

So What's the Deal with the Bible?

A few weeks ago, Barb Hunger brought a question to me. She had been on the YWCA's annual religious tour and had visited a church that has a large staff, including several pastors. Barb overcame her natural shyness to ask, "Are any of your ministers women?" The pastor who was leading the tour explained to her that the Bible does not permit women to serve as pastors. So Barb's question to me the next Sunday was: "Is that right? Is that really in the Bible?"

I don't recall my exact words (I tend to be a tad wordy), but my answer to that question is: "Well, there are a few passages in the New Testament epistles that some people read that way. And, *if* assume that those instructions in the epistles are intended as universal rules instead of specific instructions for specific churches, and *if* ignore all the other places in the Bible that do in fact speak of women called by God to teach and to prophesy, and *if* aren't willing to challenge teachings that seem hopelessly screwy, why then you can believe that."

The problem is that this answer hardly seems to help. If the Bible has to be read in light of its historical and cultural context *and* light of the rest of scripture *and* be tested against reason and experience and common sense, *and* there are passages of scripture that conflict with each other, then can't anyone make the Bible say anything they want it to say?

And if that's so, does the Bible have any value at all?

Yes. It does. It has ultimate value.

But the thing is: the Bible isn't easy. Anyone who tells you that the Bible is simple and straightforward and offers the direct answers to all our questions is either ignorant or lying. The Bible is tremendously rich and varied and, like everything else worthwhile, takes work to fully appreciate. In January, we're going to begin doing some of that work.

First, on Sunday, January 22, I will begin a new sermon series: **Questions Thinking People Ask About the Bible.** wrote it? What do we mean by "inspired"? Who decided which books got in? What about that Gospel of Judas that was in the news a few years back? Why are there two different testaments, and do they really talk about the same God? The Old Testament God seems so much edgier, doesn't he? And what do we do about passages in ten-sion with each other? Let us think together about these questions, and if you have friends who have these questions, bring them along.

Second, beginning Wednesday, January 25 (and beginning again on Sunday morning, January 29), we will delve into the actual content of scripture in a new class, taught by Pastor Jerry: "**Scripture Core.**" Learn how it all fits together so that we can reclaim this gift of God in all its richness and beauty. And difficulty.