

# Biblical Literacy

The following article has been adapted from a speech given by Bob Frisken at the Pacific Hills Christian School Presentation Evening, December 2000.

## **The Bible - A Spiritual lucky dip?**

**Biblical literacy**, the ability to read the Bible and understand its setting and context and to be able to apply it to everyday living alone can provide a sound moral fabric for the individual's life and for society as a whole. **Many people today have little idea of the overall sweep of the Biblical story.** The majority of Christians cannot place stories in context and they treat them as little more than moral tales from which parents, preacher and Sunday school teachers can draw illustrations about our "spiritual life".

The Bible should provide people with the cultural foundation for their life. It is the story of our people and of God's action in history. Its message is valid for today's society just as much as it is for our spiritual development. Few people could, if asked, relate the main teaching of Jesus, or relate the most significant stories of His life. **Too often, the Bible is regarded as a spiritual lucky dip. Open it at random and you may receive a message.**

## **Enlightenment Thinking**

Many fine Christian people, including many who send their children to Christian schools have been trapped by what I have called "Enlightenment thinking". This is the thought patterns and values that came in the period after the Reformation. The enlightenment thinkers believed in the supremacy of human thinking and thus promoted humanism with its emphasis on rational thought and individual autonomy. Enlightenment thinking led to the rise of evolutionary thinking to explain our origins. This in turn led to a rejection of God's authority and the secularism that marks our day. **Among Christian circles rationalism led to a rejection of the supernatural and a reinterpretation of the Bible so that man's reason became the ultimate authority not God's Word.** This sort of thinking still dominates much modern day thinking and is evident among Christians as well as non-Christians.

One of the tragedies of "enlightenment thinking" has been that **the Bible has been relegated to a small area of life called the private, religious area where it is read for devotional purposes.** The Bible should be used as a guide to everyday life and should be the foundation to our thought and action in all areas of life.

## **What's wrong with humanist ideas and values?**

I recently had a letter from a parent whose children attend a Christian school and who objected to a leaflet I wrote. In his letter he said:

*There is nothing inherently wrong with a lot of humanist ideals and values; it is really a way of living and relating close to how Jesus told us we should live, -love and respect ourselves and our fellows, striving for ideals, serving the community etc. etc. With the major difference of course that they've taken God out of the picture and do not subscribe to moral absolutes on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, legalized marriage etc. Yes, there's misguided thinking there, but there's also a lot of good stuff there as well.*

It is obviously true that because God made all people in his Image, including secular humanists and atheists, and that His creation was

"good" that there is much that is good, commendable and worthy in the thinking of scholars who do not accept the reality of God. However, it is equally true that people who reject the truth about God as our creator have *"neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools"*(Romans 1:21-22).

If we are His people then the Bible tells us that we "*must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*" (Ephesians 4:17-19) **This futile thinking is like a computer virus**, it can affect us, often without our being aware of it and we can also pass on thinking patterns and attitudes and values without being aware of it.

### **Where do we go from here?**

There are no easy answers. The Christian home needs to see it has the prime role in directing children. Parents need to talk more with their children and to insist that their children spend less time in front of the computer, playing with electronic games and viewing the TV and more time in family community activity, having fun together, learning about God by studying His Word together.

God has also given us the gift of Christian schooling as a significant way of making a difference. Let us use it as He intended, to raise standards of biblical literacy and pray that He may give us a new understanding of what it means to live lives that are worthy of our calling to be the people of God.

***Bob Frisken, President, CCSL, Founding President, ICTE***