

**BIBLE 101: DOES THE BIBLE HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TODAY?**

*Romans 12:9-18    Philippians 4:4-9*

My Dad will soon celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. His birth in 1927 was the year of the first transatlantic telephone call from New York City to London. It was also year that Charles Lindbergh flew the first transatlantic solo flight from New York to Paris in his plane, the Spirit of St. Louis. Now eight decades later thousands of planes with thousands of passengers circle the globe daily and most of those passengers have a cell phone in hand – text messaging to friends and family or surfing the internet at 30,000 feet. I share this to illustrate that the world has not only changed in one man’s lifetime, it is still changing. In fact, we are now living in what is called “exponential times” – an age of accelerating change and increasing complexity. As a result, the personal, political and social issues and challenges that we face could not have been imagined by my Dad’s parents 80 years ago, let alone the first readers of the Bible – issues like stem-cell research, surrogate motherhood, global climate crisis, gay marriage, assisted-suicide, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, immigration, bio-genetic engineering, and so much more. But these are some of the issues of our time and so I conclude our Bible 101 series with the question: Does the Bible have anything to say today? Or another way to ask the question: Is this ancient book we call the Bible really relevant to the issues of our frenetic, post-modern world of micro-chips and satellites?

When faced with today’s complex moral, ethical issues we can’t simply open up the Bible and point to a verse and conclude that this is God’s word on a particular issue. After all there is a distinction between “what the Bible meant” in its original context and “what it might mean” in today’s world. At the same time we cannot ignore or discount the Scriptures and simply conclude that it has nothing to say that would be relevant in our dialogue with the issues of the day. As people of faith, we must always be engaged in a careful and prayerful reading of Scripture if we are to be in a living conversation with God and thus discern God’s will for our lives as we tackle difficult issues and face tough decisions.

When thinking about the use of the Bible today in relation to the complex and challenging issues of our time, what can be said for sure is that the Bible provides some fundamental principles to guide our thinking and our action.

Two of these guiding principles are very familiar to you as I quote them often. Micah 6:8, *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.”* Matthew 22:38, *“What is the greatest commandment? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all you soul, and with all your mind... (and) You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* Both the prophet of God and Jesus the beloved Son of God make love for God and love for persons the essential foundation of ethics, the guiding principle for all our decisions and actions. Paul fleshes out what love looks like in his letter to the church at Rome: *Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor... Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers... Live in harmony with one another... Do no repay evil for evil,... live peaceable with all...* When we commit ourselves to these ethical guidelines, we will be on the way to discerning what God requires of us. We will more likely honor God and honor one another when our response to the issues of our time are based on the ethic of love.

The Bible is primarily the story of God who loves us and calls us to a life of love, as the writer of 1<sup>st</sup> John put it, “We love because God first loved us”. To read the Bible then is to be formed and transformed by this ethic. There may not be definitive answers to the issues that we face today but what we can do as people of faith is to think Biblically about these issues, to develop a world view and a personal ethic that is shaped by Scripture. What helps us most in this regard, of course, is Jesus. He is the ultimate revelation of God's will for humanity. In Him we have the authoritative source to deal with complex moral issues. In Him we see what love looks like and how it is lived out in our lives and relationships. That’s why we must keep reading the gospels especially year in and year out to discover anew what God requires of us in our day and time with the moral questions that we face.

Now the Bible is not only relevant today because it provides for us the fundamental guiding principle of love for all our decisions and actions. It is relevant because it tells us that we are loved. Let me illustrate. During World War II a German pastor named Martin Niemoeller opposed Hitler and thus spent much of the war in German prison camps. They took everything away from him except his Bible. After his release, Niemoeller gave this testimony about the Bible: "What did this Book mean to me during the long and weary years of solitary confinement and then for the last four years at Dauchau? The word of God was simply everything to me, comfort and strength, guidance and hope, master of my days and companion of my nights, the bread that kept me

from starvation and the water of life that refreshed my soul." The Bible not only calls us to an ethic of love, it speaks to God's abiding love for us. That, in and of itself, makes Holy Scripture relevant for our lives.