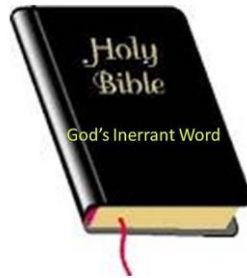


DEFENDING AN INERRANT BIBLE

“MYTHBUSTERS: BIBLICAL LITERALISM” SERMON BY PASTOR REIST



LINK:

<https://www.etowncob.org/Sermons/Mythbusters%3A-Biblical-Literalism%2C-Taking-Scripture-Seriously>

Pastor Pam Reist, a pastor at the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren, on Feb. 24, 2019, made an astonishing sermon. The sermon has “Biblical Literalism” in the title, but the series “Mythbusters” should indicate this sermon criticizes literal Bible translation, rather than defends it. First of all, we should know that the following year Reist temporarily lost her denominational pastorship by performing a homosexual marriage. (The fact it was not permanent tells you something about the COB.) However, she is now back as Executive Pastor of Congregational Life at the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren. Secondly, I think we should know a little about the denomination's belief in Biblical inerrancy and willingness to pursue that belief.

The church’s founder, Alexander Mack, was considered a “radical pietist.” Pietistic, in this context, means living a Christian life using the Bible rather than church theology as a guidepost. Radical refers to the amount of influence given to the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Brethren believe in the priesthood of all believers, which gives

liberal tolerance to biblical interpretation by each member. In other words, it is not always what the Bible says, it is what one thinks it says. This has historically caused the church to be ambivalent about many issues. Without the Bible as a means of final judgement, many congregations have lost their way. We are left with a denomination that is afraid to enforce their own belief statements.

Two statements from a 1979 committee that studied the church's stand on Biblical interpretation give us some clarity on the church's official stance on Biblical inerrancy.

1. Sec, I(6) "Scripture sets forth God's word with power and authority. Because those who speak for God in the biblical account were guided by the Holy Spirit, ALL SCRIPTURE IS ATTESTED AS "INSPIRED OF GOD" or "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is thus not only a great work of literature, but a canon of faith and life for the community of believers."

2. Sec IV(1) We affirm the inspiration of the Bible, acknowledging with mind and heart that the Bible is a book of the Spirit. Both the biblical writers and those whose witness contributed to their message were empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. Because of this presence of God enabling and equipping the biblical writers, WE HEAR GOD'S OWN WORD addressing us through the words of scripture. We are not yet agreed on whether inspiration is a finished or continuing process. Some of us believe that God's Spirit inspires new prophetic witness in the community of believers in every age, in continuity with the biblical witness. Others of us believe that the work of the Spirit in guiding the biblical writers was unique and now completed, and that the present role of the Spirit is entirely one of illumining what the Bible says."

It is clear to me that the Church of the Brethren has an official stance that God is speaking through the authors of the Bible and is therefore, Inerrant. In fact, the following scripture shows us God

has this power.

Mat 10:19-20 NIV..... But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. The Brethren have no creed except to New Testament. As far as biblical interpretation, Reist, like many other Brethren, are at the far end of the scale, ready to fall off. Fortunately, all congregations are not as liberal as hers.

Reist explains that the Bible is only a bunch of stories written by religious men to convey what they perceived as God's will. She denies the divine revelation and infallibility of the Bible. In other words, the Word of God is not the words of God, but stories made up by men. Moreover, Reist denies the literal story of Noah and presents it as an example of such biblical fables. I find her sermon both factually inaccurate and spiritually void. I do not know pastor Reist. She may be a very nice person, but we certainly do not share either the same values or the same facts.

The first thing Reist does is give examples of metaphors. Of course, there are perhaps as many as a hundred or more metaphors in the Bible. Moreover, most of the metaphors are quite apparent, and others are revealed by putting things in scriptural context. For example, Jesus is the Lamb of God, but people who interpret the Bible literally do not think he is a sheep. Reist, then applies the occasional use of metaphors to all 30,102 verses of the Bible. To her, the Bible seems to be one big allegory instead of just the actual allegories, such as the parables. She then condemns those who believe in the story of Noah's Ark by saying they believe the story as if came straight from the New York Times. What? Is she unaware that most Bible believing Christians detest the New York Times? Even in sarcasm, she should have used Fox News. Nevertheless, the New York Times was not there for Jesus to read, but Jesus did refer to the story of Noah's ark twice and NEVER

explained it was an allegory.

Reist seems to state her main litmus test is that we must look at the Bible through “scientific sensibilities.” I would like to remind her that, among many other errors, science once stated the earth is flat. It is hard to believe, but Reist makes a ridiculously false claim that nowhere does the Bible “claim to be inerrant.” In fact, she goes on to say.

“We have no reason to believe that the authors of the Bible ever imagined that that what they were writing was somehow supernaturally guaranteed to be factually accurate. Rather, biblical authors wrote in order to be persuasive.” Evidently Reist reads a different Bible than I do. Both my NIV and KJV prove Reist’s statement completely false, stating the Bible is both from God and inerrant. How can any pastor not know the following 4 verses?

1. Pro 30:5, KJV..... Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

NIV - Pro 30:5 "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

2. 2Pe 1:20, KJV..... Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

NIV - 2 Pet 1:20, above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

3. 1Co 2:13, KJV..... Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

NIV - 1 Cor 2:13-14, This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words

taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

The man without the Spirit does not

accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are

foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

4. Gal 1:11-12 KJV..... But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus

NIV - Gal 1:11-12 I want you to know, brothers and sisters that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Next, Reist makes another statement that is quite confusing. She says that “Jesus did not take scripture literally himself.” This is quite confusing, given the fact that she then states, “He [Jesus] frequently said, “You have heard it was said, but I say to you.” She actually uses what Jesus literally said to prove the Bible should not be taken literally. If she were consistent with her figurative theology, she should have started out by explaining Jesus actually didn’t say a single word in the Bible. Instead, we have 5 authors telling us their version of what Jesus said. In other words, if Reist was going to be consistent, she should have said, “What Matthew said Jesus said,” or “What Jesus supposedly said.” Nevertheless, Reist tells us Jesus himself often corrected the erroneous writings of the Old Testament writers. As an example, she points out Jesus often said, “You have heard that it was said, but I say to you.” To the contrary, all five instances where Jesus says this, Jesus was comparing Old Covenant law with the New Covenant law, not correcting errors. In addition, I’d like to ask why Matthew’s account of Jesus correcting the Old Testament is factual, when she claims the whole Bible is filled with errors? Maybe she thinks the COB slogan, “No creed but the New Testament,” means just the New Testament is inerrant. Seriously, Jesus’ respect for the inerrancy of all scripture is captured in the following well known verse:

“Mat 5:18 NIV..... For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

Furthermore, Jesus, referenced Noah and the flood twice. Apparently not being able to explain the Bible as well as Reist, Jesus referred to a literal Noah’s ark story. Of course, according to Reist, we can’t believe what Jesus supposedly said, because it is neither the Word of God nor “factually accurate.” Do not forget, however, we can take Jesus literally when Reist quotes Jesus to prove the Bible is not literal. Reist continues with another factually incorrect statement.

Reist states, “The early Christian church did not embrace a literal understanding. Most Christians throughout history would not have read the Bible literally. It’s a relatively recent thing. The factual inerrancy of the Bible was first promoted just 300 years ago as a reaction to the enlightenment which ushered in modern science.” Actually, divine revelation and inerrancy in scripture were not only stated in modern times, but the Catholic Church reaffirmed a long-held belief. In 1965, the Catholic Church wrote “*Dei Verbum*” (the Word of God). This paper dates divine revelation of scripture back to the Council of Trent in 1545. However, Irenaeus, who lived in the second century, wrote,

“Being most assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit” (*Against Heresies*, 2.28.2, in ANF, 1:399).

So, in reality, a literal understanding of the Bible in the church goes back as many as 2000 years, not just 300.

Believe it or not, I knew in advance one thing Reist was leading up to. Sure enough, about 16 minutes into the sermon, she applies her figurative view of the Bible to justify same sex marriage. Of course, if one does not believe the Bible is divinely inspired the and

factually accurate word of God, anything goes! Reist surprisingly also implies that Jesus is not the only way to salvation. I surely don't understand how even a figurative interpretation explain Jesus' words, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

Reist, then talks about exegesis and hermeneutics. In addition to reading a literal Bible translation, I believe one should use proper word definition, proper grammar, recognition of all figures of speech such as metaphors, as well as proper context. I literally (no pun intended) find it funny that Reist boldly proclaims the word "inerrant" is not in the Bible but ignores the fact that neither are the words "exegesis" nor "hermeneutics." are not in the Bible either.

Reist, then uses a scripture in Leviticus to show that tattooing one's body is forbidden only because of literal interpretation. To the contrary, many of the laws in Leviticus are part of the Old Covenant and we must look to the New Testament. For the issue of tattooing, one can consider 2 scriptures:

1. 1Co 6:19 NIV..... "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;"

2. Joh 2:21 NIV..... But the temple he had spoken of was his body. Although tattooing is open to discussion, homosexual marriage is not, since Jesus said marriage should be between a man and a woman. Of most importance, Jesus gave the reason for his statement so no one would be confused. He said the reason goes back to Adam and Eve.

Mat 19:4-5 NIV..... "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?"

SUMMARY

I will start by recapping the errors and misleading information of Pastor Reist.

1. Because metaphors are not literal, then the whole Bible is not literal. However, as I have shown, this is incorrect.
2. The Bible never claims it is inerrant. However, I have shown many verses disprove this claim.
3. Biblical miracles such as Noah's Ark are only stories made up by men in order to be persuasive. However, I have shown this as illogical for a Christian to believe this. In addition, even Reist points out that roughly 2/3 of Christians disagree with her.
4. Reist promotes homosexual marriage as being biblically acceptable. If I were to quote Leviticus regarding homosexuality, I am sure she would say it doesn't apply because Leviticus is Old Testament. But then why does it apply to Tattoos? Nevertheless, Jesus said marriage is between a man and a woman based on Adam and Eve as an example because God made them male and female. Don't forget, even the COB denominational view is against homosexual marriages.
5. The word "inerrant" is not found in the Bible. However, I have pointed out Reist fails to mention that neither are the words "exegesis" and "hermeneutics" are in the Bible, which she uses to interpret the Bible.
6. Jesus admitted errors and corrected them in the Bible. However, Jesus only mentioned these changes on the context of explaining the New Covenant. He implied scripture is inerrant and actually said all scripture is eternal.
7. "Scientific sensibilities" should be used when reading the Bible. However, science has been proven wrong many times throughout history, plus, any belief in God or Jesus requires faith.
8. Divine revelation and inerrancy of the Bible only began about 300 years ago. However, history shows church founders embracing these principles as far back as 2000 years ago.

It is no wonder Reist does not find the Bible as "factually true and inerrant." Not believing in a factually true and inerrant New Testament is like a lawyer who brings 7 witnesses to the stand and

says, "What my witnesses say is not literal or factually accurate, but it is "true" (as Reist says) because they are "persuasive. Each juror should pick what the Holy Spirit tells them is true. Do not treat these witnesses like they speak the word of God."

In contrast, I believe the written testimony of 6 witnesses who all knew or saw Jesus. I also believe the second-handwritten testimony of Mark. I believe the Bible is accurate and erroneous because none of these witnesses gave a disclaimer that their accounts are not factually true or inerrant. Instead, all their works imply they are divinely revealed and factually accurate. I also consider the written accounts of 2 independent historians. I find all these proof sources perfectly logical.

However, what I find illogical is believing in God, when your main source of information is a book one admits is a compilation of erroneous man-made stories, made to be persuasive. Hence, there is no way of telling what is true. Perhaps loving your neighbor was never literally said by God?

Reist questions the major amazing stories of the Bible. She emphasizes the creation story, the Flood, and even the Easter resurrection story of Jesus as not being factually correct, but true. To this I say, "which is the greater miracle, that a man lived inside a fish for three days, or that a man was born of a virgin, claimed to be God's only son, did great miracles, healed the sick, and rose from the dead in 3 days?" In other words, if you do not believe the former, you certainly cannot believe the latter. After all, the whole story of Jesus does not meet the test of "scientific sensibilities" proposed by Reist. Who would believe a man with no earthly Father came from heaven, walked on water, was crucified, came back to life, and went back to heaven? Well, I do!

Finally, I want to make clear I do not believe every single word

today is the exact same word God revealed to the authors of the Bible. To believe, that, one must believe the Bible only applies to people who read Hebrew. In addition to hundreds of languages, there are numerous Bible versions. The difference between me and Reist is that I believe every idea is literally revealed and factually true in any language. Reist does not believe anything is revealed by God or factually true. My beliefs are based on the Bible, but her Bible is based on her beliefs. That is why I believe in the miracles of the Bible, and she does not. After all. Miracles do not meet her "scientific sensibilities."

Note: "Church of the Brethren" should not be confused with the "Brethren Church" or any other church having the word "Brethren" in its name. Also, as I have mentioned, not all COB congregations are liberal. Additionally, some congregations have left the denomination because, regrettably, the liberal wing is becoming more influential.