

YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW
Session Two
Class leadership instructions

Introduction Notes

A. The prayer meeting controversy centered on the question of whether prayer meetings were "evangelical or unevangelical."

1. They were asking whether prayer meetings were "gospel or not gospel."
 - a. The word gospel means good news but they used it in the sense of whether it was according to God's word.

The Bible, God's infallible and inerrant word, is the supreme and final authority for what we do and believe.

 - b. Their question was whether these meetings were biblical or not.
2. William Gehman and his followers believed that they were biblical, or at the very least were not unbiblical, in their requests.
 - a. The first recorded minutes (see the quote from Verhandlungen, page 24) shows that the issue of the significance of the Bible had been settled.
 - b. What they were saying was that if someone was convinced by the Bible to do something, they should be free to do it.

B. From the beginning, the Evangelical Mennonites were prepared to wrestle with what they believed.

1. The Evangelical Mennonites began almost immediately to work on a doctrinal statement.
2. Discussion: What is a doctrinal statement and why is it important? Why not simply say, "We believe the Bible"?

Listen for or make the following points.

- a. **Most everyone who claims to be a Christian, including cult members, say they believe the Bible.**
- b. **A doctrinal statement helps you and your church know what you believe about the Bible.**
- c. **The purpose of a doctrinal statement is not to divide us from other denominations but to state the truth from the Bible to which we share a commitment.**

3. In formulating their views of the Bible, the Evangelical Mennonites showed they were a little out of step with other Mennonites.

- a. They chose Scripture over tradition and community practice.
 - b. They said, "We are prepared to go where God leads us through His word."
- 4. The Evangelical Mennonites began to prepare a statement of what they believed.
 - a. They worked for several years to put their statement together. **(See the statements from Verhandlungen listed on the student sheet. Have members of the class take turns reading the statements.)**
 - b. The Evangelical Mennonites saw the Bible as Menno Simons saw it and intended to identify themselves as Mennonites.
- 5. Their doctrinal statement, which was completed in 1866, was the first Mennonite doctrinal statement in North America.
 - a. Other Mennonites accepted the Dortrecht Confession which was prepared in 1632.
 - b. The leaders of the Evangelical Mennonites felt that the Dortrecht Confession was not adequate for them.
- C. The Bible has been a key issue in the story of the Bible Fellowship Church.
 - 1. It may be the single most driving and shaping force of our History.
 - 2. The question is still being asked by leaders and members of the Bible Fellowship Church, "What does the Bible say?"

Question Notes

- 1. This is just a sampling of Scripture references.
- 4. Take the time to find out what infallible and inerrant mean. Find out why some people believe the Bible is infallible but not inerrant.
- 5. Think about whether Christians have come to believe that the truth of the Bible needs to be supplemented by teachings of modern psychology and sociology. What are the benefits and dangers of using the truth of such disciplines along with the truth of the Bible?
- 7. Get some helpful suggestions from the class. Be prepared with some of your own.

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THE BIBLE

"It was decided that each child of the Lord, having proved himself such by his walk and conversation, shall have entire freedom to express himself according to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost" (Verhandlungen, p. 24).

PREPARING THE DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

"Resolved: That God's Word and the teaching of our author Menno Simons in this as well as in all other articles of faith shall be taken as our fundamental rule and way" (1861, Verhandlungen p. 29)

"Finally the whole confession was laid aside and the New Testament accepted as rule and order enough for our society" (1862, Verhandlungen p. 30).

"7. Because every so often different views in regard to our confession of faith and our religious practices are expressed, we vow that we will hold on to the teachings of Christ, the views of the Apostles and Menno and shall conduct our church services like the brethren in Canada under Brother Hoch's district" (1863, Verhandlungen p. 33).

"4. A committee was appointed to lay down general rules and a brief statement of faith of our denomination, based on God's Word and the teaching of Menno Simons, and to report at the next Conference for further discussion" (1865, Verhandlungen p. 44).

"Notwithstanding all the trouble of the committee, should however in the future anything, of which we have now not thought, be wanting (which we do not doubt at all) in this Doctrine of Faith and Church Discipline, we would take as a remedy God's Word in hand; for it is our sincere wish to take the simple and secure Bible way, as Christ, the Apostles, and Menno Simon have taught, in order to serve Almighty God, and in pursuance of Christian order to cooperate with all upright Christians for the upbuilding of His glorious Kingdom upon earth, according to the grace that He will in part (sic) from time to time." (Introduction, Doctrines of Faith, Evangelical Mennonites, 1866, What Mean These Stones? p. 25).

Questions

1. What does the Bible say about itself?

-Matthew 5:17-18

-2 Timothy 3:16-17

-1 Peter 1:10-11

-2 Peter 1:21

2. How would you answer the question, what is the Bible?

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3. Compare the statement of 1865 about the Scriptures to the current statement in our Articles of Faith. How are they alike? How are they different?

"6. Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for our Instruction in the Ways of Salvation.

We believe and confess also, that the Holy Scriptures contain the counsel of God, as far as it is necessary for us to know it for our salvation, indeed, that nothing which is not contained therein and which cannot be pointed out therefrom, can be made binding on a person as an article of faith, or as a doctrine, which he must receive and believe necessary in order to be saved.

The Holy Scriptures we understand to consist of those Canonical Books of the Old and of the New Testament, which at all times have been received in the Church without any doubt as such" (Doctrine of Faith, Evangelical Mennonites, 1866, What Mean These Stones? p. 28).

"Article I The Holy Scriptures.

The Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, are the inspired, infallible Word of God, a divine revelation, the original writings of which were verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are the supreme and final authority of faith and conduct.

Inspiration is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the Scriptures so that their words would convey the thoughts He wished conveyed, would bear a proper relationship to the thoughts of the other inspired book, and be kept free from error of fact, doctrine and judgment.

The Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, written, are composed of all books of the Old Testament and New Testament, namely:..." (Articles of Faith, the Bible Fellowship Church).

4. What do you believe it means that the Bible is infallible and inerrant? Do you think it is important to believe that the Bible is infallible and inerrant? Explain.

5. Does the Bible have the answers to man's greatest and deepest needs or is additional truth needed? Explain.

6. What are some of the reasons why we ought to read and study the Bible?

7. What are some helpful ways to read and study the Bible?