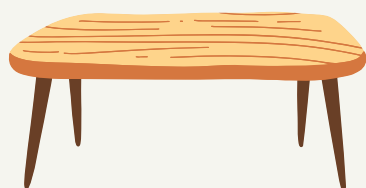


HOW DO WE APPLY THE BIBLE WELL TO THE QUESTIONS WE WRESTLE WITH TODAY?

The New Testament Christians had to work through disagreements about big issues. Because we are waiting to be completely restored, we continue to “see through a glass darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). We continue to live in a time of **progressive revelation**.

Today there are still questions about how to live faithfully which Christians disagree on, and new situations where we wrestle with how to apply God’s revealed truth well.

Four things can work together to help us make good responses.



Three (**Scripture, Reason, Tradition**) were developed by Richard Hooker (1554–1600), a prominent Anglican priest, and a fourth (**Experience**) was added by John Wesley (1703-1791).

These four “Sources of God’s revelation” work together as guidance, often overlapping to act as legs of a table, helping us discern in a balanced way.

1. Scripture: What does the Bible say?

For Christians the Bible is always the supreme source of authority, and the testing measure for everything else.

Reading it well involves:

Getting as close to the **original meaning** as possible

Being aware of our own **interpretation**, and those of **others**.

Reflecting on whether issues are seen as **first order** (in other words, essential) or second order in Scripture: “For what I received I passed on to you as of **first importance**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15)

In 434 AD Vincent of Lerins said first order things were:

That which has been believed everywhere, always and by all people.

For centuries this has acted as a guide for first order parts of the Bible.

Questions to ask:

Am I giving the Bible the full weight it needs?

Am I aware of my own interpretations?

What are first order and second order issues?



2. Reason: What makes sense?

We are God’s partners in creation gifted with the ability to think and feel, and with conscience. Reason helps us to connect and analyse various ideas, concepts, and arguments. It can help us define and defend how we view Scripture, but also our traditions and even our experiences.

Reason is not the opposite of faith – reason can be exercised **with** faith, and faith can be defended by reason. As Christians we are transformed by the “renewing of our minds.” (Romans 12:2).



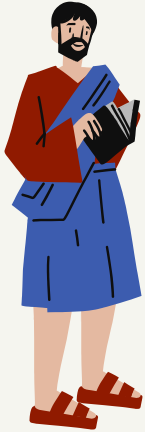
While faith might always go **beyond** reason, it never goes **against** it, and sound arguments can be made to explore and defend positions. Nevertheless, we will always be aware that no one person can be completely objective.

Questions to ask:

Do I see my ability to think as a gift as I interpret the Bible and listen to others?

Am I humble about my own brokenness as I consider this question?

3. Tradition: What have voices before us said?



Each generation of Christians does not come from nowhere, but we have inherited wisdom from those who have gone before as they have sought to apply the Bible.

They have developed principles of interpreting Scripture well and living it out. God has been active in the lives of those who have passed on their living tradition to us.

These voices have an important, but secondary role. The Church of England has historically drawn on the thinking of the early church “fathers and mothers” yet always sees these teachings as being useful only as much as they are “agreeable to the...scriptures” (Canon A5).

Questions to ask:

What voices and wisdom do I need to pay attention to?

4. Experience: How have I and others sensed God’s direct action?

God is always at work in all His creation, and in our daily lives, and therefore we expect Him to be revealing Himself in new ways. Wesley believed it was only when we experienced something personally that we could have **true confidence** in our understanding. We can be suspicious of experience because it is subjective. We think at best it can only **reinforce** our opinion, rather than **inform** it.



Yet experiences have always really happened, whether physical or psychological. The question is how much is our **interpretation** of the experience subjective? In addition, in making decisions, the experience of others can enable us to pay attention to perspectives we would be otherwise unable to understand or consider, particularly those who have been marginalised.

In making good decisions, a final principle is that it is in the context of a Spirit-led community – in which we are open to the Holy Spirit, learn from each other, and read Scripture together, that the peace of God to guide us will most likely be found.

Questions to ask:

Am I open to God speaking to me today in this question?

How am I listening to the experiences of those who can help me understand better?

Where is God at work in the world?

