



Friends and the Bible

Friends' appreciation of the Bible and other scriptures springs from our faith that there is in everyone the capacity to be open and responsive to the experience of the Divine. The possibility of that experience has been present in every place and time, even before the Bible was written, whenever and wherever people have earnestly sought communion with God and an understanding of God's will.

The influence of the Bible upon the Society of Friends has been both unique and profound. George Fox knew the Bible intimately prior to his great "openings", openings that dealt radically with both religious and social issues and that continue to influence our Society. He insisted that his openings came first by God's "immediate spirit and power" but were later found to be "agreeable to Holy Scriptures." Like many friends since, he found the Bible to be not the Word of God but the record of the experience of God in many lives, serving as an important touchstone against which to test our leadings.

Friends at all times have brought to their reading of these scriptures light from other sources. Through historical, literary and cultural studies as well as sifted experience we have enriched the insights provided by our reading of the Bible. As a Society we have been generally freed from the so-called conflict between science and faith, finding instead therein a mutual illumination.

Friends know from experience that knowledge of the Bible widely shared in a Meeting deepens the spiritual power of both spoken ministry and inward listening. The Bible, moreover, even those parts that seem alien and uncongenial, challenges us to examine more closely our current assumptions and leadings. Maturing insight and experience often discover that passages once apparently irrelevant and lifeless speak truth with power.

Given the Bible's importance in shaping the ways Friends have expressed their experience of the presence and leading of God and its power to illumine our worship and our vocal ministry, we are encouraged to know it well.

We do not, however, consider scriptures, whether Hebrew or Christian or those of other religious faiths to be the final revelation of God's nature and will. Rather, we believe in continuing revelation. This term emphasizes our ongoing communion with the Living God, our expanding sensitivity into our relationships with one another, and our growing knowledge of the universe.

Since it also has great nurturing power for individuals, knowledge of the Bible opens our spirits to the religious power of art, music, and literature. The Bible warns us as well of the violence that can spring from our individual self-righteousness and of the hard-heartedness rooted in our alienation from god. It offers the words to express the guidance that can flow from our responsiveness to the Light Within, as in Amos' call that we "let justice roll down like waters" (Amos 5:24); as in Jesus' citing the two great commandments (Mt 22: 37-39); and as in Paul's injunction that we speak the truth in love." (Eph. 4:15). Yet most importantly, the Bible offers us hope, as in Jesus' assurance: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." (Mt. 7:07).

This article was published as part of a PYM document at least 10 years ago. But I can't find the original – I only have this excerpted piece that I gave to FDS teachers in my Meeting when teaching the Bible. If anyone knows where it originally came from, please let me know!

*~ Christie Duncan-Tessmer
Children's RE Coordinator, PYM*