

EARLY BRETHREN AND THE BIBLE

(from the DVD program)

“The Saur, both the Christopher Saur, spent time reading the Bible in devotions before they would begin their day of work. Sometimes as much as two hours before the work day started, they would get up to begin their Bible reading and prayer... The Brethren used the Bible regularly for worship in their homes, for times when they would gather for public worship. Obviously they preached from the Scripture. And then the Brethren also used the Bible for personal devotions.”

– Jeff Bach, Prof. of Brethren Studies, Bethany Theological Seminary

“I would not say that the early Brethren were literalists in the way they read the Bible, although I would not say they were engaged in higher criticism either. They wanted to put Scripture into practice. They read it, they took it as it was stated seriously, and they asked the question, ‘What does this mean for us in our living out the faith as a group?’”

--Carl Bowman, Head, Department of Sociology, Bridgewater College

“For the Brethren it was important to know not only what they called the outer Word, or the printed Scripture, the words of the Bible, but also to have an encounter with what they called the inward Word, which was Christ. Brethren believed that the inward Word and the outward printed Word were in harmony with each other; that one pointed to the other. Christ would help you understand Scripture; Scripture would always point you to Christ and to a lively faith in Christ.” – Jeff Bach

“I think it’s fair to say that the early founders of the church regarded the Bible as their basic guide to both faith and practice. They truly became people of the Book. Their emphasis on obedience was unusual and maybe, to some, extreme, but certainly a needed message for the time.”

– Emmert Bittinger, Professor of Sociology Emeritus, Bridgewater College.

“The early Brethren were big believers in the fact that human beings can deceive themselves, and that if I read the Bible by myself and if you read the Bible by yourself, that we’re perfectly capable of convincing ourselves that God is telling us something that is in our interest. And this was part of the reason that they felt they needed to read the Scripture together as a community – that it wasn’t enough for individuals to do that in isolation. As a community they would come together, they would read the Scripture together and overcome that tendency towards self-deception by coming together; and then as they conversed and asked, “What is the Scripture saying here?”, that the Holy Spirit would inform their Bible study in that collective gathering and lead them to a clearer or correct understanding of the Scripture.” – Carl Bowman

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did early Brethren view the Bible as very important?
2. Why was studying Scripture together so crucial? Is that still the case?
3. What did the “inner Word” and the “outer Word” mean to them?