

Questions – Role Play



Episode 5: Where did the bible Come from?

Leaders Introduction

In Episodes 1 & 2 we laid the foundations of understanding the importance of trust and the inevitability of people having an ultimate authority, be it reason, experience or revelation. We saw that reason and experience are important in the Christian faith, but not ultimate; they are used in thinking about faith but are not the content of faith. We began to look at why revelation from God in his word the Bible, as an ultimate authority is reasonable when you think about it and experience it.

Episodes 3 to 6 look in more detail at the reasonableness of the Bible as a foundation for knowledge by considering the Bible's historical reliability. The episodes break it down as follows:

Episode 3 – Looks at the idea of apparent contradictions in the bible

Episode 4 – Considers the question of whether the Bible was simply made up

Episode 5 – Examines how the Bible was put together (the canon of scripture)

Episode 6 – Looks at transmission and translation, how the Bible was passed down to us today.

Each of these issues is a part of the picture of the reliability of the Bible. In normal conversations they won't come up as nice neat separate subjects, but we have created an episode for each one to help focus on the specific aspects of each question in turn.

In considering the question of historical reliability we might be tempted to move over to a wholly evidentialist approach to apologetics (see the introductory video for what that means). But whilst the focus does indeed shift towards that, there is still half an eye on the key ideas unpacked in Episodes 1 & 2, namely that no one is neutral everyone has a faith position. So in considering evidence there is a reason why some people consider it convincing and others don't; none of us are objective.

Leader's Questions

1. How would you describe Saleem's approach to engaging Damien with the Christian faith?

He is conversational and asks a couple of questions just like Holly and Damien, but he actually treads a good middle path between Damien's hesitancy and Holly's assertiveness. He mostly asks questions to check Damien is still following him and wanting to continue;

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Leader's Questions

2. **Holly and Salim draw an analogy between mushrooms and the way in which the books of the New Testament were collated into the canon of the Bible, how does the analogy work?**

(i.e. explain how the selection of the books was like sorting mushrooms into poisonous and non-poisonous);

Putting a poisonous mushroom into the non-poisonous box doesn't make it non-poisonous. Sorting things in this way is merely recognising a pre-existing reality. So the early church were not deciding which books to put in to the New Testament, but which books were in the New Testament; they were recognising what already existed;

3. **When it comes to recognising the reality of whether a mushrooms is poisonous or non-poisonous and the reality of whether a book is part of the Bible or not what is the main difference?**

The main difference is that in sorting mushrooms you can use the scientific method to recognise poisonous mushrooms (or a pre-existing recognition aid that is based on previous scientific testing). But the scientific method was not used for deciding which books are part of the Bible;

4. **Why wasn't the scientific method used for deciding which books are in the canon?**

Because the scientific method is a process of testing the material world to discover how it works; it cannot be used to think about and investigate things that are not directly part of the material world (in this case the work of God in the material world), it would be a category mistake;

5. **If the scientific method is inappropriate for deciding on the books of the Bible, what methods would be appropriate?**

This question leads us into the lengthy discussion of the historical processes that the early church went through but also the spiritual question which Holly raises about God's control of the process which again raises the issue of people's starting points (their presuppositions). How you work through these points will depend on where your group wants to start, but we suggest beginning with the historical process as follows:

- Historically the early church had a process for ensuring that the books accepted into the canon of the New Testament (and so given the status of scripture, or God's word) included:
 - It had to be written by an apostle, early church leader or the follower of an apostle who had direct connection with the teaching of Jesus (e.g. John Mark who wrote Mark's gospel or Luke) – NB: You may want to explain that by Apostle the early church meant one of Jesus' 12 disciples, including Paul;
 - Books written after the first generation of Jesus' followers were excluded, even if it looked good (Damien asks if books were included simply because the early church liked what they read in them, these points deal with that question without being harsh);
 - Whilst Salim and Holly don't mention it it is also worth noting that the early church would not accept books that did not agree with the content of the rest of the canon (hence in part why the book of James took so long to be accepted).

6. **What do you think about the way in which Sylvia very quickly 'bats away' Holly's point about**

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6. **Damien is understandably sceptical about the historical process that Salim and Holly set out why?**

Because people make mistakes. Salim's response is fair, just because people make mistakes it doesn't mean the early church did in this instance, as people can also get things right. This raises the question of starting points or presuppositions directly and Holly takes us there;

7. **Where does Holly end up in addressing Damien's concerns with the potential for people to make mistakes?**

She quotes Jesus as saying that the spirit will guide his disciples (who become the Apostles) into all truth and remind them of all he has taught (John 14:26 & 16:13);

8. **So we are to believe something about the Bible because the Bible tells us so.....what does that remind you of?**

It is harking back to the idea of needing to have a foundation on which you stand which will inevitably require some form of circular reasoning (as we saw in episodes 1 & 2);

9. **How does Salim take things in a helpful direction at the end?**

He recommends that Damien start reading the Bible, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." This moves the discussion from apologetics towards evangelism and reading the Word of God itself (NB for leaders that this is also a move to a more fideistic approach to apologetics; yes history matters and yes presuppositions are vital, but so also eventually is the apologetic of the church and the experience of reading God's word);

Role Plays

In turns have a conversation, with one person playing the role of a Christian and the other a non-Christian. Start with one of the following:

- The Bible was written by the church, they just picked out what they wanted to be in it to serve their own ends!
- I don't understand how you got the Bible, who decided which books went in?
- Hey, I've just written my own book, how do I go about getting it into the Bible?

Remind them that they are focussing on responding with a question back to the other person.

If these conversations don't go well, don't worry and tell the people in your group not to worry, it is likely that it's the first time most of them have tried any of this and like anything else it takes time to get used to..

Questions – Role Play

Group Member Questions

1. How would you describe Salim's approach to engaging Damien with the Christian faith?
2. Holly and Salim draw an analogy between mushrooms and the way in which the books of the New Testament were collated into the canon of the Bible, how does the analogy work?

(i.e. explain how the selection of the books was like sorting mushrooms into poisonous and non-poisonous)
3. When it comes to recognising the reality of whether a mushroom is poisonous or non-poisonous and the reality of whether a book is part of the Bible or not what is the main difference?
4. Why wasn't the scientific method used for deciding which books are in the canon?
5. If the scientific method is inappropriate for deciding on the books of the Bible, what methods would be appropriate?
6. Damien is understandably sceptical about the historical process that Salim and Holly set out why?
7. Where does Holly end up in addressing Damien's concerns with the potential for people to make mistakes?
8. So we are to believe something about the Bible because the Bible tells us so.....what does that remind you of?
9. How does Salim take things in a helpful direction at the end?

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