

MISREADING SCRIPTURE WITH WESTERN EYES

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

Introduction

1. We want this book to enrich your reading of the Bible, not detract from it. We want it to give you greater confidence, not less, in the Word of God and your reading of it. Yet the challenge to read a text *differently* can be unsettling. What risks do you see in opening yourself up to new readings?

Chapter 1

1. Comments that describe sins like smoking, drinking and cussing as cultural can make us uncomfortable. Isn't sin, sin? If we call some sins cultural, are we at risk of postmodern relativism? We might say it this way: "sin is universal: sins may be cultural." In other words, sin exists in very culture and everyone sins; but what those sinful behaviours are can vary. Should we dictate that our cultural sins should be considered sins by Christians elsewhere? What if they do the same? Are Indonesian Christians being silly to consider playing billiards sinful? Are we taking inhospitality too casually?

2. Mores are often generational. How do you think differently about specific cultural mores (such as drinking alcohol, dancing or sexual behaviour) than your parents or grandparents? What role does culture play in the way these three generations view mores?

Chapter 2

1. Imagine reading the story of Ruth and Boaz today and saying "Boaz the Israeli" and "Ruth the Palestinian." How might that affect how you read the story?

4. How does it affect your view of Jesus to know that he was born to a people group considered inferior by the majority culture (Romans) and in a town that other Jews considered backward and unimportant (Nazareth)?

Chapter 3

3. Describe how you would explain to a non-believing friend the concept of "The Lord is my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1) Try to use propositional statements instead of metaphors, similes or analogies. How easy or difficult is it for you to change this metaphor into propositional language? Do you feel like anything is lost in the process, and if so, what?

Chapter 4

1. It can be difficult for Westerners to think of their faith in plural terms. You may have been particularly challenged - or just put off! - by the idea that salvation may be a corporate affair. In your mind, what are the dangers of reading the Bible through a collectivistic lens rather than an individualistic one? What is at stake for you?

5. What might a collectivist view of church membership entail for you in your particular congregation and/or denomination? What are the gains and losses of committing to one Christian community rather than looking around for one that might feel like a better more natural "fit"?

Chapter 5

3. In Galatians 2, Paul accuses Peter of hypocrisy because he ate with Gentiles until "certain men came from James" (Gal. 2:12). Note the context in which Paul rebukes Peter. Paul makes it clear he opposed Peter "to his face" (2:11) "in front of them all" (2:14). He didn't pull Peter aside privately to reason with him. Paul's goal was to shame Peter into appropriate behavior. That was his culture; this is ours. So, what should we do when a church leader isn't acting appropriately?

5. As we noted above, God is also concerned about honor and shame. The writer of Hebrews tells us that because of the faithfulness of the patriarchs, "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God" (Heb. 11:16). Have you ever wondered if God would be honored or ashamed to be known as our God? How do our actions as Christians bring God honor or shame?

Chapter 6

2. Jesus speaks of the "time" (*kairos*) of the harvest (Mt. 13:30). The time of the harvest is not a date on a calendar. What does this say about scheduling ministry?

Chapter 7

4. Historically, Christians have opted to keep Old Testament law, except for the ones we didn't like, such as those related to pork, parapets, paydays and planting. Isn't it arbitrary to suggest to Christians that one may pick and choose laws based upon cultural preferences? By what criteria do we determine which laws apply to us today?

Chapter 8

4. In Proverbs 6: 16-19, the writer expresses his disgust at the despicable deeds of the wicked. Take a minute to read the passage. Are you surprised at the examples the writer gives? Or consider the way David describes the wicked in Psalm 101. What vices on these lists surprise you? Which would you also have singled out?

Chapter 9

2. With the outbreak of the H1N1 virus, moderns have been reintroduced to the threat of pandemics. We have always been susceptible of course, but most of us have short memories. When the next plague strikes, do we cite Psalm 91:5-7? Is this verse relevant for me? Before you rush to claim it, bear in mind that Jesus didn't. Satan tried to get Jesus to claim the promises of this psalm, especially verses 11-12, and Jesus refused (Lk.4: 9-11). How would we determine the appropriate application of these verse? Who does "you" refer to?

