people of Israel - Exodus 2

David - 2 Chronicles 21.7

In the New Testament God's supreme covenant was made with Jesus Christ **Read: 1 Cor 11.22-26**

The Bible portrays a God who is revealed (the Hebrew word *galah* literally means 'to uncover') and who seeks a relationship of love, peace, and justice with humanity. In the Bible we meet a God who communicates, who calls, speaks, acts, liberates, saves, heals and shows us who God is.

The Bible is an account of all that. God's revelation also takes written form:

Look up the following scriptures (distribute them around the group) :

Thus says the Lord: Obadiah 1.1; Nahum 1.12, Exodus 24.12, Joshua 24.26, Jeremiah 30.2, Ezekiel 43.11

Where does the New Testament come from?

The gospels were originally circulated in communities of faith as oral traditions (stories passed on by word of mouth). They were later collected together and written up and edited by the gospel writers.

Paul's letters were distributed as written documents within the early churches. John was told to write up his visions (see Revelation 1.11).

The early church began to regard certain writings as authoritative and eventually 'canonical' ('canon' literally means a measuring rod). The New Testament 'Canon' was finalised in 367AD.

Human or Divine or a bit of both? (20 mins)

Two New Testament texts point to what is often referred to as the *inspiration of scripture*.

Read 2 Timothy 3.16-17

What do you understand by the term 'inspired by God' or 'God Breathed'?

Read 2 Peter 1.21

This passage emphasise the means God uses to convey God's divine message. How do you understand how God would 'move' someone?

The Bible was written by human beings at a particular time, culture and context reflecting their worldviews, religious ideas and cultural customs. With the rise of science, advances in historical thinking, biblical criticism and philosophical questioning, the view that the Bible was God's divine revelation and an authoritative word has been severely challenged.

The Reformed tradition has highly emphasised the importance of scripture as the means by which God's will and purposes are made known. Scripture is the source of our knowledge of Jesus Christ, who is made known by preaching the gospel message. The Holy Spirit gives the illumination of faith by which we experience the power of scripture and God's revelation of Himself within our own lives. John Calvin said: 'the same Spirit who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded'. The scriptures are authoritative for Christian belief and the life of faith.

The Reformed theologians have held a number of views about the Bible:

1. *The Bible is a book of inerrant facts*: this view believes that the Bible must be accurate in all that it teaches. Since God is perfect and cannot lie and scripture is the 'word of God' scripture must be perfect and without error.
2. *Scripture as a witness to revelation*: scripture only becomes authoritative as it witnesses to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit brings the bible alive for some people. For others it is just a book.
3. *A divine message in human thought forms*: God's message of salvation is presented through the words of human writers. Though they were 'inspired' they also share the limitations of being human, sinful and bound b culture and time. The purpose of scripture is not to present inerrant facts but to tell the story of salvation.

Discuss these views.

CONCLUSION (5 MINS)

Our challenge over the coming months is to write our own Credo: I believe....

At the end of this discussion what would you say you believe about the Bible?